

**WEAPONIZED HUMOR:
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF TURKISH-GERMAN ETHNO-COMEDY**

by

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Abstract

My thesis aims to show how the humor of Turkish-German ethno-comedians fulfills a double purpose of entertaining its audience while advancing a cultural political agenda that Kathrin Bower called “transnational humanism.” It includes notions of human rights consensus, critical self-reflection, respect, tolerance, and openness to cultural diversity. Promoting these values through comedy, the artists hope to contribute to abating prejudice and discrimination in Germany’s multi-ethnic society. Fusing the traditional theatrical principle of “prodesse et delectare” with contemporary cultural politics, these comedians produce something of political relevance: making their audience aware of its conceptions of “self” and “other” and fostering a sense of community across diverse cultural identifications.

My thesis builds mainly on the works of Kathrin Bower, Maha El Hissy, Erol Boran, Deniz Göktürk, and Christie Davies. Whereas Davies denies humor’s potential for cultural impact, Göktürk elucidates its destabilizing power in immigrant films. Boran elaborates this function for Turkish-German Kabarett. El Hissy connects Kabarett, film, and theater of polycultural artists and ties them to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque and the medieval jester. Bower published several essays on the works of ethno-comedians as humorous catalysts for advancing a multiethnic Germany.

I hope to continue and substantiate this line of research. Following the assumption that humor can have a significant social impact, I focus on the question of how exactly ethno-comedy promotes its cultural political agenda. Three survey chapters examine the cultural history of German-Turkish relations including the sources and nature of ethnic stereotypes as the main material of today’s ethno-comedians, the origins and development of the comedians’ social role in the jester tradition, and humor theory. Drawing on Freud, Bhabha, and Bakhtin’s works my

subsequent case studies elucidate the specific conditions which govern the artists' performative space and turn their distinct humor into an integrative tool in culturally diverse demographics.

My contribution to the field of Turkish-German studies lies in suggesting a more specific definition of ethno-comedy as a performative paradigm, identifying typical strategies of fighting ignorance with laughter, and illustrating this aesthetic model with two representative, complementary case studies on performances by Bülent Ceylan and Serdar Somuncu.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Tim Höllering.

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Dedication

*To fools and children,
who can make this world a better place.*

“The duty of comedy is to correct men by amusing them.”

Moliere (1622-1673)

“The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter.”

Mark Twain (1835-1910)

“Life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.”

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

“You are not angry with people when you laugh at them. Humor teaches tolerance.”

W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)

“This I conceive to be the chemical function of humor: to change the character of our thought.”

Lin Yutang (1895-1976)

“Laughter is the closest distance between two people.”

Victor Borge (1909-2000)

“Comedy is simply a funny way of being serious.”

Sir Peter Ustinov (1921-2004)

“One can never speak enough of the virtues, the dangers, the power of shared laughter.”

Francoise Sagan (1935-2004)

“A wonderful thing about true laughter is that it just destroys any kind of system of dividing people.”

John Cleese (1939-present)¹

¹ All quotes can be accessed at <<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/>> (24 Sept. 2015). For John Cleese, see the 2008 interview with Nathan Rabin at <<http://www.avclub.com/article/john-cleese-14197>> (24 Sept. 2015).

1 – Introduction

In the late 1990s, a new phenomenon surfaced on the horizon of German entertainment. The genre of ethno-comedy emerged from the traditions of early 20th century political *Kabarett*² and stand-up comedy, combining elements of both. Over the last decade, it has begun to slowly enter academic discourse, yet specific publications still remain few. Its immediate surroundings, however, have already received more attention. This thesis owes much to the significant works of Kathrin Bower, Deniz Göktürk, Erol Boran, Leslie Adelson, Maha El Hissy, Kerstin Pschibl, Katrin Sieg, Bernhard Greiner and others, who not only covered substantial grounds in adjacent fields but also outlined fundamental principles of ethno-comedy in the process.

Among the first authors to publish a comprehensive account specifically on ethnic humor was Christie Davies with his groundbreaking book *Ethnic Humor Around the World* (1990), providing valuable insights on global joking patterns. In my study, I would like to reconsider two of his premises: firstly, that jokes have no significant effect on their social environment. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.2.4 on stereotypes, the subjugating qualities particularly of ethnic humor have been widely recognized by now to cast serious doubts on this suggested lack of influence.

The second premise concerns the directionality of laughter in ethnic humor. According to Davies, one “factor that underlies much humor and is brought out particularly well in ethnic jokes, is the sense of sudden vicarious superiority felt by those who devise, tell, or share a joke. Ethnic jokes ‘export’ a particular unwanted trait to some other group and we laugh at their folly, perhaps glad or relieved that it is not our own” (*Ethnic Humor Around the World* 7). Degrading the butts and elevating their tellers, these jokes subscribe to the aptly named superiority theory

² The German word *Kabarett* today refers mainly to political satire, while the English word *cabaret* implies a focus on the burlesque. To signify the German interpretation I use the German term.

where people only mock whom they perceive in an inferior position.³ Davies goes on to say that these targeted minorities typically cannot retort but only redirect these attacks further down the hierarchy of a stratified society, thus conserving the theoretical basics.⁴

As I will demonstrate more fully in 4.3 and 4.4, a key variation of this pattern in today's genre of ethno-comedy is its inversion through self-deprecation. A high degree of self-referential humor is a constitutive element of contemporary ethno-comedy and marks a clear break from former, rather racist displays of aggressive superiority. Looking back on his own findings, Davies believes that "it would be misleading to analyze in the same way the ethnic jokes that members of an ethnic group tell about 'their own people.' Attempts to do so have led to the nonsensical attribution of 'self-hatred' or 'bad faith' to the joke-tellers because they are seen as attacking themselves, or what the observers see as their essential selves" (*Ethnic Humor Around the World* 312). Far from these self-destructive notions, I will give evidence of the self-assertive nature of contemporary ethnic humor. While Davies insists that jokes build or maintain barriers between groups, I intend to show how ethno-comedians employ comparative humor in a specific social constellation to actually bring people together.

A few years after Davies' major investigation, Leslie Adelson, coming from the field of literary studies, published *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (2005) where she examines Turkish-German writings of the 1990s. Looking at respective scholarly discourse on Turkish-German cultural production, Adelson opposes the intercultural image of migrants being suspended "between two worlds." Instead, she promotes the concept of "touching tales" which shows greater sensibility towards shared elements of culture resulting from mutual

³ In *Humor Research: Jokes and their Relation to Society* (1998), Davies refers to the generic social constellation of joker and butt in ethnic humor as "centre-edge relationships" (1).

⁴ Davies gives the following example: "In the case of immigrants who are in the process of assimilating themselves into the ways of a new country, ethnic jokes told about their people as a whole are often passed on to newly arrived greenhorns or to fractions of the group who have failed or refused to make the transition from immigrant to full member of the new society" (*Ethnic Humor Around the World* 311).

historical entanglements of postwar Turks and Germans. She analyzes works by Zafer Şenocak, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Sten Nadolny, Feridun Zaimoglu, and others to illuminate the cultural influence exercised by their narratives' figurative reference to decades of shared life practice.

Although at first glance seemingly of little relevance to a study on ethno-comedy, Adelson's core question is very much related to my own interests: What cultural labor do the writings of Turkish-German authors facilitate in a literary framework? Referencing Stephen Brockmann, Adelson refers to literature "as a privileged sphere for reflection" ("The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature and Memory Work" 327). Assuming a similar privilege for the comedic stage, this thesis asks: What cultural labor do the performances of Turkish-German artists facilitate in a comical framework?

In her study on *German Literature on the Middle East* (2011), Nina Berman tried to answer a similar question: "Do literary and other textual discourses have an effect on social, political, or economic action?" and found "that no predictable pattern exists in this regard" (*German Literature on the Middle East* 239). My study broadens her question to include stage and TV performances of Turkish-German ethno-comedy, using the examples of Bülent Ceylan and Serdar Somuncu. Although concrete predictions may remain impossible with regard to these artists, we can still make plausible claims for their disposition, the direction of their interventions, and, given the size of their audiences, some of the likely effects arising from their actions. As Adelson already asserts in *The Turkish Turn*: "There are assuredly other lines of reorientation to be studied in the manifold cultural effects of Turkish migration in the 1990s and beyond, and my hope is that this book will encourage others to undertake medium-specific analyses of them" (26).

One such line of reorientation is currently studied by Deniz Göktürk in her multiple analyses of Turkish-German transnational cinema. Her keen observations on the expressive, subversive, and constructive possibilities of humor in migration contexts shine a bright light on

the cultural politics negotiated on screen. Some of the recurring key questions she formulates with references to Freud and Bakhtin and puts to film, I will direct at ethno-comedy: “Who is the butt of the joke? Who is laughing at whom and why?” (“Strangers in Disguise” 104). Submitting the performances of polycultural comedians to such inquiry shows how these artists pursue interests similar to those of Göktürk’s hybrid film makers like the Marx brothers or Hussi Kutlucan, how they touch on common themes like identity formation, cultural exchange, or imaginations of a multiethnic pluralism, and how they present deeply related ideas through medium-specific lenses.

What Adelson developed in the field of Turkish-German literature and Göktürk in the medium of immigrant film, Erol Boran expanded to Turkish-German *Kabarett*. Published in 2004, his dissertation examines its origins and developments from the founding fathers Sinasi Dikmen and Muhsin Omurca’s project *Knobi-Bonbon* (1985-97) to Serpil Ari and the Köse sisters’ all-female *Bodenkosmetikerinnen* (1991–1999) and their subsequent solo careers.⁵ Boran not only drew attention to the *Kabarett* stage as another platform for articulating marginalized positions in German society, but also identified distinctly Turkish roots in the cross-cultural performances of these first-generation migrant artists.

According to Boran, Dikmen turned from writing satires to performing *Kabarett* in the hopes of reaching a larger audience (“Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarett” 209). In ethno-comedy we find the next step for the next generation, based on the same rationale. The broadly televised performances of contemporary artists like Kaya Yanar and Bülent Ceylan reach multiples of what *Knobi-Bonbon* and the *Bodenkosmetikerinnen* entered in the books. In addition to the hundreds of thousands attending live events, millions of viewers

⁵ The name “Knobi-Bonbon” contains the German diminutive for “garlic,” playing with a German stereotype about Turkish food, while the ironic euphemism “Bodenkosmetikerinnen,” i.e. “floor beauticians,” references cleaner as a cliché job for Turkish women.

regularly watch their TV shows.⁶ As my case studies in chapters five and six will show, ethno-comedians tend to follow a cultural political agenda. Considering only the phenomenal popularity of some, it already seems reasonable to assume a distinct potential for the exertion of political influence in their programs.

In 2014, Ceylan and Yanar's appeal to mass audiences occasioned Kathrin Bower to examine "whether the intersection of spectatorship and performance in Kaya Yanar's and Bülent Ceylan's programs contributes to the recognition and embrace of plurality and multiplicity or whether their dependence on stereotypes and cultural clichés serves to reinforce rather than unseat ideas of cultural difference" ("Made in Germany" 359). Her study confirms the former, and in another article she convincingly demonstrates the same political component in the performances of the "self-styled philosopher of transnational humanism" Serdar Somuncu ("Reframing Integration" 194). While I fully support her position, I still hope to bolster her argument further by embedding it in a more holistic frame that the scholarly article format simply cannot provide. Where Bower shines an astute light specifically on the politics of ethno-comedy, my thesis focuses more on how the genre and its comedic strategies work and includes an outline of the medieval origins and humoristic mechanisms of the cultural politics involved.

Maha El Hissy developed a similar overview of Turkish-German film and *Kabarett*, and also referenced ethno-comedians in the publication of her dissertation in 2012. El Hissy connects a postcolonial approach with Bakhtin's work on Rabelais and Dostoevsky to illuminate how polycultural artists employ aspects of the carnivalesque, the grotesque, and polyphony for the purposes of articulating and possibly renegotiating marginalized positions. Drawing on the same theoretical background, I try to expand her discussion of comedy and the carnivalesque by

⁶ For example, according to the independent service provider Quotenmeter the worst quota for an episode of Kaya Yanar's "Kaya Show" was 3.41 million viewers <<http://www.quotenmeter.de/n/55208/quotencheck-die-kaya-show>> (1 Dec. 2015). The same website states an average of 3.99 million people watching Ceylan's "Bülent Ceylan Show" <<http://www.quotenmeter.de/n/49029/quotencheck-die-buelent-ceylan-show>> (1 Dec. 2015).

substantiating her references to conceptual parallels between jester figures on the one side and *Kabarett* artists and comedians on the other. While chapter three provides a detailed background to jesters, chapter four complements Bakhtin's concept of carnival with humor theory to further illuminate its modes of operation and outline probable psychological effects of carnivalesque laughter – once again in the interest of a more cohesive bigger picture.

Based on the works of Bülent Ceylan and Serdar Somuncu, two representative Turkish-German artists, the following pages are an attempt at deriving an ethno-comedic model that outlines how this kind of comedy works, what it can look like, and what it strives to accomplish on a social level other than amusing an audience. Like El Hissy, I argue that ethno-comedians embody a contemporary variation of the jester figure. They use a specific social position and its entailed liberties in order to empower themselves much like the first artificial fools subverting courts as the respective centers of medieval societies (see 3.2). Accordingly, the jester tradition in Europe is my constant point of reference when looking at strategies of humor and examining my two case studies. I will demonstrate how both artists create a carnivalesque atmosphere – each in their own way – and employ rhetorical and performative tactics to make their audiences susceptible to their cultural political messages. In the Turkish-German context their distinctive, as I call it, “weaponized humor” attacks and deflates stereotypes that have developed and spread over centuries. Exploiting the potential for broad social impact of televised performances, these popular contemporary fools turn comedic stages into meaningful platforms for the cultural contribution of marginalized groups.

Before we proceed to a brief overview of the structural layout, three terminological clarifications seem in order. Unlike the German word “Kulturpolitik” with its semantic focus on allocating monetary funds, I use the term “cultural politics” to identify a political component in ethno-comedy. It describes the artists' strategic attempt at influencing social patterns of thought

and action by means of a cultural event. The cultural political labor performed specifically by ethno-comedians consists in their collective efforts to contest their audiences' perception of self and others.

However, as Damon Roberts rightfully pointed out, "comedy as a public performance is always political, but very rarely does it result in politics" (16). I concur, and only mean to emphasize and elaborate the genre's undeniable potential for exercising influence that arises from the powerful constellation of likeable characters choosing specific material, promoting a clear agenda to a vast number of people, and asking them to question and position themselves in relation to it. Nonetheless, this cultural political component in ethno-comedy certainly remains substantially tendential.

Secondly, the artists' main tool for advancing their agenda is what I refer to as "weaponized humor." Many jokes in ethno-comedy not only serve to amuse the audience but also to direct laughter at adverse social conditions. Henri Bergson's notion of laughter functioning as a social corrective reverberates strongly in the comedians' attack of stereotypes and prejudice. Superiority theory explained the discriminatory power of racist humor. Ethno-comedians engage in a cultural political battle that not only targets misplaced notions of individual superiority but interrogates society as a whole. Using humor to exercise social critique and to fight hypocrisy, ignorance, and discrimination reveals an aggressive, positively destructive side to humor and inspired the image of "weaponized humor."

Lastly, despite the increasingly popular use of the term "ethno-comedy" in scholarly research as well as mainstream media, to this day we lack a concrete definition of what constitutes ethno-comedy as a genre. The semantic uncertainty derives in part from the vague category of "ethnicity," especially in conjunction with notions of "nationality" and definitions of "citizenship" in modern nation-states such as Germany; to another part it derives from a

frequently rash overuse of the ethno-comedic label to designate fundamentally disjointed phenomena. Accordingly, two steps lead to a proper working definition of the term: a consideration of the prefix “ethno,” followed by a description of what lends the genre its distinct comedic profile.

Looking at various applications of the word “ethnic,” Mandel summarizes its terminological ambiguity like this:

The analytic category “ethnicity” has been and continues to be used in a myriad of contexts referring to as many different processes and phenomena. Often it is assumed to be an objective given – of a natural kind with an obvious essence. In the attempt to reduce it to its necessary and sufficient conditions, the result might be a mere listing of attributes such as religious practices, linguistic styles, food habits, costume or some vaguely articulated and mystified primordial feeling about what we are presumed to agree is clearly “ethnic”.

Neither coherent nor consistent criteria delineate an “ethnic” domain. (85)

“Ethnic” often functions as a label that describes either recognizably domestic culture performed abroad or vice versa a domestic performance perceivably colored by a culture from abroad. In both cases, it designates something perceived as foreign. In ethno-comedy, however, the artists focus on diversity within, not between societies. This dissertation uses “ethnic” to observe how polycultural artists play with their own identifications to contest ascriptions of ethnic as foreign while estranging (not to say “ethnicizing”) the seemingly familiar. Highlighting the fluidity and permeability of culture adds a transnational perspective to interpreting ethnicity: Instead of designating something as exclusively foreign, an inclusive view of “ethnic” indicated aspects of cultural diversity within the perceived domestic.

As a category of identification, ethnicity is strictly separate from nationality. Germans of Turkish background can self-identify as part Turkish, incorporate elements in their individual identification that the German majority society commonly perceives as Turkish, and still be of German nationality. In its dependence on interpersonal perception, the term is inherently tendentious: What some (still) identify as ethnic and foreign may (already) appear as an ethnic variety of the domestic to others. Consequently, ethnicity is a volatile concept requiring much individual and social sensitivity. Semantically, the term “ethno-comedy” plays with this element of uncertainty, as one of its main goals is to humorously attack supposedly fixed ethnic identities.

Although Kaya Yanar prefers the nomenclature of “Kultur-Comedy” over ethno-comedy, his definition of the genre matches this relational concept of ethnicity perfectly: “Das ist für mich der ausländische Blickwinkel auf die Deutschen, der deutsche Blickwinkel auf die Ausländer, der ausländische Blickwinkel auf die Ausländer und der deutsche Blickwinkel auf die Deutschen. Jeden erwischt es mal” (“Interview mit Kaya Yanar”).⁷ Considering that each angle fragments the cultural composition of its overall object by identifying ascriptions and incorporations of ethnicity in German society, “ethno-comedy” still seems to be the more accurate term.

The second step to a proper definition of ethno-comedy lies in reconstructing the comedic concept. Erol Boran and Susanne Gring already outlined general ideas. Focusing exclusively on the content level, ethno-comedy according to Gring refers to any joke made at the expense of at least one ethnicity or culture (16). Boran concurs and adds the minority artist as an optional formal criterion (“Faces of Contemporary Turkish-German Kabarett” 182). While I support both

⁷ “To me that’s the foreign perspective on Germans, the German perspective on foreigners, the foreign perspective on foreigners and the German perspective on Germans. Everybody gets some.” Yanar’s description echoes an idea by Zafer Şenocak and Bülent Tulay who recommended “to consider what is strange as one’s own and what’s one’s own from a distance. And only therein lies the chance of the coming generations to deal differently with prejudice and stereotypes, in order to eliminate them – perhaps, one day – from the language of humankind” (9).

suggestions, I consider the appearance of a polycultural background a game changer and therefore not an optional but a mandatory factor.

The key criterion here is the notion of self-deprecation as a pillar of ethno-comedic humor. As will be shown in more detail in 4.3, Freud's tripartite model of jokes collapses when teller and target of a joke are one. Instead of deriding a third party, suddenly the elicited laughter turns not only a lot more frequently against the artists but also against the audience and thus changes the whole dynamic of a performance. In his analysis of comedy as a long-lasting theatrical principle, Bernhard Greiner emphasizes how any performance doubles the level of textual references since it interposes an already interpretative act between a literary text and the audience (4–6). This doubling separates actor, text, and act at all times. Of course, ethno-comedians also maintain this split, but their self-deprecating humor not only blurs these distinctions (see 2.2.5); it also asks an entirely different, equally self-referential interpretation from the audience.

By contrast, in the wider context as outlined by Gring the ethnic element of humor is marked by a bias of ridicule against everyone but oneself. This antediluvian form of entertainment includes everything from minor racial slurs to major extremes like the minstrel or blackface shows in the United States.⁸ In the course of recent mass migration, however, a newer kind of comedian has appeared and created a form of art that diverges distinctly from this racist notion: culturally hybrid entertainers who poke fun at others – and themselves. Hybridity here is understood as the appearance of a polycultural background that is partly ascribed and partly self-

⁸ For the blackface tradition, see Wipplinger.

attributed.⁹ Since individuals may identify with more than two cultures, I prefer the notion of poly- over biculturalism to underline my counter-essentialist understanding of hybridity.¹⁰

This contemporary paradigm of comedy differs significantly from the old regarding content, form, and intention. Although none of the following features are exclusive to ethno-comedy, it is their specific combination that generates the genre's potential for cultural political significance. On the content level, laughing at oneself creates an amiable background against which otherwise offensive jokes are more likely to be accepted or even welcomed. For this self-deprecation to take effect in a context of ethnic humor, it is crucial that the main cultures in question stem from the artist's own background. This condition turns the perceived cultural diversity of the performer into a privileged position for comparative comedy.¹¹ Together, the polycultural background and self-deprecating humor suspend Davies' criticism of ethnic jokes that is based solely on the "basic assumption . . . that the jokes are a means by which the joke-tellers ascribe human deficiencies to *other* ethnic groups in an excessive or ludicrous fashion" (*Ethnic Humor Around the World* 307 my highlights). Finally, in addition to eliciting laughs from their audiences most ethno-comedians also hope to trigger a few core realizations in line with their cultural political agenda of transnational humanism. In this narrow sense, my definition of the term "ethno-comedy" refers to artists of perceived polyculturality who perform culturally comparative humor with the double purpose of entertaining and enlightening their audience.

⁹ For an explanation of the social reciprocity of identification processes, see 2.2.3; for an example of how this hybrid appearance may be created, see 5.3.1).

¹⁰ Kaya Yanar, for instance, is of Turkish-Arabic descent but was born in Germany. The term "polycultural" serves to highlight the permeability of all cultures and plurality of possible identifications in this respect.

¹¹ El-Tayeb, Adelson and others legitimately point out that terms like "second-" or "third-generation migrant" conceal the fact that the people thus denoted almost never actually migrated themselves but through the use of this terminology are still denied native status in their native country by majority discourse (people of Turkish ancestry much more often than those of Polish, for instance). While the issue of identity will be addressed in more detail in chapter 2.2.3, in the following, terms like "migrant artist," "minority artist," or "cultural hybrid" all refer to polycultural individuals.

With reference to the ethno-comedian Serdar Somuncu, Bower uses the label of “transnational humanism” as a shorthand to describe his belief “that ethnic and national boundaries must be understood in historical terms, and that it is the responsibility of individuals across countries and cultures to recognize their role in inscribing difference” (“Reframing Integration” 194).¹² In my case studies, I attempt to broaden the scope of this term by exceeding the notions of historicization and self-reflection and discerning a more concrete set of propagated values. Moreover, I hope to differentiate its dual perspective. Focusing on the prefix “trans-” the term not only uncovers the permeability of cultures and concepts of national identifications; in an act of postcolonialist fragmentation, it also highlights elements of heterogeneity within seemingly coherent cultural constructs. In this sense, transnationalism and transculturalism may describe a similar thrust with slightly different frames of reference.

Thinking of autochthonous duos like Erkan and Stefan from Ingolstadt or the Hessian Mundstuhl, Boran points out that the term ethno-comedy “has also been applied to comedy shows by German performers” (“Faces of Contemporary Turkish-German Kabarett” 185). The one element distinguishing their humor from discriminatory jokes by “regular” comedians is their indulgence in what Katrin Sieg called “ethnic drag,” which only adds a visual dimension to its inappropriateness (see also 2.2.5). Imitating the cliché sociolect, and in the case of Erkan and Stefan also the supposedly typical fashion, of lower-class Turkish migrants represents a form of presumptuous silliness that is closer to the supremacist minstrel tradition than the humanist egalitarianism of Turkish-German ethno-comedy. It is precisely this kind of moronic masquerade that Deniz Göktürk condemns when she says: “Ethnic role-play in comedy frequently draws on crude stereotyping that amounts to little more than blatant racism, where the power of laughter is kept in the hands of the powerful” (“Strangers in Disguise” 103). In culturally comparative

¹² As my first case study will show in more detail, Somuncu’s colleague Bülent Ceylan shares this belief as well; in fact, a cursory sighting of numerous other artists suggests this conviction to be largely unanimous.

humor, the absence of perceived hybridity eliminates the crucial element of equal self-deprecation since only one cultural identification may then be ridiculed in a self-referential manner. For this reason, I disregard these forms of ethnic humor in my analysis.

Compared to ethnic ridicule that subscribes to superiority theory, the exceptional constellation in my specific definition of ethno-comedy promotes a multi-ethnic approach to the topics in focus and provides a productive forum for cultural reflection. “The blending of perspectives in this type of cultural production has the potential to motivate changes in perception among those with a migrant background as well as the indigenous population of the ‘receiving’ country” (Bower, “Reframing Integration” 197). Accordingly, it is only this specific definition of the genre and its corresponding artists that underlies this dissertation.

As indicated already, ethno-comedy originated from the traditions of political *Kabarett* and stand-up comedy. Bower claims that *Kabarett* “is characterized by a satirical tone and frequently has a political agenda, whereas comedy largely steers clear of politics and privileges entertainment over critique. Comedy neither assumes nor requires politically informed spectators, whereas the cabaret audience is expected to have some knowledge of contemporary politics in order to follow the program” (“Made in Germany” 359). Ethno-comedy combines elements of both spheres. Depending on the personal predilection of each artist an ethno-comedic performance can follow either a more comedic approach to the genre or a *Kabarett* approach, although transitions along this spectrum are certainly fluid.

In order to provide as far as possible a comprehensive picture, I chose Bülent Ceylan and Serdar Somuncu for my analysis because Ceylan embodies the comedic end of this spectrum while Somuncu is the epitome of the *Kabarett* counterpart. Like Bower, I chose Ceylan because he has an unparalleled mass appeal and “offers a style of comedy that renders the ‘other’ or the ‘stranger’ comical and ordinary and thus unthreatening while also incorporating the strangeness

of the familiar by showcasing the comic foibles and diversity of the indigenous population” (“Made in Germany” 361).¹³ I also subscribe to her assessment of my second subject:

Serdar Somuncu stands out, not only for his unapologetic embrace of political theater critical of both German and Turkish social politics, but also for his assertion of a right and responsibility to engage with Germany’s past coupled with an insistence on differentiation and balanced comparison when discussing integration. He also digs deeper and more aggressively into questions of Turkish and German identity while also addressing larger issues of subjectivity and social relations in a media-saturated environment. (“Reframing Integration” 198)

In addition to Bower’s descriptions, the following few benchmarks should suffice for a general orientation regarding the ethno-comedic spectrum and how the performative styles of Ceylan and Somuncu complement each other.

The focus of Ceylan’s comedic approach is emotional while Somuncu pursues a much more intellectual strategy. Compared to Ceylan’s spectacular shows which are designed to sweep his audience away and celebrate ethnic diversity, Somuncu’s spartan stage setup asks his audience to concentrate much more on his words, tone, and body language. The attitudes Ceylan promotes are almost exclusively positive while Somuncu constantly risks evoking negative reactions as well. Where Ceylan aims predominantly for amusing his audience and providing pleasure, Somuncu frequently dares challenge it in a variety of ways and not only hazards its emotional discomfort but sometimes even creates it deliberately. As a result, the comedic

¹³ As Bower points out in “Made in Germany,” the same rationale applies to Kaya Yanar (361). Although he was the first acclaimed star comedian of this genre, Ceylan’s emphasis on spectacle makes him a more extreme example of the comedy approach, which justifies his choice in a representational model of the ethno-comedic spectrum.

approach to ethno-comedy is highly mass-compatible while the *Kabarett* one is much more demanding. These tendential descriptions will become clearer in the actual case studies.

The background to my case studies is formed by three historical developments which converge in the phenomenon of today's ethno-comedian: a cultural one regarding Turkish/German entanglements, a social one regarding the tradition of jesters, and a conceptual one concerning carnivalesque humor. Since each one originates in the Middle Ages, the outlines of all three trajectories have to remain rather cursory. Without a doubt, the dimensions of this frame border on the preposterous, particularly given their disciplinary transgressions into other, typically independent fields of study. However, in the introduction to her seminal study on *German Literature on the Middle East*, Nina Berman writes:

We feel vulnerable when we leave familiar turf, and we are. The potential charge of dilettantism prevents most scholars from exploring the space beyond disciplinary boundaries. But upon leaving familiar territory, we begin to see the limits of disciplinary work. It is with an awareness of the potential and actual weaknesses of this attempt to cover a thousand years of intercultural history that I invite my readers. (21)

In much the same spirit I believe in the complementary validity of in-depth analysis and broad-stroked contextualization in scholarship, and hope for benevolence regarding details for the benefit of coherency in a bigger picture.

As the reader will also notice, although the appearance of hybridity is an essential part to my definition of the ethno-comedian, all of my historical overviews exclude much of the specifically Turkish point of view, for instance regarding Ottoman imperialism in the cultural historical part of this thesis or the satirical genres of the *Karagöz* and *Meddah* traditions in my

socio-historical account of the jester figure. For a detailed discussion of potential influences of Turkish traditions on first-generation Turkish-German *Kabarett*, I refer my reader to Boran's *Geschichte des Türkisch-Deutschen Theaters und Kabarett* (particularly pages 39-74). With regards to comedy, however, identifying relics and mutations of Turkish roots in subsequent generations still offers fruitful grounds for further research.

Within these parameters, my thesis follows a mixed-method approach. By sketching the historical and conceptual anchorage of the contemporary ethno-comedian, I hope to establish a genealogy of the genre that traces three different developments, examines key figures and periods representing turning points along each trajectory, and illuminates how all three converge in today's ethno-comedian. Looking separately at German-Turkish entanglements (chapter two), the jester tradition (three), but also the conceptual longevity of carnivalesque humor (four) prepares the two case studies (five, six) as it helps to understand a comparatively recent phenomenon as something both old and new, or familiar but decidedly different.

This structure divides my dissertation into roughly two halves. The abstract first part offers historical contexts and critical theory to set up analyses and interpretation in the more practical second part. Watching the progress of three different historical developments enables us to see how they change over time and ultimately all converge in one contemporary art form.

Chapter two starts in the early Middle Ages and provides a rough overview of the Turkish/German past until today. Considering major events from the Crusades to the Sieges of Vienna and the guest worker contracts on the one hand, and texts and other cultural artifacts commenting on each period on the other, its first section aims to outline the formation of a German mentality faced by today's hybrid comedians. Over a thousand years, Saracens, Ottomans, and Turks served as cultural Other to a Christian Europe, nurturing a large spectrum of stereotypes on both sides which now form the basis for much of today's comedic material.

Against this historical background, the chapter's second section turns to postcolonial theory. When ethno-comedians direct their weaponized humor at outdated notions of essentialized identities, prejudices misconceptions of self and other, or everyday hypocrisies of the German majority society, they engage in profoundly postcolonialist activities. Accordingly, this chapter applies key ideas of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory to the current situation of Turkish migrants in Germany and pursues questions of identity formation in majority/minority relations and the role of stereotypes as core moments of ethno-comedy. It concludes with a brief introduction into the Turkish-German comedy scene and a look at some of the risks currently faced by its protagonists when challenging the mainstream society.

Chapter three also starts in medieval times but focuses on the origins and transformations of the jester figure. Viewing the figure as a social type rather than a single character, it traces its various manifestations from courtly fools to Baroque harlequins, *Kabarett* and stand-up artists all the way to contemporary comedians. In the Turkish-German ethno-comedian, the jester tradition meets and incorporates the trajectory of Turkish/German relations and generates its latest progeny producing self-deprecating ethnic humor.

Chapter four outlines basic mechanisms of humor in general and the carnivalesque humor typical of medieval jesters in particular. This section uses Freud's model of jokes as a foundation and shows its distinctive twist in self-deprecating ethno-comedy, where joker and target collapse into one. Building further on Bakhtin, this chapter also establishes the parameters typical of a carnivalesque event, highlighting structural and conceptual parallels and differences between the medieval market place and today's venues. Today's structures, processes, and freedoms underlying an ethno-comedic performance continue and update the jester tradition and as such render the event – in Bakhtin's terms – carnivalesque. As El Hissy already proved, Bakhtin's studies on phenomena of the carnivalesque and grotesque in the Renaissance novels of Rabelais,

although a study on literature, provide valuable insights on comedic principles at play now as then and therefore constitute the heart of this framework. Rooting current occurrences in medieval¹⁴ traditions not only elucidates the origins and sheds light on their historical growth, but it also sharpens the view on contemporary specificities and what constitutes their novelty factor and modification of preceding patterns. Having thus established the cultural, socio-historical, and conceptual backgrounds of ethno-comedy, this chapter concludes with an estimate of its cultural political potential in terms of influencing the minds of the broad public. Examining the genre in the skeptic light of Adorno and Horkheimer's still largely applicable vision of the *Culture Industry* refutes a variety of common criticisms regarding the social relevance of humor and confirms the unique social position of critical comedians.

Analyzing the works of the two exemplary, contemporary Turkish-German artists Bülent Ceylan and Serdar Somuncu, the case studies in chapters five and six demonstrate two different comedic styles serving the same cultural political ends. Throughout my examination, I will highlight their continuations and adaptations of the jester tradition and show how each in their own way represents the latest manifestation of this figure. The core of this section is the literary study of transcribed passages from different comedy routines, published songs, or books. For the performance parts, these analyses also incorporate visual, tonal, and body-linguistic features of presentation as well as theatrical elements arising from the general setting.

As it stands, my case studies observe only male artists. Comparing male and female stand-up comedians in the United States, Leon Rappoport found that it took “nearly fifty years for women comedians to attain the same level of acceptance as men” due to sparse representation

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, a Renaissance novel is at best a late medieval document. However, Bakhtin argues that Rabelais' depictions not only match medieval conditions exactly and portray them most accurately, but also that they possess a timeless quality: “Every act of world history was accompanied by a laughing chorus. But not every period of history had Rabelais for a coryphaeus. Though he led the popular chorus of only one time, the Renaissance, he so fully and clearly revealed the peculiar and difficult language of the laughing people that his work sheds its light on the folk culture humor belonging to other ages” (*Rabelais and His World* 474).

(111-112). On the one hand, he attributes this shortage to external factors like frequently sexist working conditions. On the other, the social psychologist explains the extended male domination also by internal factors such as an often less pronounced desire in women to expose oneself or display openly aggressive behavior either indirectly by “putting down” their targets or directly in confrontation with hecklers. Successively, however, female comedians overcame their marginalization, as Joanne R. Gilbert has shown. To date, women in Turkish-German ethno-comedy still struggle to compete with their male colleagues. With the possible exception of Idil Baydar and lately of Enissa Amani none come even close to the popularity of the Pakistani-Norwegian Shabana Rehman Gaarder in Norway or the Pakistani-English Shazia Mirza in the UK.¹⁵ Whereas Amani’s career as a comedian only just begun, even the more experienced Baydar’s work seems at this point less developed in terms of comedic sophistication when compared to prominent male artists (see 2.2.6). Due to the promising findings of Gilbert and Rappoport, however, I consider the slowly emerging, specifically non-male contributions to ethno-comedy fruitful grounds for future research.

With my current work I intend to continue on the path cut out by Adelson, Boran, Bower, Göktürk, and El Hissy, and expand it further along the way. My suggestion of a more specific working definition of ethno-comedy is a first step, and in the following I hope to prove its usefulness by elaborating different potentialities of the unique constellation thus afforded. In addition to a discussion of the carnivalesque, the substantiation of the jester tradition will situate the comedians within a historical context that helps to explain their privileged position. The sections on postcolonialism and humor theory delineate mechanisms of comedy as social

¹⁵ The bi-weekly show “StandUpMigranten” regularly features fledgling women artists. The performative circumstances, however, differ significantly from independent routines by established artists and would require a different, much more tentative analytic approach. Even for Idil Baydar and Enissa Amani no performance has been recorded and released yet, which currently still complicates gathering research material.

activism and aim to provide more convincing grounds for on-stage cultural politics as outlined by Bower. The case studies serve to exemplify all of the above.

Concluding these opening remarks, I would like to add a final word of warning. Working with captivating comedic material bears the subtle risk of stylistic spillover. When, moreover, the main argument consists in the claim that even the most serious of topics can benefit from an occasionally humorous delivery, it seems only pertinent for readers to take the sometimes “jovial” tone of this thesis, too, with a grain of salt.

2 – The Cultural Context of Turkish-German Ethno-Comedy

This chapter provides two basic resources for my later case studies and consists accordingly of two parts. To begin with, a diachronic overview of German-Turkish entanglements since the Middle Ages shows the longevity of mutual relations and drafts a genealogy of today's spectrum of Turkish clichés in Germany (2.1). The second part expands Bhabha's postcolonial theory and discusses structures of identity formation, stereotyping, and role play to give an indication of how contemporary Turkish-German ethno-comedians may confront these clichés (2.2). In sum, this chapter identifies the origins and nature of ethno-comedy's primary targets.

In ethno-comedy, the specific case of Turkish-Germans in Germany constitutes one of the most interesting constellations.¹⁶ Decades of misguided migration politics, significant cultural differences between Turks and Germans, a huge corresponding repertoire of deep-seated mutual stereotypes, and the still controversial status of Islam among the Christian majority society render this particular configuration an exemplary situation in need of intercultural mediation.

Far into the 1990s, the German government denied this necessity. For instance, despite several postwar recruitment agreements and a resulting 6 million people of migrant background living in Germany by 1991 (7.6% of the total population), Chancellor Helmut Kohl asserted on the occasion of his inauguration that year that Germany was not an immigration country.¹⁷ At almost 7.5 million (9.1%) in 1996, Minister of the Interior Manfred Kanther still claimed that Germany neither was, wanted to nor ever should be a nation of immigrants (Luft 142).¹⁸ Another 20 years later, the status as an immigration country seems to have been largely accepted but the corresponding renegotiation of cultural values is still in full swing.

¹⁶ For examples of ethno-comedians in other nations, see 2.2.6.

¹⁷ Prof. Dr. Küsters, Hanns Jürgen. *Helmut Kohl*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Web. 14 Jan. 2014. <http://helmut-kohl.kas.de/index.php?menu_sel=17&menu_sel2=&menu_sel3=&menu_sel4=&msg=609>.

¹⁸ For the statistical data, see Rühl (32).

Today, almost three million people of Turkish descent constitute Germany's largest ethnic minority (4%), 2.3million (77%) of which identify as Muslim.¹⁹ However, when President Christian Wulff stated in 2010 that Islam was a part of Germany, he triggered a massive public debate.²⁰ With reference to the Turkish-German Mesut Özil, a playmaker of the German national soccer team, Chancellor Angela Merkel supported President Wulff, but at the same time declared that a multi-cultural approach to co-existence had failed.²¹ Political talk shows and major newspapers echoed voices from all social classes revealing that a nerve had been struck regarding concepts of national identity and mirroring a troubled national mentality. In an interview in 2012, the new President Joachim Gauck felt obliged to qualify and moderate his predecessor's statement, however marginally.²²

¹⁹ Cf. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 4.

²⁰ "Das Christentum gehört zweifelsfrei zu Deutschland. Das Judentum gehört zweifelsfrei zu Deutschland. Das ist unsere christlich-jüdische Geschichte. Aber der Islam gehört inzwischen auch zu Deutschland. Vor fast 200 Jahren hat es Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in seinem West-östlichen Divan zum Ausdruck gebracht: 'Wer sich selbst und andere kennt, wird auch hier erkennen: Orient und Okzident sind nicht mehr zu trennen'." For the whole speech, see: Federal President's Office, ed. *Der Bundespräsident*. Web. 15 Jan. 2014.

<http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Christian-Wulff/Reden/2010/10/20101003_Rede.html>.

²¹ Referring to "multikulti" as a side-by-side co-existence without any intention of the immigrants to integrate in terms of language and education, Merkel remarked: "Dieser Ansatz ist gescheitert, absolut gescheitert." For her definition, see: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, ed. *Die Bundeskanzlerin*. Web. 15 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/ContentArchiv/DE/Archiv17/Interview/2010/10/2010-10-30-merkel-spiegel.html>>. For the quote refer to: N.A. "Merkel: 'Multikulti ist absolut gescheitert'". Web. 15 Jan. 2014.

<<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/integration-seehofer-sieben-punkte-plan-gegen-zuwanderung-1.1012736>>.

²² Reacting to the remark that he had not yet endorsed Wulff's statement, Gauck replied: "Nein, aber seine Intention nehme ich an. Die Absicht war die, zu sagen: Leute, bitte einmal tief durchatmen und sich der Wirklichkeit öffnen. Und die Wirklichkeit ist, dass in diesem Lande viele Muslime leben" ("No, but I agree with his intention. His intention was to say: Guys, take a breather and open up to reality. And the reality is that many Muslims live in this country"). Asked to rephrase Wulff's statement according to his own perspective, Gauck answered: "Ich hätte einfach gesagt, die Muslime, die hier leben, gehören zu Deutschland" ("I would have said simply that the Muslims living here belong to Germany"). For the complete interview, see: Federal President's Office, ed. *Der Bundespräsident*. Web. 16 Jan. 2014.

<<http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Interviews/2012/05/120531-Zeit-Interview.html>>.

Only in 2014, Gauck finally attempted to answer the question of how to self-identify appropriately as a nation and resorted to a time-honored image based on diversity: “Es gibt ein neues deutsches ‘Wir’, das ist die Einheit der



Verschiedenen” (“*There is a new German ‘We,’ it is the unity of the diverse*”).²³ At the 2015 exhibition “Immer Bunter – Einwanderungsland Deutschland” (“*Ever more colorful – Immigration nation Germany*”) in Bonn, Gauck’s suggestion was the last quote displayed by itself at the very end, illustrating its still ambiguous position between statement and appeal, *status quo* and vision. Facilitating this new unity is also the bread and butter of today’s ethno-comedians, with Turkish-German artists leading the way.

Of all the ethnic minorities currently living in Germany the Turkish subculture still constitutes an exceptional case, due in part to a long mutual history.²⁴ When the first German-Turkish ethno-comedian entered the stage something ground-breaking had happened. A once distant and diffuse entity had taken physical form and after centuries of imagined passivity had now – protected by the cloak of comedy – performed its public subjectification. Well into the 19th and 20th century, “the Turk” as *pars pro toto* had been the Other to Europeans, a distant object of tales and songs and as much superstition as scholarly description. Using the eventful history of Germans and Turks as an extraordinarily rich source of material, German-Turkish ethno-comedians today embody the educated voice of this long-known Other who takes the spotlight and actively engages in the revaluation of societal perceptions.

²³ Cf. Federal President’s Office, ed. *Der Bundespräsident*. Web. 10 June 2015. <<http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Reden/2014/05/140522-Einbuengerung-Integration.html>>.

²⁴ It is also an exceptional case regarding still ongoing developments between both nations, e.g. the recurring topics of double citizenship or Turkey’s accession into the EU, as will be shown below.

As culturally hybrid people, contemporary Turkish-Germans are tied to various degrees to two different cultures. Their distinctly foreign features – such as different names, possibly with letters and pronunciations unfamiliar to Germans (for instance the ç, ş, or ğ), or often darker complexion – create immediate categorical distinctions between native and migrant by the German public, and prompt their over-determined associations with the cultural Other. As such, despite their presumably intimate familiarity with German culture, they are perceived primarily as Turkish and therefore often confronted with a skeptical part of German mentality that has developed over a thousand years.

In order to better understand the attitude existing when the first professional Turkish-German comedian set foot on stage, it is necessary to first shed some light on some of the past German-Turkish encounters and subsequently examine this latest phenomenon against its cultural historical background. Accordingly, we take three distinct journeys into the past. While this chapter embarks on the entanglements of two peoples, the next trails the tradition of the jester's social role, and chapter four tracks remnants of the carnivalesque in contemporary comedy. All three journeys begin in the Middle Ages, trace their traditions through time, and ultimately meet in my case studies of today's Turkish-German ethno-comedians.

2.1 German-Turkish Entanglements

The following overview deals with incidents of monumental dimensions as well as seemingly small documents that testify to the long-term reverberations of distant but distinctly formative events. With Nietzsche in mind the term *monumental* already hints at my underlying understanding of history. In “The Use and Abuse of History” (1874) Nietzsche identifies three kinds of relationship to history that may work on an individual, local, or national level: the

monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical.²⁵ The critic discerns between moments worth remembering and others destined to be forgotten, while the antiquarian perceives a sacrosanct dignity in age and aims to uphold all ways of old. The monumental view pays less attention to detail than the critical, and much less in comparison to the antiquarian, and focuses exclusively on moments of long-ranging significance. While I do not advocate historiography in general be based on a monumental view, I believe that the “mindset” of a collective over time is shaped predominantly by a monumental experience of history. Looking at the extensive German-Turkish history and its effects on many of today’s perceptions, it seems that major events and consistent perceptions over extended periods of time were most influential in generating stereotypes, which constitute the main material of today’s ethno-comedians. Minor events by contrast, especially in less media-saturated, pre-postmodern times would have a hard time overturning deeply entrenched, prejudiced perceptions. Accordingly, a monumental perspective appears most pertinent to my purposes of illuminating contemporary conditions for ethno-comedians.

In contrast to Nietzsche’s description, my concept of a monumental history includes the utterly disastrous as well. Comparing society’s general populace to its powerful few, it seems that individuals in the political and economic sectors sometimes adapt much faster to changing circumstances – occasionally even create them deliberately – while the general public often tends to cling much longer to older opinions, especially when those are founded on negative experience. Since my overview concentrates on those major moments in history that can still be recognized in their long-term impact today, the following remarks confirm that times of disturbance seem indeed more potent in their long-term formative power than the benign ones, although there is always a possibility even for the ponderous collective to be convinced otherwise. It is this chance that ethno-comedians attempt to exploit and expedite.

²⁵ Cf. Nietzsche, “Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen. Zweites Stück. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben” esp. 124–140.

The upcoming overview looks at the dynamic of single events and larger periods of time not to retell history but to illuminate some of the circumstances presently faced by Turkish-German performers. In line with Bhabha's denial of deterministic origins (see 2.2), the intended outcome of this overview is not a retrospective teleology from a supposedly fixed point of origin but a revealing account of various developments over time that merely happened to result in present day conditions. Considering ethno-comedy as a platform for cultural participation, the following tries to explore discursive shifts in Germany's perception of Turks which generated the cultural backdrop for today's ethno-comedians. The first major events to set the course occurred in the Middle Ages.

2.1.1 8th to 14th Century (*The Middle Ages*)

In the widest sense, German-Turkish relations date back to a time when neither Germany nor Turkey existed as such. Their predecessors' first few encounters were mostly friendly and oftentimes even characterized by mutual respect until the Saracens conquered the Holy Land.

In 777 Charlemagne received an Arabian emissary in Paderborn, and during his reign he maintained cordial relations with Harun ar-Rashid, who ruled over much of the Middle East and northern Africa. In the centuries that followed, Europeans maintained some contact with the East through trade and the occasional pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but relations with the Orient entered into a dramatic new phase when Pope Urban II announced the First Crusade in May 1095. Within four years European knights had recaptured Jerusalem, marking the beginning of a two-hundred-year period of intense interaction between Latin Christendom and the Islamic world. (Kontje 16)

Looking at literature ranging from Wolfram's *Parzival* (~1200) to early migrant writings of the 20th century, Kontje's work on *German Orientalisms* (2004) diversifies Said's notion of *Orientalism* (1978) and outlines a plurality of ways in which specifically German thought influenced "the construction of the identity of a nation poised between western Europe and the East" (Kontje v).²⁶ In an attempt to outline the medieval origins of many German stereotypes about Turks today, this section focuses mainly on those aspects of the mutual cultural history that made a lasting impact on the public perception and still exist in some form in the German collective memory.

For example, one of the most profound developments originating in the Middle Ages was linking the geographical division of Orient and Occident with distinct religious identities. Once established, this conceptual binary of a Christian Europe versus a Muslim Orient dominated public perception for centuries, as will become particularly obvious in the Early Modern Age with the aid of Martin Luther's writings (see 2.1.2). Even in contemporary times, its long-term influence still reverberates. In the reactionist resentments surfacing sporadically in the current debate about Islam in Germany mentioned earlier, parts of a black and white mentality based on this medieval binary survived until today.

In most instances, the religious label demarcates home and foreign and, as in Luther's case, often helps to distinguish between friend and foe. In the medieval beginnings, however, despite all their differences Saracen sovereigns like the emperor Saladin, although perceived as heathen enemies, were highly esteemed by German and English monarchs like Richard the

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of how fictional and non-fictional texts may disclose valuable information on "the *origin and course* of social, political, and economic events" (original emphasis) in Germany's history with the Middle East, see also Nina Berman's *German Literature on the Middle East. Discourses and Practices, 1000-1989* (2011). Where Berman's work ends, Adelson's *Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* of the 1990s begins. After much "Betroffenheitsliteratur" ("*literature of affliction*") of the first migrant generation, authors of Germany's largest minority from the Middle East reversed what Göktürk called the "ethnographic gaze" ("Strangers in Disguise" 121) and wrote from an increasingly liberated, culturally participatory perspective about their situation in Germany.

Lionhearted and Friedrich Barbarossa, as they represented a noble kind of socially, scientifically, and even spiritually sophisticated people (“Saladin”).²⁷

The royal appreciation already indicates how the level of involvement with the foreign creates a substantial difference in its perception when comparing the positions of nobles and the educated to those of the common folk. Active trade in particular provided the former with a wide range of beneficial opportunities. The frequent travel of merchant ships occasioned much exchange not merely of goods but of knowledge and skill, too. In exchange for iron, wood, and wool products, satin, spices, tropical fruit, and ceramics entered European courts and cathedrals, but also manufacturing techniques, architectural know-how, advanced medical expertise, translations of Greek philosophers and mathematicians – all of which exceeded the current *status quo* in Christian-based countries and earned the Saracens much admiration (Tolan 8–10). Only in matters of faith Western clerics and nobility remained obstinate. Tolan gives a great example of the inconsistency resulting from these parallel perceptions:

Some Latin writers did not hesitate to express their admiration for Arabs (*Arabes*) and their erudition at the same time as they dismissed as crude heresy the “sect of the Saracens” (*Sarraceni*). Twelfth century author Petrus Alfonsi [q.v.], for example, denounces Muhammad as a false prophet and a fraud in his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* (1110); yet his *Disciplina clericalis* is full of praise for the wisdom of the Arabs. (11)

²⁷ A counter-example is the Islamic expansion following the death of Mohammed in 632 A.D. In the name of Allah, Arab armies conquered the Southern coasts of the Iberian Peninsula in the early 8th century. After Portugal and most of Spain had fallen, members of all Abrahamic religions arranged themselves to various degrees and facilitated a massive exchange of knowledge and cultural goods (see below). By the end of the 15th century the *Reconquista* had put the Peninsula back under Christian rule and also exiled all Jews, yet trade routes with Arabs and Egyptians remained. The French *Chanson de Roland* (~1100) and the *Chanson d'Aliscans* (~1185), for instance, tell the heroic stories of early battles between Christian and Muslim forces and were later adapted into the once popular German epics of the *Rolandslied* (~1170) by Pfaffe Conrad and the *Willehalm* (~1210) by Wolfram von Eschenbach. These tales as well as the entire time period, though for instance a rich source for later Christian fear-mongering against Islam, failed to make a lasting impact on the cultural memory, are largely forgotten today, and are therefore not part of the following analysis.

However, just as the luxuries of exotic fruit and spices were earmarked for an elect few, this ambivalence of mind between economic and cultural appreciation on the one hand and the religious contempt of the Saracens on the other was likewise reserved for the rich and powerful.

The common people perceived the Saracens in a much more straightforward fashion. The Crusades cost the lives of countless knights and knaves but also tremendous amounts of money, which were typically raised from the general populace.²⁸ Moreover, they spread the diffuse feeling of a continuous spiritual threat. Since the battles raged in a land far, far away, this menace to Christian civilization remained widely faceless to most of the population who would likely never see an actual Saracen or even leave their own shire.

Their lack of substantiated knowledge regarding Saracens provided fruitful grounds for Christian scaremongering which completely ignored the first successful attempts at peaceful cohabitation and instead fostered exaggerated falsehoods and prejudice across the whole social hierarchy. Their graphic hate speech had a particularly long-lasting effect on the uneducated commons, the ponderous collective. When Sultan Mehmed II. conquered Constantinople, until 1453 the Christian capital of the East Roman Empire, songs like Balthasar Mandelreiß' "Türkenschrei" ("*Scream of the Turks*") verbalized and solidified the broad public's antagonism against Islam in general and Turks in particular:

Der Türk der schwor in Zornes Not	<i>The Turk swore in destitute fury</i>
auf Mahomet bei seinem Gott,	<i>on Mahomet to his God</i>
er will die Kirchen gar zerstören,	<i>he wants to destroy the churches,</i>
Sankt Peters Münster gar entehren,	<i>desecrate the minster of St. Peter's,</i>
Sein Ross darin unterstellen.	<i>stable his horse within it.</i>

²⁸ The connection of foreigners with personal expenses in general and the link to a willful government in particular remain key criticisms of German reactionists today, e.g. in international affairs like supporting Greece in the Euro-zone or national ones like granting asylum, work, or social welfare to non-natives.

Auch hat man mir fürwahr gesagt,	<i>Also I am told forsooth</i>
ein Türke der sei lang und breit	<i>the Turk was long and wide</i>
und hab eine böß grausame Gestalt.	<i>and of a fiercely gruesome build.</i>

(von Liliencron 464)²⁹

Three centuries after Jerusalem had ceased to be the Crusades' main concern, Mandelreiß' song testifies to a culture and mentality still very much susceptible to the rekindling of yesteryear's fears by tapping into the hazy collective memory of distant but major events.³⁰ Despite continual trade relations between East and West, after losing Jerusalem to the Saracens and Constantinople to the Ottomans the majority of Germans perceived their Oriental Other quite consistently as a danger to Christianity and to the safety of the realm.³¹

First the Holy Land, then Constantinople, soon almost Vienna – for centuries the Ottoman Empire was identified as a foreign force of heathen beliefs that constantly threatened Latin Christendom. With these negative large-scale events overshadowing the benefits through trade, a deep-seated skepticism towards Ottomans took hold in Germany. For the most part, they were

²⁹ The German version has been slightly adapted for a contemporary reader.

³⁰ Even today in Western polemics we find references to the obsolete dichotomy of “Orient vs. Occident” for the exact same purpose of re-invoking an old diffuse fear and substantiating a profound distrust of Muslim culture, most prominently in a citizens' movement starting in 2014 called “Pegida”, i.e. “*Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident*” (see 2.1.5).

³¹ In part, the mutual sense of menace still exists, especially since the rise of capitalism: an imperialist West infiltrating the economically inferior East, which in turn threatens the traditionally Christian West by spreading Islam. This obviously simplistic depiction certainly ignores particular intricacies and exceptions, yet these general notions nonetheless resurface sporadically, for instance when a lecturer of the Kuaatar University called the Danish Mohammed cartoons of 2005 a “Crusadist campaign of Zionists” on Al Jazeera (“Mohammed-Karikaturen”). Political scientist Abdel-Samad observes: “Im Westen herrscht die Vorstellung, der Islam sei übermächtig und befinde sich auf dem Vormarsch. Die demographischen Entwicklungen in der islamischen Welt und in Europa sowie die blutigen Anschläge und schrillen Töne des fundamentalistischen Islam bestätigen viele Menschen im Westen in ihren Annahmen. Tatsächlich ist es jedoch so, dass sich die islamische Welt in die Defensive gedrängt fühlt und gegen die in ihrer Wahrnehmung aggressive Macht- und Wirtschaftspolitik des Westens heftig protestiert”; “*The West believes mostly in the idea that Islam was overly powerful and gaining ground. Demographic developments in the Islamic world and in Europe as well as the bloody attacks and strident sounds of fundamentalist Islam confirm many people in the West in their beliefs. The fact of the matter is, however, that the Islamic world feels put on the defensive and protests heavily against the perceived aggressive power and commercial policy of the West*” (16).

portrayed and perceived as the Other, the non-European of a different faith, a different set of values and customs, and usually of an antagonizing spirit. This depiction gave rise to numerous stereotypes that traversed the centuries in various cultural artifacts like plays, songs, or everyday proverbs until today. One of the key figures to entrench and further develop this negative predisposition emerging from the Middle Ages was Martin Luther, whose later writings in particular continue seamlessly the medieval thread of Islamophobic polemics.

2.1.2 1483-1546 (*Martin Luther*)

While the historical reality of the Crusades, their factual existence in the past, is still vaguely alive in today's collective memory, the initial German esteem for Muslim culture is largely forgotten. This development was fostered considerably by Martin Luther. In the year 2017 we will witness the quincentenary of the famous posting of his 95 theses, a cornerstone of the eventual Protestant movement. His struggle with Catholic practices remains the most prominent of his activities. At the same time that Luther tried to reform the Catholic Church, however, the Ottoman Empire advanced westwards and the more Luther engaged with this threat, the more his writings changed in nature and contributed increasingly to a profound European hatred of Turkic peoples. While his polemic sermons against the Ottomans are no longer remembered by most – just like his deeply anti-Semitic statements³² – “the turmoil that was established in this key period of Christian-Muslim relations ... provides the backdrop for many of the tensions that remain in the modern area” (Francisco 5). Although the specific texts may no longer be familiar today, Luther's teachings set the course for centuries and experienced a strong emphasis in Nazi-

³² Cf., for instance, his book *Von den Jüden und iren Lügen* (1543, “*On Jews and their Lies*”) and his fall-out with the humanist Erasmus von Rotterdam over this matter. In anticipation of the quincentenary celebrations, the German newspaper *Die Welt* published an article in March 2014 explicitly reminding its readers of Luther's anti-Semitic propaganda and its consequences, but not his hate speeches against the Turks (Posener).

Germany. This long-term impact on the national mentality specifically towards “the Turk” warrants special attention to the reformer.

In the Early Modern Age, Luther took the same line in his writings as medieval scholars, but he added “a psychological and theological dimension to the German hostility to Rome and the Ottoman Empire ... Luther’s Turks are both utterly alien and intimately familiar: an Asian and Islamic threat from outside Christian Europe and the evil twin of the Catholic Church within Europe; the incarnation of the devil and the personification of the Germans’ own sins” (Kontje 39). After decades of papal persecution and military threat by the Ottomans, Luther’s initial moderation towards the Turks yielded to a growing hatred he nursed in equal shares for all he perceived to support the wrong faith, i.e. followers of the Pope, Jews, and Muslims.

While he possessed first-hand information on the former two groups, Islam remained a mystery to Luther. Most of the scholarly literature existing in the 16th century was secondhand, like the 12th century translation of the Qur’an. Although in the 20th century it was found to be “completely untrustworthy and misleading,” it had yet been “the ‘standard version’ for European readers and refuters of the Qur’an up until the eighteenth century” (Francisco 11). Luther was certainly aware of its existence but for the longest time he failed to obtain a copy. Moreover, he had “never once dialogued with a Muslim or [come] into contact with Islamic culture” (Francisco 30). Only four years prior to his death and over a decade after his open call for war on the Ottomans he finally found a different translation of the Qur’an in 1542. As Bornkamm claims, Luther’s entire knowledge was based on just three sources: antiquity, Islam, and characteristics of general heathens opposed in certain passages of the Bible (qtd. in Ehmann 6). Francisco substantiates the scarcity of reliable sources, but emphasizes that “Luther’s understanding was as broad and perceptive as anyone’s knowledge during his time and, according to contemporary research, surpassed most” (127). Nonetheless, his primary sources were still few and mostly

corrupted by the Islamophobic interpretation of their early translators. Despite these adverse conditions, Luther's writings truly made their presence felt for ages to come.

One of their most lasting effects was to maintain the blurring of oriental cultures. Terminologically, Luther did not differentiate between Turks and Islam, or Muslims, the Ottoman Empire, and the realm of Mohammed (Ehmann 7). Everything Luther stated about Turks he applied to the entire Orient. This inaccuracy only fostered the vagueness in Germans' perceptions and helped to create and promote cultural stereotyping. This notion is in part still felt to this day – resurging particularly after the events of 9/11 – when German reactionists tar all Turks and tribal predecessors of today's Arabs and Syrians, Iraqi and Iranians, Shiites and Sunni, Alevi and Kurds with the same brush and label them superficially and comprehensively as Muslims of the Middle East.

Moreover, “using the term ‘Turk’ as a synonym for ungodliness and tyranny, he wrote in the first of his so-called reformation tracts from 1530, *An den Christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, ‘If we want to fight against the Turks, let us begin here where they are worst of all.’” (Francisco 69). The very word “Turk” became a derogatory term delineating the uneducated, aggressive, and lustful heathen. In this sense it even applied to Christians behaving in an un-Christian way despite their knowledge of the gospel, rendering them worse “Turks” than the actual heathen Turks (Ehmann 445-46). This particular usage is certainly no longer part of the word's contemporary semantics, but with respect to the German national mentality it reinforced once more only the negative connotations associated with the idea of the Turks.

At first, the young Luther had been opposed to waging war against the Ottomans, mainly for two reasons: Firstly, they did not threaten specifically Germany just yet; and secondly, the Pope – whom he had declared the “tyrant” of Christianity (Luther, *Ein Sermon von dem newen Testament* 22) and the “Antichrist” (qtd. in Francisco 69) – posed a much more immediate

concern to him. After the fall of Constantinople in 1452 almost every Pope had entertained an increased interest in yet another crusade in order to re-conquer the former East Roman capital and the Holy Land in the process; but most related endeavors came to an abrupt end when each Pope died before any significant actions were taken. However, the decades of accompanying anti-Turk polemics certainly left their mark in the German conscience.

For example, in 1532 Duke George of Saxony instituted the *Türkenglocken* throughout Saxon churches. At noon everyday a special bell was to be rung followed by individual and corporate recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria. Every Christian was also expected to offer the following daily prayer: "Lord have mercy upon us; give us grace to amend our lives; preserve us from falling into the hands of that horrible fiend, the Turk." (Francisco 47-48)

Such routines went hand in hand with the nationwide distribution of so-called *Türkenbüchlein* ("booklets on Turks").³³ The first was prepared anonymously, others published later *inter alia* by Luther himself. The genre was aimed to arm Christians spiritually against the impending threat of Islam, although Catholics and Protestants followed individual approaches as to how this should be accomplished. While Pope Clement VII. favored an aggressive move, Protestants argued for defensive military involvement only. Moreover, to many of the reluctant German nobility and to Luther as well the papal call to arms appeared as yet another feint to squeeze money out of them. In his first *Türkenbüchlein*, not coincidentally from 1529,³⁴ Luther finally "urged the European powers to put their internal affairs in order and then to unite against their common enemy"

³³ Francisco translates it as "Turkish writings" but this term seems misleadingly ambivalent as it is supposed to designate writings about Turks, not by them (74).

³⁴ 1529 witnessed the first Ottoman Siege of Vienna.

(Francisco 74). This ambition not only testifies to the phenomenal reach of his writings; it also strengthened the medieval binary of an idealized Christian-European power versus the Muslim Empire.

Interestingly from a contemporary point of view, by the late 1520s Luther's initial "Let the Turks be Turks" attitude (Francisco 68) had changed to a large degree because of the Ottomans' comparatively progressive features.

Turkish rulers were relatively more tolerant of Protestant Christians than the Catholic inquisitors attempting to stamp out the growing Reformation movement. ... Socially, it was well known that labourers, regardless of religion, were desired and well rewarded by the Ottomans, and financially, taxes levied against the Turks became so high that, even with their own imposing taxes, Ottoman rule looked more desirable. (Francisco 44-45)

In a curious inversion of today's circumstances, Ottoman religious and financial freedom tempted Germans to leave their home country to go work for the Turks. In fact, many "central Europeans ... were apparently well aware of, and even admired, the 'wealth, splendour, power, simplicity, and rapidity of action' of lands governed by the Ottomans" (Francisco 85). Initially Luther, too, respected certain aspects of the Ottoman way of life, including even religious ones. However, the same aspects he appreciated, i.e. "the sophisticated simplicity of Ottoman culture, of which he had cited several examples ranging from their abstinence from alcohol to their disdain for anything remotely idolatrous, also contributed to the rising tide of conversion" (Francisco 27). After the reformer had received several "reports of Hungarians and Germans offering their services to the Turk and, in some cases, willingly submitting to Ottoman rule" (Francisco 85), he developed a pervasive fear of impending Christian apostasy. He was afraid that, once immersed

into the Ottoman culture, the constant exposure to a Mohammedan lifestyle would eventually corrupt Christian souls and ultimately lead to mass conversions. His fear enabled Luther to abandon his once ambivalent state of mind and henceforth view the Ottomans in an exclusively negative light.

As a people fighting Christians, leading them astray from their religious beliefs, denying the holiness of Christ, and desecrating the institution of marriage through polygamy and divorce *ad libitum*, Luther soon concluded that the Muslims were clearly serving purposes directly opposed to Christian doctrine and must hence be by definition the henchmen of Hell. In an apocalyptic reading of the Muslim expansion Luther interpreted the Ottomans as the force of physical evil complementing the patron of spiritual evil – the Pope. Together, they each represented the Antichrist to him (Francisco 83) whose divine purpose on earth lay in causing the devastation prophesied to precede Judgment Day. Consequently, in his “Heerpredigt wider den Türken” (“*Army sermon against the Turk*”) he identified the Turks as “the birch of God,” i.e. His rod of punishment (Luther, *Heerpredigt* 22).

While Luther originally thought it pointless and fundamentally un-Christian to defy God’s punishment, the first Siege of Vienna in 1529 completely reversed his perception: “Since we now have the Turk and his religion at our very doorstep, our people must be warned” (qtd. in Francisco 88). The first half of his life, the Turks had presented the same faceless threat to Luther they had been throughout the Middle Ages. In the second half, however, this threat gained shape. With the first Siege in 1529 the menace changed from mere specters to actual soldiers. What had once haunted the general populace only in stories had now become a physical reality threatening the heart of Europe. Only in the face of imminent danger to the lives and – more importantly – to the Christian souls of his fellow countrymen did the reformer accept them as a, from a clerical point of view, justifiable opponent in warfare.

The Siege sparked a whole flood of hate-filled propaganda against Turks. Previously, Ulrich von Hutten had called to action in vain in his *Vermahnung an die Fürsten Teutschlands, die Türken mit Krieg zu überziehen* (1518, “Cautioning of the German Lords to Wage War Against the Turks”). After the Siege, however, Luther’s *Vom Kriege wider die Türken* (1529, “On war against the Turks”) or his even more radical sermon of the same year, the *Heerpredigt*, had found countless sympathizers and were echoed for over two hundred years.

The *Heerpredigt* consists of two parts, and both are equally significant in their long-term effects on public perceptions of Muslims. First, Luther provides a reason for the broad public to wage war against the Ottomans. In blind faith in the validity of the gospel, he bases his entire argument solely on chapter seven of the Old Testament’s Book of Daniel and equates the prophecy of four succeeding realms and a following punishment with the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, thus rendering the Ottoman conquests and cruelty as the foretold retribution of God – “oder Daniel wurde zum Lügner, das ist nicht möglich” (*Heerpredigt* 7).³⁵ According to Luther, fighting Christians in the name of “Mahometh” exposed Muslims as minions of Satan. Therefore, killing them in the name of God was most honorable. To die by their hand, Luther portrayed as an act of martyrdom which promised sanctification and eternal joys in heaven, regardless of any previous sins (Luther, *Heerpredigt* 16). The awareness of acting as a weapon of God was supposed to inspire martial confidence and moral peace of mind:

³⁵ “Or Daniel was made a liar and that is not possible.”

So bedarfst du auch nicht sorgen noch fürchten, dass du in der Türken Heer unschuldig Blut treffest, weil du hörest, dass sie von Gott als seine Feinde zum Tode und zur Hölle verurteilt sind. Und gebieten dir deine Oberherren, dass du solch Urteil an dem Türken vollbringen sollst und jetzt deine Faust und Spieß Gottes Faust und Spieß ist und heißt, und bist also Gottes des allergrößten Herren Scharfrichter oder Henker wider seinen großen verdammten Feind, wie könntest du ehrlicher und löblicher streiten?³⁶ (*Heerpredigt* 16)

And so you should neither worry nor fear to strike innocent blood in the army of Turks since you hear that they are sentenced to death and hell by God as his enemies. And when your suzerains order you to carry out such a sentence on the Turk and that your fist and spear now becomes and is called God's fist and spear, so you are God the almighty Lord's headsman and executioner against his mighty damned enemy, how could you fight any more honestly and honorably?

Committing cruelties – albeit indirectly – in the name of Satan was clearly condemnable; committing them in the name of Christ, however, was not only justified but considered noble. This simple black and white rationale proved easily comprehensible and provided a conveniently calm conscience for Christian believers when slaying Muslims at the gates of Vienna.

The second part of Luther's *Heerpredigt* calls for action explicitly and paints terrifying pictures of the horrors spread allegedly by the Ottomans. According to Luther, the Turks were known “die Christen zu schrecken, ihre Kindlein zu erschlagen, zu erstechen und auf die

³⁶ This and the following quotes by Luther have been slightly modified from the original in spelling and phrasing to accommodate a modern readership.

Zaunstecken spießet und was sonst nicht fort kann erwürget” (*Heerpredigt* 19).³⁷ To put an end to these terrors, each man was called to arms and warned that if he failed to heed Luther’s call, the Turk “steckt dir Haus und Hof an, nimmt dir Vieh und Futter, Geld und Gut, sticht dich zu Tode ..., schändet oder würget dir dein Weib und Töchter vor deinen Augen, zerhackt deine Kinder und spießet sie auf Zaunstecken” or enslaves them (*Heerpredigt* 25).³⁸ According to Nina Berman, the imagery of impaled heads, for instance, actually matches German and Ottoman accounts of the same battles. With reference to Carl Göllner she points out, however, that “the Ottomans generally did not differ in the kind of atrocities they committed from practices common to wars at the time” (“Ottoman Shock-and-Awe” 229). Of course, such scholarly differentiation would only have debilitated Luther’s propaganda. Accordingly, he maintained a necessary bias and used repetitive imagery, generalizations based on hearsay, and graphic violence explicitly against women and children to imprint a particular perception of the enemy as frightening but spiritually doomed creatures unworthy to live deeply within the public mindset.

Many of these gruesome attributes derive from Luther’s conception of Mohammed. Reading the prophet in close proximity to Epicurus, Luther condemned the Qur’an as a twisting of God’s words to please evil (Ehmann 163). He described him as a false prophet, a charlatan and aggressor, and most of all as a sensualist and adulterer (Ehmann 441). Moreover, he repeatedly referred to Mohammed as a sorcerer versed in the dark arts who practiced magic rites and told of strange and fascinating wonders and visions and as such resembled a Proto-Faustian³⁹ figure

³⁷ “to scare the Christians, to beat or stab their children to death and impale them on fenceposts, and to strangle whoever else cannot leave.”

³⁸ “burns your house and home, takes your cattle and fodder, money and possessions, stabs you to death, ... rapes or strangles your wife and daughters in front of your eyes, chops up your children and impales them on fenceposts.”

³⁹ The will to power, the bond with Beelzebub, and religious rites resembling strange sorcery – many central themes that dominated Marlowe’s and Goethe’s respective tales are already present in the common characterizations of the doomed Mohammed and his relation to the Devil.

(Ehmann 164).⁴⁰ By extension, all of the prophet's followers must naturally be alike, believe in the same values, and indulge in the same behavior. Therefore, all are equally condemnable.

Luther's warnings address everyone. He writes: "Solchs alles rede ich für die so Christen sind oder gerne wären, dass sie wissen, wie sie sich zu dieser Zeit richten und trösten sollen" (*Heerpredigt* 18).⁴¹ Of course, he delivers his doctrines to his own congregation, but also teaches others what to preach from their pulpits. "He instructed them to 'explain to [the laity] what a rightful service it is before God to fight the Turks when the authorities so command'" (Francisco 74). The fame he had achieved after posting his theses in 1517 and openly defying the papacy a little later had created a broad public interest in his person and ensured the attention of an enormous audience. With the churches spreading Luther's words among the general populace and his *Türkenbüchlein* addressing the nobility, he achieved the widest influence possible for his time.

Over the course of Luther's work, the German perception of the Ottomans gained considerably in shape. Luther's initially nuanced view of Ottoman culture soon yielded voluble hate speech once he recognized the increasing number of converts among German emigrants. At once, he perceived Christian Europe in danger of apostasy. For a man of the cloth this risk clearly outweighed any otherwise admirable qualities of the Ottoman lifestyle and warranted an immediate military response to the Muslim expansion. Luther supported the war by providing an adequate mindset for fighting the Ottomans: Conflating national and religious identifications, he

⁴⁰ Francisco refers to a similar text by Heinrich Knaust from 1542 which "recounted other means by which Mohammed attracted his first followers: In the presence of Jews he claimed to be the long-expected Messiah. In addition to his knowledge of the Scriptures, he confirmed this claim by performing signs and wonders, which, according to Knaust, were nothing but black magic (*schwartzkünstiger*) and demonic miracles (*Teufflischen wunderzeychen*), and, along with other 'signs' such as using a trained pigeon that ate grain out of his ear thus giving off the appearance of receiving words from the Holy Spirit, Muhammad was also able to win over the Arabs with his law" (56). Francisco believes Knaust's book to have been the only extensive history book on Mohammed at the time (55), which makes it quite likely that Luther was familiar with the text.

⁴¹ "All this I say to those who are or would like to be Christians, so that they may know how to act in these times and how to console themselves."

denigrated their prophet, explained the satanic function of Muslims in the Christian history of salvation, and propagated tales of their gruesome war practices. Tying his arguments to biblical exegesis gave his ideas particular credibility. Their graphic imagery and easily comprehensible language (“Man muss dem Volk aufs Maul schauen”)⁴² had a massive impact on the collective memory: Luther conveyed a clear message of disdain, substantiated the perception of Ottomans as a threat to Europe, and infused the German public with numerous reinvigorated stereotypes.

2.1.3 1526-1792 (*Ottoman Wars*)

Between 1526 and 1792, eight conflicts between German-Austrian troops and the Ottomans spanned a total of over 70 years, involving almost every generation in concrete confrontation with the enemy.⁴³ The following two centuries witnessed two major changes in the German image of Ottomans. First, parallel to the fear-mongering in spiritual and military discourses, a conflicting alternative narrative emerged from the arts which revived medieval depictions of Oriental figures as alluring exotics. Secondly, the eventual containment of the Ottomans’ westward expansion put a check on excessive scare tactics and paved the way for intercultural cooperation in the long 19th century and beyond. To begin with, however, Luther’s rhetoric of animosity led the Austro-German soldiery straight into battle.

In light of Luther’s inflammatory writings and the fears induced by the recent First Siege of Vienna, German and Austrian authorities were finally convinced that the Ottoman Empire had to be fought and even decreed a special tax to finance this undertaking. After procuring

⁴² In his *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen* (1530, “*Open Letter on Translation*”), Luther comments on his approach to translate the Bible into comprehensible German: “man mus die mutter jhm hause, die kinder auff der gassen, den gemeinen man auff dem marckt drumb fragen, und den selbigen auff das maul sehen, wie sie reden, und darnach dolmetschen, so verstehen sie es den” (“*you need to ask the mother at home, the children on the street, the common man at the market, and look at their trap, the way they talk, and translate accordingly, then they will understand*”).

⁴³ The Ottoman Wars began as early as 1423 with the Venetians defending trade routes against Ottomans, and lasted until 1878 with four final campaigns by Russia. With its focus on Turkish-German history, the time frame of this section considers only the period involving German forces. Since they often fought under the command of Habsburg generals, Austrian activity in the Ottoman Wars typically implies German participation.

insufficient funds in the first year, the tax was changed from a class-based system to a tax per capita, including the entire nobility as well as the monarch. For almost 100 years (1531-1619) Germans paid this so-called “Türkensteuer” (“*Turk tax*”); Austria maintained it well into the 18th century (Kabel 120-121).⁴⁴ After Luther had invoked almost every conceivable woe to put the Ottomans in the worst light possible, the “Türkensteuer” with its long-term impact on all of society firmly imprinted the association of Turks with a financial burden in the German collective memory.

In the 17th and early 18th centuries, Christian warmongers had still drawn heavily on Luther’s writings, his interpretation of the Bible, and his imagery of fear. Their polemics were likewise aimed at the largest possible audience and served the sole purpose of refreshing the terrifying tales of the latest Crusades, the defeat of Constantinople or the First Siege to repulse the eternal archenemy once more at the Second Siege (1683) and yet again in the Long Ottoman War (1683-1699). Based on these particularly large-scale military encounters, the once abstract image of the Turks gained an immediate, concrete physical dimension and shifted from a distanced spiritual to a nearby martial threat.

Parallel to the horrific images familiar from Luther’s pulpit or actual battle fields, a quite different perception preoccupied the imagination within the arts. Drawing on medieval sources, 16th and 17th century literature described Turks as particularly lustful heathens which created an ambivalent dualism. The stereotyped Turk became the blanket guiding figure of the dangerous yet intriguing exotic stranger portrayed as both “lecherous and cruel” (cf. Kleinlogel 25). The public perception of the Turk constantly oscillated between fear and fascination, the appealing

⁴⁴ Kabel dates the *Türkensteuer* in Germany to 1531; Michael Caspar in “Gieboldehäuser Bürger zahlen Türkensteuer” (Eichsfelder Tageblatt, 10.7.2009, p. 9) dates its origin to 1521 based on the *Wormser Reichsmatrikel* decreed at the same Diet of Worms that also ostracized Luther. Other related taxes were the Austrian *Terz* (also *Türkenertz*) and *Quart* (also *Türkenquart*). These were Papal taxes imposed on the Catholic Church in Habsburg territory only, the former referring to the percentage of income the second to property value.

and the appalling. Due to the very different but equally captivating images of threat and allurement, these two depictions put together dominated German discourse on the Orient. As a consequence, “the Turk” became the living embodiment of the ambiguous exotic (Kleinlogel 51).

Only in the aftermath of Prince Eugen von Savoyen-Carigna’s victories against the Ottomans in 1697 and once more in 1717 did the impression of a constant threat from the East slowly abate (Kleinlogel 301). In the second half of the 18th century the perceived danger was ultimately averted and the stereotyped Turk eventually regained more civilized features within the arts. He still represented the peculiar, lascivious, and somewhat wild exotic, but the profound fear of a genuine beast and wrath of God largely remained in the past, a development that was enforced particularly over the course of the Enlightenment.

In the decades to follow, this new image prevailed both in literature and on stage. Following the success of Voltaire’s *Zaire* (1732), Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise* (1779) is also set in Jerusalem during the Crusades. In its progressive depiction of a reasonable Ottoman ruler, Lessing’s final play is well ahead of its time. The Muslim emperor Saladin appears as a humble and religiously tolerant wise man, enlightened by the Jewish tradesman Nathan. Both Jew and Muslim stand in stark contrast to the harsh Christian patriarch characterized by a short temper, ignorance, and ruthlessness. While the patriarch displays features of the common crusader, the emperor and the tradesman embody humanist values and practice the freedom of religion familiar from the Ottoman occupation of Spain and still dreaded by Luther as a prime reason for German emigration. *Nathan*’s enlightened level of tolerance remains exceptional even today despite the growing civility in contemporary Muslim portrayals.

Other examples of an improved Ottoman image in Europe can be found in the “Türkenoperen” (“*Operas with Turks*”) like Mozart’s “The Abduction from the Seraglio” (1789). When the wealthy Muslim Bassa Selim chooses to spare the Spanish Christians in the final scene,

his act of kindness reflects on his entire ethnicity. Although his generosity appears to outshine the dubious personality of his cruel servant, their complementing characters embody a sense of ambiguity still inherent in the revised image of the cliché Turk. The ambiguity intensifies especially in light of Selim's cultural hybridity, considering that he, too, was of Spanish origin and only converted to Islam. By ascribing noble features of humanity and compassion to a Muslim, however, Mozart's opera clearly subscribes to an advanced perspective on the former archenemy and presents a much more differentiated image of Muslims.

Regardless of the continuing Ottoman Wars, the increased depiction of gentility from Ottomans slowly upgraded their image among Germans. Already in 1769, Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen evoked an indirect testimony to the new social status of Turks. Pretending to have built a chess automaton, he disguised a fake robot in oriental garb which was hence called a Turk. By extension, the public's tolerance of this costume also attests its acceptance of the improved Ottoman image as an intellectually sophisticated people.

Inside the apparatus, however, was not machinery but a small human chess master who controlled the mechanic arms via levers.⁴⁵ Even after the exposure of the fraud the "robot" drew much public attention. Through frequent conversational reference to the fraudulent "Turk," the famous automaton's main contribution to Germany's collective memory was most likely linguistic: It gave rise to the still current expression of "türken" ("to *turk*"), meaning to deceive someone.⁴⁶ However, the foregrounded untrustworthiness is premised on a picaresque feat of intelligence. As a result, the term reflected an ambivalent stance between respect and skepticism.

⁴⁵ In 2006, the online trading facility Amazon developed a computer platform that distributes small tasks requiring human intelligence to actual people around the globe. In reference to the chess automaton, this platform was named the "mechanical Turk" (Williams). Whereas Kempelen's product constituted an – albeit ambivalent – upgrade in the German perception of Ottomans at the time, Amazon's reference today bears clearly backwards overtones of cultural imperialism. It re-inscribes an outdated Orientalist hierarchy into the perception of millions of users and so impedes global progression towards more equality.

⁴⁶ In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) Walter Benjamin uses the chess automaton as a critical analogy to historical materialism. For possible origins of the expression see *The Oxford English Dictionary* where

Halfway through the final Austro-Ottoman battle (1787-92), after the Ottoman Empire had already suffered significant losses in the Balkans (1768-74), it was in dire need of a powerful ally. Prussia recognized an entrepreneurial opportunity of promise in the East, abandoned Austria, and signed a strategic military alliance with the Empire in 1790. Thus compromised in his advance, the Habsburg Kaiser Leopold II. agreed a year later to conclude peace with the Ottomans as well and an era of peaceful coexistence began. The new policy of rapprochement put an official end to centuries of negative propaganda, the arts had already begun to portray Ottomans in an increasingly favorable light, and the general populace seemed willing to follow. However, the repeated state of war had created deep-seated feelings of fear, financial burden, and untrustworthiness across many generations that still lingered on in the collective memory.

2.1.4 1792-2000 (Formal Cooperation)

The peace treaty of 1790 between Germans and Ottomans laid the grounds for entrepreneurial cooperation which should culminate in the guest working contracts of the 1950s and 60s. The period of formal cooperation witnessed a gradual divergence of interests between governance and people: While economy-driven politics in the late 19th and early 20th century increased intercultural exchange on a business level, interest of the general populace in Ottoman affairs decreased. Despite industrial cooperation, trading agreements, youth exchanges, and cross-cultural training programs, the average degree of public involvement with the Ottomans declined. As a consequence, the initial improvements in German perceptions of Ottoman culture stagnated in a state of skeptical ambivalence. The subliminal reserve towards Ottomans took a conspicuous turn for the worse during the decades of neglected integration efforts following the first guest

the term “Turk” refers to a target for shooting practice in the 16th century, or the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by the Brothers Grimm. The Grimms list two potential origins: regular military demonstrations by Generalleutnant Gebhart Hans Valentin Ludwig von Kotze usually near a Turkish cemetery that was central to the show, or the context of the “Türkensteuer”.

worker contracts with Turkey in 1961. Not until the year 2000, the government began to actively foster the integration of its now profoundly multi-ethnic citizenry.

Only three months after signing the peace treaty with the Ottomans, the German center of military attention shifted to France.⁴⁷ Concentrating the national wrath on the Western arch enemy benefitted the partial rehabilitation of the former Eastern arch enemy. In Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan* (1819/27), for instance, a profound admiration for Oriental culture reminiscent of the 8th century resurfaced. Despite the fact that the aged poet had always preferred the mythologies of Greek and Roman antiquity, he had also harbored a keen interest in Eastern literature and lifestyles his whole life (cf. Trunz 537). Although the veneration expressed in the *Divan* referred explicitly to medieval Muslim authors, the popular collection of poems benefitted contemporary Ottomans by supporting the Germans' improving opinion of the recently pacified foe (Celik 90).

In contrast to Goethe's poetic appreciation, many of the prestigious entrepreneurial opportunities on Ottoman lands had little to no effect on the minds of the German majority population. The export of goods and knowledge failed to make a lasting impact on the collective memory. With Prussia's help, Ottoman emperors strove to modernize their territory in terms of weapons and infrastructure to regain their old strength. In the late 1870s, for example, a contract sealed the purchase of one million German Mauser-rifles over the next 25 years (Celik 97). Yet, the resulting financial gain or the Ottoman appreciation for quality weaponry passed the German populace by. Likewise, in 1880 German engineers began designing the *Bagdad-Bahn*, a railway connecting Konya and Bagdad to exploit land more efficiently ("Bagdadbahn"). Although the completion of the 1600km railway in 1940 was a master stroke of engineering and intercultural cooperation, its impact on the public perception of the Turks was meager at best. It was

⁴⁷ In April of 1792, Austria and Prussia turned their armies west and entered the Coalition Wars (1792-1815) against France, briefly even with the help of the Ottoman army (1799-1802).

geographically too far removed from German everyday life to actually affect the general populace and so constituted another missed opportunity to improve the Ottoman reputation among the German people.

Despite symbolic displays of sympathy (such as Kaiser Wilhelm II. in Turkish military uniform), even the domestic training of Ottoman technicians failed to produce any substantial

exchange between ethnicities. In order to catch up with the level of Western industrialization, Ottoman engineers were sent to

Germany where they first worked for Mercedes, for instance, and were then expected to effect technological progress back home. Consequently, by 1907 already 12,000 Turks were employed in German factories (Celik 96). However, the temporary nature of their stay thwarted long-lasting contacts and hence prevented any noteworthy interchange.

A considerably greater influence on German views of Muslims, Ottomans, and other at the time so-called “Oriental” cultures arose from novels of Karl May (1842-1912). The most widely read German author to date “employs the full repertoire of Middle Eastern Tropes available at the time” (Berman, *German Literature on the Middle East* 180). For instance his *Orientzyklus*, six volumes of travel fiction, features particularly Turks as harmless, often comical simpletons. Buttressing stereotypes of Eastern inferiority, May’s depictions continue to diminish notions of a Turkish threat in public perception. However, instead of supporting official



Image 1: Kaiser Wilhelm II. 1917 in a Turkish military uniform.
© Scherl / Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo.

aspirations of intercultural esteem and cooperation, he replaces the image of an imperialist aggressor with different but equally negative attributes.⁴⁸

Shortly after May's decease, both World Wars put the formal friendship between the Turkish and German governments to the test. Indirectly, projects like the Bagdad-Bahn and the exchange of scientific expertise caused the Ottoman Empire to join forces with the young German Empire against the Triple Entente in World War I (Celik 70). Despite the mutual defeat, the formal cooperation continued well into the Second World War, fortified by the



Image 2: German-Turkish Nonaggression Pact (June, 18, 1941). Tretikov, Lila, Exec. Dir. *Wikimedia Foundation*. Web. 17 April 2014. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6d/German-Turkish_Treaty_of_Friendship_and_Non-Aggression.jpg>. (Public Domain)

Nonaggression Pact of 1941.⁴⁹ The side by side flags of Turkey and Nazi-Germany on symbolically equal heights as displayed in Image 2 testify to a relationship of mutual respect that stands in stark contrast to today's neo-Nazi discrimination in Germany of fellow citizens of Turkish background. Although the new nation of Turkey sided with the Alliance only a few months prior to German surrender and declared war on the Reich in February of 1945, the old and the new republic quickly returned to friendly terms in postwar times. Sixteen years later, both nations signed an agreement for the mass recruitment of Turkish workers in Germany.

In 1961, the first Turkish guest workers crossed German borders, again under the initial assumption of a very short stay. On a political level, this recruitment plan certainly furthered the formal friendship with Turkey. On an industrial level, the workers were desperately needed. On a

⁴⁸ For an in-depth discussion of May's impact on the self-perception of the young German nation, see Nina Berman's *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne* (1997), esp. 41-164. For the cultural function of respective stage adaptations, see Katrin Sieg's *Ethnic Drag* (2002), esp. 73-114.

⁴⁹ For a literary depiction of Turkish-German relations between both World Wars and afterwards, see, for instance, Zafer Şenocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998, "Dangerous Kinship").

social level, however, the plan caused a massive increase in intercultural conflicts on German soil when the number of foreign workers skyrocketed over the next decade.

Most frequently, conflict arose due to the Germans' conflation of Turkish national and religious identifications. In spite of any previous amelioration of the Turkish image in Germany and a "widespread fascination with an exotic Orient ... the image of Islam [had] remained consistent and negative. 'The main themes – first, violence; second, lasciviousness; and third, deceit – appeared again and again ... and even survive today'" (Kontje 34-35).⁵⁰ Despite seventy years of peace "the so-called *Gastarbeiter* have been seen as a kind of continuation (this time by economic means) of the Ottoman (Islamic) onslaught on Europe. There is the sense of being overwhelmed by an alien culture" (Robins 66).

Especially in times of turmoil, German media fostered these xenophobic fears and resentments. When financial instability increased popular insecurities during the economic crisis of 1973, the journal *Spiegel* encapsulated the natives' sense of foreign overload in the headline "Die Türken kommen – rette sich, wer kann!"⁵¹ reporting one million people of Turkish origin living in Germany and another 1.2 million waiting to enter ("Spiegel" 24). In the late 1980s, the supply crisis of the GDR saw a significant increase of the word "smuggling" in relation to foreigners (Poutrus 99). Instead of helping to abate cultural tensions, polemics like these accomplished the opposite by breeding discord and antipathy among the population.

Due to prejudiced generalizations, even the word "Turk" itself adopted new facets of meaning. Similar to Luther's usage, the term sometimes serves as a generalizing linguistic label for the unfamiliar as it "has come to be synonymous with *Ausländer*, foreigner, and outsider" (Mandel 91). Its semantic connotations transformed accordingly. Formerly associated with the wrath of God and a constant military threat, or later a partner providing valuable workforces,

⁵⁰ Kontje quotes Norman Daniel's *Islam, Europe, and Empire*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh: 1966, p. 6.

⁵¹ "The Turks are coming – Save yourself if you can!"

Mandel shows how it has recently “become a signifier of instability and anxiety in national, subnational, and transnational narrations” (3).

Images of the foreign as inferior but threatening frequently pervaded not only the media landscape but the arts as well. Outdated practices of othering purported patterns of thinking inadequate for the ethnically changing demographic. Examining the writings of Wolfram von Eschenbach and Goethe, to Thomas Mann, Günther Grass, and Botho Strauß among other sources, Kontje exposes the survival and development of Orientalist notions across the twentieth century. Perpetuating stereotypes, popular arts and media often impeded tentative attempts at cultural integration and thus supported immigration politics that lagged far behind the continual transmutation of the German society (Hans 77).

Despite second and third generations of migrant background, German politicians of the 1990s still denied the nation’s status of an immigration country and clung to inappropriate models of fixed, protectable identities. Slowly but surely, however, Turkish migrants had already “had a tremendous impact on shaping German culture and society. ... This has occurred in part by introducing a new culinary culture, a non-Orientalist aesthetics, Islamic rituals and practices, and by infusing a multicultural sensibility and visibility onto the German landscape” (Mandel 16). The discrepancy of backwards politics in the face of progressive cultural change culminated in outbursts of rightwing aggression 1992 in Mölln and 1993 in Solingen where extremists attacked and killed people of migrant background.

Cleaving to obsolete ideas of ethnic separability becomes a more and more absurd notion in times of global mass migration. At the turn of the millennium, Kontje observes:

Cooler heads have cautioned that what is needed is not another round of “ethnic cleansing” but greater tolerance and increased efforts at mutual understanding. Distinctions between “us” and “them” have in any case become increasingly difficult to make: second and third generation children of Turkish *Gastarbeiter* in Germany ... have a hybrid cultural identity that no longer conforms to national stereotypes of either Germany or Turkey. (227)

With these new generations, the constant concretization of the Turkish image in the German collective memory lately entered a reverse phase of disintegration. For centuries, Ottomans had come continually closer to Germany. First, the spiritual crusaders had become imperialist soldiers, then business partners, later allies, and ultimately coworkers. In the process, both peoples attempted steadily to gain national identities. However, whereas the first emigrants were mainly unskilled workers with no knowledge of German and no intention to stay,⁵² subsequent generations were raised into a polycultural existence. Educated, and with varying ties to both ancestral origin and personal *Heimat*, they now contest and disrupt increasingly obsolete concepts of national identification.⁵³ On the way to forming seemingly clear-cut comprehensible entities they constitute a great step backward, suspending both notions of something genuinely domestic and something genuinely foreign. At the same time, this suspension is also an equally large step forward in terms of peoples growing inextricably together.

In the year 2000, the German government finally accepted the challenge of cross-cultural relations as an intra-cultural issue. After decades of denial regarding the roles of foreigners in Germany, Federal Minister of the Interior, Otto Schily, used a debate about directed immigration

⁵² These are the primary reasons why Thilo Sarrazin, former Senator of Finance in Berlin and author of the controversial book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010, “Germany does away with itself”), ascribed them a lacking potential for integration (59–61).

⁵³ *Heimat* here is supposed to mean the place most likely for someone to feel at home at, exercising the culture most familiar to someone, and the area to identify with when asked.

to form an independent committee on immigration (“Unabhängige Kommission Zuwanderung”). The committee developed the basics for a new immigration law which included a stronger orientation towards the job market as well as the offer of governmental integration courses. After much debate, the law inured in 2005, sounding the bell for several fundamental changes in Germany’s official position on immigration (Luft 145).⁵⁴

2.1.5 2005-2016 (*Active Integration*)

Having neglected the social implications of progressively intercultural politics for almost half a century, German governments of recent years put increased efforts into harmonizing a diversified German population. After decades of denying demographic hybridization, Chancellor Angela Merkel continued on the course set by the new immigration law of 2005 and over the next eleven years implemented several institutional measures to further improve domestic conditions. By increasing the variety of respective discourse participants, gauging national and international influences, and slowly developing a dynamic but sustainable new national self-conception, the current regime makes up ground, takes responsibility, and tries to reclaim its leadership position as social visionary in touch with its people.

In order to better accommodate people of migrant backgrounds in Germany, the Merkel administration has held six “Integrationsgipfel” (“*integration summits*”) since 2006 in the Chancellery Building. In the same year, then Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble initiated the “Deutsche Islamkonferenz” which convenes every four years. In 2007, the “Nationale Integrationsplan” was instigated and introduced five years later as the “Nationale Aktionsplan Integration.” 2008 launched the national citizenship test and 2010 the “Bundesweite

⁵⁴ For a concise summary of the political developments leading up to the new law, see Boran *Eine Geschichte des Türkisch-Deutschen Theaters und Kabarett* (2004), 25-27, and the section on “What is a German? Legislating National Identity” in the pivotal compendium *Germany in Transit* (2007) by Göktürk, Gramling, and Kaes, 149-192.

Integrationsprogramm” (“*nationwide program for integration*”). All of these measures had a double function: On the one hand, they raised important questions of national identifications and thus served to clarify and elaborate respective domestic perspectives; on the other, they were designed to incorporate people of all ethnicities in a redefined German society.

Where the German government seemed to have realized the social benefits of integrative efforts, Turkey’s authorities feared a significant loss. With roughly three million people of Turkish descent living in Germany today, Turkey has a solid, physical presence in the heart of Europe. Its government is anxious to maintain close relations with these emigrants as it believes them to be their strongest proponent for Turkey’s accession to the EU. The resultant strategies of encroachment, however, put Turkish-Germans in a much contested position. Swaying international politics to the advantage of Turkey would require their strong identification with Turkey and obstruct their integration into German society. Therefore, “Germany wishes that Turkey would ‘let go’ of its citizens, while Turkey wishes that Germany would start welcoming, albeit not assimilating its citizens in Germany. Thus, a curious asymmetrical pattern emerges in the triadic relationship among the migrants, the government of their country of settlement, and the government of their country of origin” (Østergaard-Nielsen 133).

Next to Turkish-Germans with strong ties to Turkey, we find another group who emigrated precisely to cut those ties, leave their secular home, and exploit a liberal society in its conservative options. “For some migrants and their children, having arrived in Germany from a Turkey that disallowed many Islamic expressions, the German experience presented the possibility of refashioning themselves as explicitly nonsecular in a diasporic existence” (Mandel 7). The most extreme variety emerging from this group is the Salafi. At least since 2005, Muslim fundamentalists like Pierre Vogel prey on the insecurities of youths and claim to propagate the

one true faith. Currently, this sect constitutes one of the biggest nationwide challenges to reason, liberalism, and self-determination in Germany.⁵⁵

On a national level, it seems that despite decades of mass migration the unfamiliar may have entered the German nation-state physically – but not yet mentally. While the visual presence of Turkish migrants today has become a normality in most metropolitan areas (especially Cologne and Berlin), their natural influence on Germany’s national profile still meets denial, even resistance in the mindsets of many. Even in recent history, the steady hybridization of German society triggered extremist counter-movements. In November of 2014, 4,000 hooligans, right-wing radicals, and members of nationalist parties gathered in Cologne to demonstrate unity as “HoGeSa” or “Hooligans gegen Salafisten” (Brühl). In October 2015, 20,000 similarly minded people mustered in the city of Dresden, concluding the first year of monthly demonstrations under the motto “Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes” (“Pegida”).⁵⁶ Whereas the Hooligans seem to have clear concepts of their enemy, supporters of Pegida continue seamlessly in the mindset of indiscriminate Islamophobia familiar from Luther (cf. 2.1.2). Both HoGeSa and Pegida attract a diverse crowd of reactionary citizens, political extremists, and violent aggressors who share a diffuse sense of original Germanness and a related fear of alienation. Unfortunately, the irony is lost on both groups that their collective delusion, often self-contradictory propaganda, and total ignorance of alternative positions render them perfectly equivalent to their detested Salafi movement.

⁵⁵ In her book *Zum Töten bereit* (“Ready to Kill”), Syrian-German author and teacher of Islamic classes, Lamya Kaddor, reflects on her conversations with teenagers who were approached by Salafi, converted to Islam, and later either contemplated or actually managed to leave Germany and join the jihad of ISIS.

⁵⁶ “*Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of Europe.*” Roughly the same number of people joined in counter-protests. It is worth noting that in 2013 foreigners constituted 2.5% of the population in Dresden’s state of Saxony, a mere fourth of the national average (“Bevölkerungsbestand Sachsen”).

On an international level, the increasing degree of hybridization and resulting confusion of cultural identities also causes the occasional back-to-basic approach in the interpretation of self and Other, particularly regarding Turkey's accession to the EU.

An increasingly essentialist vision of culture – “Islamic vs. Christian” – arguably plays a key role. This reductive view of civilizational clash has kept Turkey from being fully understood and appreciated for its diversity; ultimately membership is continually deferred in the EU, what is often seen as the Christian Club of Europe. Turkey's status as Islamic rather than Christian has caused it to waver at the geographic, economic, and social borders of Europe. Whereas for many years the immigrants were simply marginalized guestworkers, now they are more likely to be seen as Muslims in an unwelcoming environment. (Mandel 12)

Movements like HoGeSa or Pegida seem to confirm Mandel's bleak vision, much like the increasing popular support of the young, right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). Resurfacing remnants of an ingrained cultural memory keep complicating an age where social change occurs faster than ever before. For the moment, President Gauck's proclaimed “unity of the diverse” still stands in stark contrast to the slow-changing nature of national mentality. Despite the extensive efforts of the Merkel administration, there is still a long way to go on the path to abating these social tensions and towards President Gauck's envisioned unity.

Against these historical, political, and cultural backgrounds the modern Turkish-German ethno-comedian enters the limelight. As an object of a millennium of transformations in heteronomous conceptualizations, polycultural artists perform their public subjectification, take the stage, and actively engage in a national discourse on identity, diversity, and coexistence.

Within them, ancient associations with the haunting specter, the soldier, and the alluring exotic still reverberate. Berman even assumes that “the archive of images gathered over centuries in the German collective memory actively impedes the absorption of new material and the emergence of new views” (*German Literature on the Middle East* 238). It is this archive which the *Kabarett* artists that were examined by Boran tried to undermine, just like today’s ethno-comedians pursue the same goal but within their own media and distinct artistic parameters.

Rising from a discursive intersection of entertainment, philosophy, and politics, the overarching goal for ethno-comedians is as simple as it is difficult: contributing to the establishment of a shared life praxis, or, in Welsch’s paraphrase of Wittgenstein, a world where we get along (16). To accomplish this, the social outsiders, originating from what Bhabha calls the “third space,” exploit a position predestined for critiquing polarizing politics and setting up “new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (Rutherford 211). The second part of this chapter takes a closer look at the genre’s cultural political potential that emerges from its growing influence on mainstream perceptions in a democratic society.

2.2 The Cultural Politics of Ethno-Comedy

Over 1200 years of cross-cultural entanglements Turks influenced German culture in various ways, most directly since the guest workers gradually gained full citizenship. Despite more than two centuries of formal cooperation between both countries, many forms of discrimination have accompanied Turkish migrants in Germany at all times. As Boran, for instance, showed for the case of migrant *Kabarett*, Adelson for Turkish-German literature of the 1990s, and Göktürk for the medium of film, various artists of migrant background already engaged in a cultural political battle by telling counter-narratives to revisit established, prejudiced perceptions of the majority society. Using jokes as their weapon of choice, Turkish-German ethno-comedians put their

polyculturally informed humor in the balance and join this list of cultural combatants representing the marginalized in general and Germany's largest ethnic minority in particular. What Barreca states for women and humor holds true for these hybrid comedians, too: "Making your own jokes is equivalent to taking control over your life – and usually that means taking control away from someone else" (110).

The immediate co-existence of Germans, Turks, and Turkish-Germans raises general questions of power dynamics in majority/minority relations, ways to identify, and means of ethnic (counter-)representation, all of which are influenced fundamentally by mutual stereotyping. Since these questions are at the heart of postcolonial studies, the following adapts and expands the work of Homi Bhabha and applies his perspective to this context. To begin with, the first section explores traditionally postcolonial grounds and looks at how German foreign policy around a brief period of actual colonization already inscribed a self-image of superiority into the German collective memory that in some circles complicates social interaction between natives and people of migrant background until today (2.2.1). The second section expands this perspective to Turkish-German relations in Germany and draws parallels between observations of its scholars and the work of ethno-comedians (2.2.2). Among the key interests of both are the formation, articulation, and negotiation of individual and collective identities. Accordingly, the following part examines core concepts of identity as a primary preoccupation of comedy based on ethnic variety (2.2.3). Another shared interest of postcolonialists and ethno-comedians lies in analyzing the nature, distribution, and effects of stereotypes. Returning to the work of Bhabha, the next part examines the structural composition of stereotypes which constitute the biggest resource for ethnic humor and a key leverage point to renegotiating mutual identifications (2.2.4). The penultimate part of this section ties together all of the above: It examines how hybrid artists employ the method of role playing with stereotyped ethnic identifications to contest Turkish and

German self-images (2.2.5), before a short introduction into the Turkish-German ethno-comedy scene concludes this chapter (2.2.6).

The overall goal of this second part is to provide a first impression of the cultural political potential of ethno-comedy. Having skimmed over a millennium of shared history, we got a glimpse of how far German-Turkish entanglements go back, how they were sometimes combative, sometimes supportive, and how over the course of it all a plethora of stereotypes emerged which now serves as the main material for today's ethno-comedians. In the next step, we close in on the contemporary intervention of these comedians and their cultural labor, and see how they engage with the *status quo* in order to shape their own history.

Evidently, this political component in ethno-comedy works differently than, for instance, parliamentary politics. Erika Fischer-Lichte, for example, coming from the field of theater arts considers every performance inherently political through the physical co-presence of actor and audience, regardless of its specific subject (68). To political theorist Thomas Bernauer any action is political in nature if it is intended to influence social coexistence.⁵⁷ In their oftentimes critical performances, ethno-comedians certainly try to affect, even guide the way various ethnicities view and possibly treat each other, thus rendering the genre profoundly political. Based on a postcolonial perspective, the following investigation of its central concepts of identity, stereotyping, and role play seeks to expose the underlying mechanisms of such on-stage politics.

⁵⁷ “Soziales Handeln, das auf Entscheidungen und Steuerungsmechanismen ausgerichtet ist, die allgemein verbindlich sind und das Zusammenleben von Menschen regeln” (Bernauer et al. 32); “*Social action that is directed towards decisions and control mechanisms which are binding and governing the cohabitation of people.*”

2.2.1 *The German Colonial Mindset*

At first glance, a *postcolonial* approach to Turkish-German cultural products may seem somewhat misguided. The most obvious objection is that Germany – compared to England, France, Spain or Portugal – barely had an actual colonial past, let alone with Turkey. This cannot be denied convincingly. Bismarck turned some remote trading posts into areas officially under German protection. However, the combined territories and islands thus governed between 1884 and 1919 in Africa and the Pacific were generally few, economically trivial, and without noteworthy cultural exchange between colonizer and colonized. After Germany's surrender at the end of World War I the Treaty of Versailles allocated Germany's areas abroad and hoped to stifle all suchlike ambitions.

Despite the brevity of this phase it allowed for a significant alteration in German self-perception. While the foreign natives constituted no primary motivation for the scheme of abroad settlements – compared to medieval and early modern efforts to missionize heathens – German colonial discourse still referred to them in terms of family relations. The German narrative of colonial dominance used the image of a stern father ruling over his subordinate children, thus implying a clear hierarchy. The metaphorical *Vaterland* expanded accordingly from describing a paternal connection only between the state and its citizens to also implying a relation of cultural superiority between the German Empire and its supposedly inferior colonies. The sense that being German automatically equaled being a more sophisticated form of human – a notion so fundamental to the National Socialists of the near future – received a solid foundation during this time. In a subtle but crucial way, the image of the superior Westerner helping, advancing, even civilizing the inferior foreigner as reflected, for instance, in the concept of “the white man's burden” subsists even into the new millennium. Analyzing the self-representation of the Museum of Europe in Brussels 2007, El-Tayeb finds that “the dominant liberal humanist cosmopolitan

discourse in postwar Europe [still pretends] colonization somehow happened out of necessity (and more *to* Europe than inflicted by it)” (165).

In addition to this otherwise unrewarding period of actual colonization, a slight expansion of the overall concept allows for further crucial insights into historical developments formative for the contemporary German mentality. Keeping in mind the long-term German perception of Turks as the prototypically foreign (as outlined in 2.1), a wider definition of colonialism illuminates constitutive moments shaping the German stance towards the foreign in general, thus sharpening the picture of the current state of all migrants in Germany. Referencing the geographer Heinrich Schmitthenner, Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop reframe the idea of a German colonial past:

“There are colonies which are territorially contiguous with the Mother Country, and there are colonial activities without the flag. Colonization does not emanate from the State alone but from the colonizing activities of the race.” From this point of view the Germans are a colonizing people with centuries of experience. They have traditions of settlement, missionary work and commercial activity which go back far beyond the short-lived colonial empire of 1884-1919. (8)

Considering already the medieval conquests of Teutonic knights as proto-colonial activities, Friedrichsmeyer et al. argue that explicitly “colonial ventures date back at least to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when thousands of Germans took part in the conquest and colonization of the ‘New World’ – as adventurers or mercenaries in Spanish or Portuguese expeditions, as merchants outfitting ships or trading in slaves, as scientists, explorers, or interpreters” (8). Between 1683 and 1720, Brandenburg already had colonial settlements and trading posts in

Africa and the Caribbean. However, when Friedrich Wilhelm I. of Prussia ascended the throne, he focused his fiscal politics on strengthening the military, in the course of which he sold the African territories in treaties of 1717 and 1720 to the Dutch West India Company. Clearly, a colonialist mindset had already been around for quite some time. It was only fully realized as late as the first official annexations in 1884 and due to its conceptual permanence it was not to be extinguished by a single treaty after World War I, especially one imposed from the outside and devised by major colonial powers (Gründer 216-217).

A mere two decades later, a reinvigorated German army marched on Poland. Although clearly an act of war, the invasion bore essentially colonialist characteristics as well, comparable to the British appropriation of their former penal colony Australia. The region was claimed primarily for its space not its resources, and the natives were only a secondary part of the landscape: The Western usurper tolerated their compliance but showed no hesitation to kill the disobedient. As a main difference to the more traditional colonial pattern of binding distant locations in order to obtain access to exotic goods, German expansionism now concentrated on the incorporation of immediately adjacent territories. At least initially, German propaganda concerning the imperialist ideology which resurfaced in the late 1930s and ignited World War II pivoted on the idea of acquiring necessary *Lebensraum* in the East. As with Bismarck's colonial enterprises, it was once more strategic territorial gain which motivated the movement and not the dual moral obligation to civilize and missionize heathens which arises from Europe's Christian cultural superiority as pleaded, for instance, by the Iberians settling in South America.⁵⁸ Again, the narrative of the *Vaterland* adapted accordingly, this time including only Aryan tribes in the paternal pattern and reserving haughty disdain at best for everyone else.

⁵⁸ Of course, the ideology behind National Socialist expansionism exceeds colonial aspiration. The intent here is not to limit the movement to colonial ideals but only to highlight one particular aspect in this specific context.

During the First World War not a single foreign soldier had set foot on German grounds, thus allowing a flawed sense of proud invincibility to persist among the general populace. Only after the crushing defeat on own soil the grand scheme of German expansionism, colonial or otherwise, was finally over. Irrespective of when exactly the colonial mindset established itself in Germany, its underlying attitude of superiority towards the foreign shaped the collective mentality for a considerable time, right up to the *Gastarbeiter* period and beyond.

2.2.2 A Postcolonial Approach

While the German colonial mindset alone already justifies approaching German literary and cultural studies from a postcolonial perspective, the theoretical framework itself changed over time and formulated questions outside the original colonial paradigm. When Edward Said laid the field's foundations in his book *Orientalism* (1978) he still maintained a generalizing East/West binarism of Orient and Occident, in which the Occident was represented mainly through writings from France and England. Later, Todd Kontje's work on *German Orientalisms* (2004), though in itself not a postcolonial study, first diversified "the West" by concentrating on German artifacts, and secondly differentiated the core concept of Orientalism by disclosing several distinct tendencies even within the already exclusive focus. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi K. Bhabha outlined the overall axiom when he defined the heterogeneous multiplicity of constantly competing discourse participants as the norm. As a result, he further increased the scholarly sensitivity for a permanent plurality of synchronous positions.

This development shows how the postcolonial perspective changed, occasioned both from within the field (Bhabha) and from without (Kontje). Its categories are not rigidly fixed, and so it can adapt in accordance with individual epistemological interests. As an academic field, its name today only references the circumstances once necessary for its origin, a transitional period

involving actual former colonies; but it no longer describes a basic pattern obligatory for all of its research questions. The key realization of Kontje, Bhabha, and others is that each situation needs to be assessed in terms of its own distinctiveness: Each colonial constellation differs considerably from the others, both simultaneously and over time, so the same questions typically yield different answers. Realizing the devil in the detail, a matured contemporary postcolonial critique first and foremost highlights the complexity of specific scenarios, disavows generalizing statements that exceed the individual object of study, and focuses instead on the examination of increasingly broad concerns connecting mostly unique constellations.⁵⁹ While it is certainly true that, in terms of motivation, the *voluntary* situation of Turkish migrants in Germany differs in this respect from those colonized on their own native land, these broad concerns still have a bearing on them even though their history lacks the colonial condition. Accordingly, a postcolonial perspective offers a plethora of field-specific research questions applicable to colonial and many non-colonial situations alike.

Over the course of this theoretical expansion, the aspect of a colonial history itself turns from a once constitutive criterion into just another component of the overall analysis and produces a curious twist: While the presence of colonialism was often a cause for extensive ethnic strife, its absence may support yet other kinds of intercultural complications. In her book on the situation of German-Turkish artists in Germany, El Hissy draws attention explicitly to the latter phenomenon:

⁵⁹ For instance, we can observe power relations within a specific constellation, assess various groups, their historical development and means of influence; but to apply the findings to a different constellation may lead nowhere due to its own infinitely versatile constitution. Therefore, we can apply the same broad question to different constellations but need to beware of generalizing the answers. The connection of unique constellations then consists only in the shared applicability of the overall question, the interest that defines the postcolonial field.

Das Fehlen der für die postkoloniale Situation charakteristischen Beziehung zwischen ehemaliger Kolonialmacht und Kolonie führte zur Wahrnehmung der eingewanderten türkischen Minderheit als Träger eines höheren Grads an Fremdheit.⁶⁰ Als die Rückkehr der Gastarbeiter in vielen Fällen nicht in Erwägung gezogen wurde und der Aufenthalt in Deutschland sich verstetigte, kamen die fehlende Vertrautheit im Umgang mit den türkischen Migranten und die Geringschätzung der entstandenen Multikultur bedeutend stärker zur Geltung. (42-43)

The missing relationship characteristic of the postcolonial situation between former colonizer and colony led to a perception of the Turkish minority as possessing a higher degree of otherness. Once the return of the guest workers was not considered in many cases and the stay in Germany became constant, the lack of familiarity in dealing with Turkish migrants and the disdain for the emerged multiculturalism found much more prominent expression.

In a way, El Hissy articulates the reverse of Bhabha's depiction of colonial discourse, which he describes as "produc[ing] the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (101). The colonizers' perception of their subjects may be riddled

⁶⁰ In a footnote, El Hissy emphasizes here: "Der wichtigste Faktor, der zur Konstruktion und Zementierung von Fremdheit führt, ist sicherlich der der Religion. Ein unmittelbarer Zusammenhang zeigt sich im deutsch-türkischen Kontext an den Diskussionen um den Beitritt der Türkei in die EU, dem Streit um den Bau von Moscheen und der Kopftuchdebatte, die insbesondere im deutsch-türkischen Kabarett thematisiert werden. Diese Themen implizieren Fragen über Macht und Ausgrenzung. Hier wird die Debatte über das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Tradition und Moderne relevant, ein Thema, das das Fundament vieler postkolonialer Begegnungen bildet und für den deutsch-türkischen Kontext aktuell ist" (43, footnote 23); "The most important factor resulting in the construction and cementation of otherness is definitely religion. In the German-Turkish context, its immediate relevance becomes obvious in the discussions regarding Turkey's accession into the EU, the controversy about building mosques, and the debate about headscarves, which feature particularly in German-Turkish Kabarett. Here, the argument regarding the tension between tradition and modernity becomes important, a topic that constitutes the basis for many postcolonial relations and that currently applies to the German-Turkish context as well."

with racist Eurocentric projections resulting in a completely inadequate image; in many ways, however, the continuous close contact also creates a period of mutual history, ongoing social contact, of reciprocal language acquisition and cultural exchange. This missing background leads El Hissy to diagnose a lack of potential social starting points:

Kulturelle, soziale, sprachliche und andere Verbindungen, die die großen Kolonialmächte aufbauten und – insbesondere im Fall Frankreichs – bis heute noch pflegen, fallen damit komplett aus. Stattdessen ging es in erster Linie um Assimilationsversuche seitens der „Dominanzkultur“ und die Eingliederung der als fremd wahrgenommenen Migranten in die deutsche Gesellschaft. (43)

Cultural, social, linguistic, and other connections established by the major colonial powers and – especially in the case of France – maintained until today are missing entirely. Instead, it was mainly about assimilation attempts from the “dominating culture” and the German society absorbing migrants it perceived as strange.

Obviously, these comparative deficiencies are not supposed to imply that colonial situations were generally beneficial to everyone. However, despite all their undoubtedly dubious qualities they may not have produced exclusively negative conditions for a future coexistence on equal terms.

As outlined in the first half of this chapter, the long history of Germans and Ottomans was largely characterized by fear. Despite profitable trade relations and the arts’ continuous obsession with the allure of the “exotic Oriental,” from the earliest contacts in the Middle Ages well into the 18th century the Ottoman Empire always constituted a spiritual and military threat to Christian Europe as well, the negative view dominating public perception for centuries. El Hissy’s

observations confirm the low impact on German mentality of later collaborations between Germans and Ottomans such as the Bagdad-Bahn project at the turn of the 20th century, the 12,000 Turks already employed in German factories by 1907, or even the combined efforts during both World Wars. Although her explanation “dass keine gemeinsame historische Erfahrung vorlag, die den Hintergrund für die Migrationsbewegung bildete” (43)⁶¹ is historically inaccurate, it seems factually representative of the current German majority’s mindset.⁶² The subsequent attempts at assimilating Turkish migrants into German culture support this perception.⁶³ In the wake of the Gastarbeiter contracts there is no exchange between familiar peoples, only the classification into binary categories of an obscure organic German versus the exogenous foreign and the corresponding effort to turn the latter into the former.⁶⁴

One of postcolonialism’s major goals is to overcome such binary categories of thinking. To accomplish this, postcolonialism describes and analyzes structures of dependence in multicultural settings with distinctly asymmetrical power dynamics.⁶⁵ What began as observations of colonizer and colonized morphed in the context of mass migrations into a study of majority/minority relations as well. Questions of identity and representation, control and

⁶¹ “*There was no mutual history to background this migration movement.*”

⁶² It is precisely this misconstrued state of affairs that got Çelik to write his book on Turkish traces in Germany as a counter-narrative in the first place: “Türken in Deutschland – das scheint auf den ersten Blick eine junge Sache zu sein, kaum ein halbes Jahrhundert alt ... Es geht hier um Historie ... darum, dass die heutige Präsenz türkischer Mitbürger in Deutschland in Wahrheit bereits eine 500jährige Geschichte hat”; “*Turks in Germany – at first sight that seems to be a rather recent thing, no more than half a century old ... This is about history ... about the fact that the presence of fellow Turkish citizens in Germany today emerged from 500 years of history*” (8). Depending on one’s perspective, Çelik’s account is still short by another eight hundred years but his overall point remains valid.

⁶³ The term “migrant” is an over-simplification in light of the various possible backgrounds and respective ways to self-identify (for a more detailed analysis see 2.2.3). However, many comedians of a migrant background refer to themselves explicitly as migrants irrespective of their place of birth, passport, or other official formalities. Cases in point are the artists performing at the biweekly show “StandUpMigranten,” hosted in a hooka bar in Munich by a German comedian of Moroccan background.

⁶⁴ Cf. the debate about “Biodeutsche,” i.e. “*biological Germans*” as a recent linguistic anachronism reversing the progression from the lineage-based *jus sanguinis* to birthright citizenship, *jus soli* (Fetscher).

⁶⁵ Bower points out that the word “multicultural” has lost much of its appeal because of its perceived reliance on a definition of culture as homogeneous and closed” (“Reframing Integration” 197). This work considers culture as dynamic, e.g. in constant adaptation through inclusive integration.

subordination, integration or assimilation typically guide scholarly inquiry. Looking at contemporary German-Turkish relations in Germany, these are strikingly apt questions.

The inherent seriousness of these topics often leads scholars like Bhabha to focus only on equally serious cultural productions as objects of study. While this rationale is understandable, any study of a minority's self-expression through art and against a majority society must remain incomplete with such a restrictive approach. Bhabha's studies examine individual subject positions usually within a minority, analyzing their means of articulating and altering the specific condition of themselves and the whole group.

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 2)

Yet, throughout his whole theoretical construct – despite all the splitting, doubling, and differentiating of various perspectives – he overlooks an entire site of enunciation of cultural difference that is as powerful as it is popular – humor, or more specifically: ethno-comedy. When asked about their professional ambitions, some of the genre's most renowned artists even stated literally that they hoped their acts contributed to overcoming binary categories of thinking and to subvert current power structures.⁶⁶ Comedians like Serdar Somuncu and Bülent Ceylan but also

⁶⁶ Cf. Badenhop (2011) for Ceylan.

Kaya Yanar and others consider it a significant part of their job to challenge mainstream conceptions and proffer alternative modes of thinking.

It seems to be a commonplace that in post-medieval European societies the task to question perspectives and procedures is handed down from generation to generation. Assmann asserts that “in hot cultures, youth not only can but in fact must question all the old and hallowed traditions” (119).⁶⁷ The validity of accepted kinds and concepts needs to be tested regularly for its continuity, re-confronting the past and probing the present. For example, to contest current conditions, Somuncu first turns to history and then projects the issue at hand to the present day: “[W]enn wir heute Hitlers und Goebbels Texte lesen und darüber nachdenken, wie die Menschen das damals mit sich haben machen lassen, dann darf man auch die Frage stellen: Lassen wir das heute eigentlich auch mit uns machen? Welche Mechanismen sind heute wirksam, die uns manipulieren?” (Buhre).⁶⁸ Deliberately provocative parallels like these question the norm in normality and expose it to reevaluating scrutiny. The critical involvement with governing forces and the *status quo* as well as the formation of a counteractive power are at the heart of ethno-comedy and likewise the subject of postcolonial studies.

In a multicultural society, the postcolonial point of view concerned with the distribution of power locates the prerogative of performing revaluations like Somuncu’s within the majority society. For example, for decades the formal relation of Germans and Turks in Germany was organized, observed, and modified by Germans only. This asymmetrical division of power rested on language deficiencies among the immigrants, their insufficient counter-representation, and an analogous lack of alternative modes of expression. All three factors result from the premise that initially, guest workers were to return to their home countries after two years. There was no

⁶⁷ In contrast to “cold” unchanging cultures, Assmann defines “hot cultures” as fixated on continuous progress: “‘Hot cultures’ ... embrace invention and alteration as a governing principle of their development” (118).

⁶⁸ “*When we read the texts of Hitler and Goebbels today and wonder how people just accepted this, then we’re also allowed to ask: Do we accept something similar today? Which mechanisms are at play manipulating us right now?*”

urgency to become fluent in a rather complex foreign language, certainly not for each individual when labor was usually organized through bilingual mediators in central positions like factory foremen. The mutual feeling by natives and guest workers of a transitory situation guided the organizational patterns: no mandatory language instruction for foreigners and mainly communal housing restricted to specific quarters of the city – all of which was decided by the German body politic. Despite potential union membership since the mid-1950s which pursued and purported equal rights to all workers regardless of origin, the general assumption of a short stay still caused a severe lack of incentives to fully integrate minorities in Germany (cf. Richter 32–34).

Against this background, the postcolonial perspective as a socio-historical study of art scans the discourse of German culture for signs of counter-narratives. Many of the first migrant artists gave a timid voice of nostalgia to a growing minority when their culturally comparative narratives seemed to amplify an emotional attachment to the country of origin. Referencing Karin Yeşilada, Bower highlights this “trap of lament and self-pity that characterized the ‘Betroffenheitsliteratur’ associated with immigrant writers in the 1980s” (“Reframing Integration” 194). Dunphy points out that even accomplished, critical “writers such as Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Saliha Scheinhardt have on occasion been roundly criticised for pandering to the exotic” (142).⁶⁹ These voices were heard at least; but for most members of majority and minority alike, they served largely to link this group to a spatially, temporally, and through backwards glorification even factually removed past. Instead of re-thinking and re-organizing present conditions, these voices seemed to defy the natural state of cultural transition and instead substantiated the common misconception of fixed identities which persist regardless of changes in place and time. Exceptions within the arts were few, so despite their continuing physical

⁶⁹ For a detailed discussion of Özdamar’s work, the development of her writing, and her impact on the Turkish-German arts scene, see Erol Boran, “Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarettts” 135–157.

presence, the migrants' cultural significance, while growing through their steadily increasing numbers, did not enter the mainstream mentality for precious decades.

As Adelson points out, much of the scholarly research on the situation of migrants also reinforced the firm but false belief in the discriminability of two distinct cultures and attacks the respective metaphor of a bridge: "The imaginary bridge 'between two worlds' is designed to keep discrete worlds apart as much as it pretends to bring them together" ("Against Between: A Manifesto" 267).⁷⁰ Although the image's alleged intentionality to separate seems dubious – given that Adelson admits herself that the authors thus accused only tried to better understand migrant cultures – I agree with her basic critique of an unfortunate implication: Using the bridge as an explanatory image only maintains the idea "that Turks and Germans are separated by an absolute cultural divide" ("Against Between: A Manifesto" 267-268), an idea which is undoubtedly absurd in light of all the migrant "literature written in German by authors whose cultural imagination has been profoundly influenced by many years of living, working, studying, and dreaming in the Federal Republic of Germany" ("Against Between: A Manifesto" 268). Consequently, Adelson reprimands the binary classification into Self and Other and demands "an epistemological reorientation" that recognizes cultural products by Turkish-Germans as "a threshold that beckons, not a tired bridge 'between two worlds'" (269).

As the subsequent chapter on identity will show, the very essence of identity formation lies in negotiating similarities and differences between oneself and anyone else. Seen in this light, abandoning the binary of Self and Other seems barely possible. Considering the unwanted implications of the dividing bridge metaphor, however, I agree with the desirability of a new image. After all, Adelson's initial observation raises an important point: "Cultural contact today

⁷⁰ For a more extensive presentation of her argument in favor of "a scalar understanding of interactive contexts, as opposed to a dichotomous model of discrete worlds," (11) see Adelson's *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature. Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (2005), 3-13.

is not an ‘intercultural encounter’ that takes place between German culture and something outside it but something happening *within* German culture” (“Against Between: A Manifesto” 268). On a purely aesthetic level, however, the suggested threshold still seems to imply distinct spheres on each side.

Nonetheless, the desired shift in perspective is quite significant. However, I believe that neither bridges nor tightropes or thresholds are the actual problem – particularly with their implied divisibility of sides – but the question of what actually happens over time in any given social context. Drawing attention away from these snapshots in time and focusing instead on the processual, the image of anything demarcating an in-between becomes ultimately misleading in its potentially dividing implications and therefore needs a substitute with a completely different focus.

For a while, this substitute was the now equally obsolete idea of the melting pot, particularly in the USA (recognize the processual focus in the progressive form of “*melting*”). For instance, when looking at the tribes of Westphalians, Goths, Alemannians and all the others who over the course of centuries eventually formed the Germans, this long-term notion of an irreversible melting process certainly holds true.⁷¹ Looking at present-day conditions in the early 1990s, however, Guillermo Gomez-Peña criticizes the inadequacy and inapplicability of this image when it comes to more recent situations, given that contemporary cultures needed to melt more diverse ingredients in less time. He supports another, more accurate model: “The bankrupt notion of the melting pot has been replaced by a model that is more germane to the times, that of *menudo chowder*. According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float” (74). Looking at Germany, this variation seems to be true. Whereas second-generations of Polish parentage, for instance, often reveal their foreign

⁷¹ Cf. Somuncu’s discussion of original Germanness (6.2.4).

ancestry only through their last names,⁷² other ethnicities like Asians, Arabs or Africans are obviously more likely to be perceived as non-native. When the number of a visually identifiable minority then grows into the millions, language reflects these transitional phases by introducing new ethnic labels like “Deutsch-Türke.”⁷³

According to Mandel, even referring to these labels as “ethnic” already implies a strictly binary model: “Terms such as ‘ethnic restaurants’, ‘ethnic studies’, ‘ethnic groups’ long since have entered popular discourse, implying a consensual understanding of their referents. ... The tacit agreement or presumption propping up this usage is that ethnics are society’s other” (95). She also refers to the term “Deutsch-Türke” to support this model:

One way the conceptual categories are being questioned is through the introduction of a new term that has entered this discourse, often referring to the third generation: “German Turk.” ... For it is always compounded in this order, implying that “German” is the adjectival modifier of “Turk.” The people referred to as *Deuschturken* [*sic*], or German Turks, are rendered a variant of Turk, not a variant of German. At the risk of over-interpretation, it could be argued that the grammatical ordering in this term still precludes full participation into German-ness, attesting to an unchangeable essence: once a Turk, always a Turk. (181)

Although her syntactic observation is accurate, it neglects the phonetic emphasis on “Deutsch,” the integrative progress expressed by this prefix as well as its transitional temporality. Furthermore, compounds like “Deutsch-Türke” not only document the on-going cultural

⁷² Through mostly traditional name changes at weddings this applies even less to women than men.

⁷³ By “transitional” I mean in the long run. These labels may be around for centuries, but eventually they will stop to make sense, either because of continuous amalgamation or a radical split.

convergency linguistically; rhetorically, they might also create an implied sense of compatibility of both cultures so that their increasing use establishes a subtle feeling of familiarity instead of difference. Ultimately, however, I believe Mandel has a point. In much the same way that avoiding unwanted implications of bridge metaphors could advance the mutual adaptation of Germans and Turks, grammatical sequence may indeed effect subtle change. Accordingly, I also follow Mandel's suggestion and deliberately use the term Turkish Germans instead of German Turks in the hopes of making a difference through less preclusive grammar.⁷⁴

Homi Bhabha also references Gomez-Peña's modified understanding of cultural transition as well as the phenomenon of temporary, often hyphenated labels but he deviates from the binary model:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, “opening out”, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race. Such assignations of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in a form of the “future” where the past is not originary, where its present is not simply transitory. It is ... an interstitial future that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present. (313 original emphasis)

⁷⁴ To distinguish cultural and historical contexts, I use “Turkish-German” with respect to identifications of people and “German-Turkish” with respect to the entanglements of peoples (see 2.1).

In slight modification of Adelson's *Manifesto*, I concur with Bhabha. He also appears to reject the ideas of fixed origins and the implied state of an exclusive suspension, and suggests instead an inclusive addition that affects all sides (not just two). While from an anthropological, juridical or terminological point of view this added "something else besides" may not be particularly well defined, from a social, affective, and relational perspective it seems a very real perception of minoritarian positioning in society. The deciding problem then becomes whether this addition to a societal self-concept is rejected or refused focusing on ethnic difference, or claimed and recognized based on cultural similarity – a question to be negotiated by all parts of society. To further elucidate this point it is worth investigating the heart of the whole transcultural discourse, the concept of identity.

2.2.3 *From Identities to Identifications*

What makes us the person we are is a question that has created a vast field of research with numerous theories contributed from various disciplines. As a consequence, there are two main limitations to the following overview: It only touches on the key aspects of creation and duration of identity and it only deals in tendencies.

One major distinction lies in the individual versus collective identity.⁷⁵ The former refers to one's specific constellation of properties including positive as well as negative preferences and predispositions, values and convictions, the particular configuration of which renders one "unique as an individual and different from others" (Olson). The latter refers to the voluntary self-

⁷⁵ Jan Assmann further distinguishes between the individual and the personal identity as the private and the public side of oneself (131-132). This distinction is too specific for this overview, however, so the two terms will be treated synonymously in the following.

identification with a group that allows us to act out specific facets of our personal identity that we share with others.⁷⁶ Jan Assmann defines this as follows:

Unter einer *kollektiven* oder *Wir-Identität* verstehen wir das Bild, das eine Gruppe von sich aufbaut und mit dem sich deren Mitglieder identifizieren. Kollektive Identität ist eine Frage der *Identifikation* seitens der beteiligten Individuen. Es gibt sie nicht „an sich“, sondern immer nur in dem Maße, wie sich bestimmte Individuen zu ihr bekennen. Sie ist so stark oder so schwach, wie sie im Denken und Handeln der Gruppenmitglieder lebendig ist und deren Denken und Handeln zu motivieren vermag. (132 original emphasis)

The image that a group creates of itself and with which its members identify we refer to as a collective or We-identity. Collective identity is a question of identification on the side of participating individuals. It does not exist “as such” but only to the degree with which certain individuals commit to it. It is as strong or weak as it is alive in the thoughts and actions of the group members and capable of motivating their thoughts and actions.

While we have only limited control over our personal identity, there seems to be a much more prominent element of choice connected to the collective one. If the former changes, we can usually join or discard the corresponding latter.

Why some aspects in our personal identity change over time while others remain forever the same is another main field of inquiry. In the context of ethnic diversity it is crucial to recognize the permeability of any perceived identity, its natural flexibility and changeability.

“Some general metaphysical views suggest that there is no unique right answer to the question of

⁷⁶ “Voluntary” as opposed to ascribed labels like “foreigner” for culturally hybrid people.

what it takes for us to persist. The best-known example is the ontology of temporal parts ... It says that for every period of time when you exist, short or long, there is a temporal part of you that exists only then” (Olson). As a result, the distinction between our essential properties and those we possess only temporally can only follow the regular reassessment of ourselves.⁷⁷

This type of self-inspection involves mental, emotional, and practical elements; it is the cognitive evaluation of affective reactions to real-life situations. Identity is then a momentary realization of (facets of) oneself, accomplished through processed experience. Straub emphasizes both the generative and transitory aspect in the development of an identity when he says:

Auf der Suche nach Identität kann nichts gefunden werden, was bereits “da” ist, irgendwo im Verborgenen schlicht gegeben und auf seine Entdeckung wartend. Wer Erfolg hat bei der „Suche“ nach seiner Identität, hat in kreativen Akten geschaffen, wonach er suchte. Identität ist immer nur vorläufiges Resultat kreativer, konstruktiver Akte. (93)

On the search for identity there is nothing to be found which was already “there,” simply hiding somewhere and waiting for its discovery. Whose “search” for identity was successful has, in an act of creation, generated what he had been looking for. Identity is never more than the temporary result of creative, constructive acts.

⁷⁷ The notion of ephemerality attached to identity can be traced back to John Locke who “extended the concept of ‘identity’ far beyond its earlier definition by adding to the ‘**idem-identity**’ of substantial sameness the ‘**ipse-identity**’ of the self over time” (Olson original emphasis). The underlying observation is the difference of us as children, adolescents, adults, etc., who are numerically the same person but have changed invariably over time.

Assmann confirms the constructed nature of identity as “eine Sache des Bewußtseins, d.h. des Reflexivwerdens eines unbewußten Selbstbildes. Das gilt im individuellen wie im kollektiven Leben” (130).⁷⁸ Accordingly, the creation of an identity can be the result of either an individual or collective effort depending on who guides or initiates the exploratory process.

All such *Identitätsarbeit*⁷⁹ can only follow experiences that raise the necessary questions. An unchallenged notion will always remain the same. This is where ethno-comedians sense their chance to intervene. “Identität als spezifische Subjektivitätsform erwirbt man in *Übergängen* bzw. in der psychischen Bearbeitung von *Übergängen* und Transformationen, nicht in starren, gleichbleibenden Situationen” (Straub 92 original emphasis).⁸⁰ The productive value of provocation in ethno-comedy is then that its reaction either confirms the established order or reveals the need for a reorientation. Occasionally, accepted concepts need to be tested, for instance by presenting alternative perspectives in order to create the necessary demand for a constructive reevaluation. Accepting the provocation and confronting the difference bears the potential to stabilize and assure the *status quo* or to destabilize it and facilitate change through growth, decline, or adaptation. “Differenzen und Ambiguitäten auszuhalten, sie als solche zu erkennen, anerkennen und mit ihnen umgehen zu können ist ein Bestandteil gelingender ‚Identitätsarbeit‘” (Straub 95).⁸¹ As the temporary answer to questions of positioning, establishing an identity therefore requires a referential other.⁸²

⁷⁸ “A question of awareness, of realizing an unknown self-concept. This holds true for individual and collective existence.”

⁷⁹ I use the German term here to emphasize the individual effort necessary to accomplish a sense of identity. The English “identity negotiation” seems to focus more on the interpersonal aspect of the process.

⁸⁰ “Identity as a specific form of subjectivity is obtained in transitions, i.e. in the psychological digestion of transitions and transformations, not in rigid, unchanging situations.”

⁸¹ “To endure differences and ambiguities, to recognize, accept, and deal with them is all part of functioning ‘Identitätsarbeit’.”

⁸² Throughout this thesis, I distinguish between “other” and “Other.” As will be demonstrated in the following, any act of identification is inherently relative in its dependence on one’s comparison to someone or something else. This is the other. The Other serves the same purpose but is more of a construct or an imaginary, like German Orientalists

Personal and collective identities depend mainly on the way we view ourselves, but since our self-assessment necessitates a point of comparison they also rely heavily on the way we relate to others. Our perpetually recurring negotiation with our environment – like immediate peers but also media-transmitted impressions of others, say, Turkish-German ethno-comedians – underlines again how any perceived awareness of identity is always just a momentary sensation. To highlight this processual nature it seems more adequate to talk about *identification* as in Assmann quoted above, rather than to risk invoking the erroneous image of holistic fixity often ascribed to identity by mistake. Conversely, our human susceptibility to external points of reference allows not only for the discernment of differences but also the detection of similarities between ourselves and other individuals.

In his essay “Was Hitler an Arab?” (1991) Zafer Şenocak condemns many “experts” for dividing and viewing the world in supposedly distinct categories. He criticizes their distanced ignorance expressed in their normative, generalizing jargon when portraying or “explaining” other cultures (10–12). Şenocak indicts their repression of shared identifications and highlights a general necessity to recognize oneself in others, the Other in oneself, and each other as mutually dependent, co-defining entities.

Similarly, today’s ethno-comedians promote a social attitude that welcomes differences and builds on similarities. They strive to tear down supposedly rigid distinctions, even deny their possibility altogether, and identify either crosscultural blurrings or mutual negations instead. Where the blurrings indicate degrees of shared traits, the negations exemplify how something applies to neither. Since blurring and mutual negation both point to commonalities, I will only give an example of one.

once portrayed all Ottomans as cruel, lustful heathens. The process of ascribing features to someone in order to better define oneself in (usually positive) opposition I understand as othering, and the constructed counterpart as the Other.

When mocking the cultural cliché of Turks as traditionally violent aggressors, Ceylan, for instance, enjoys projecting it on his German-identifying audience members. When women discover that his luscious hair requires – allegedly – nothing but curd soap, he recounts in a joke story how their jealousy often triggered a fit of rage and comments: “Da merkste wie die Frau zum Türk wird!” (*Live!* 66-67).⁸³ Ceylan’s mockery of women’s stereotypically obsessive hair care undermines the image of Turkish aggressors when he emasculates himself by emphasizing this typically feminine attribute of long hair in him. Furthermore, in light of the trivial context the purportedly extreme reaction also appears comical and triggers laughter. Reducing Turks to this single feature of ridiculous rage destabilizes the generalizing stereotype and illustrates how everyone may get angry sometimes (even for odd reasons) but that these episodes do not define that person, let alone an entire people. In a humorous way, the comedian thus opened a space for reflection by relating different positions, facilitating a change of perspective, and thus enabling the realization that one projection is as inaccurate as its reversal.

As already implied by the English term “identity *negotiation*,” identification is always a reciprocal process. Not only do we feel confirmed and connected or opposed and repelled when contrasting ourselves with others; the others’ identification of us is an equally fundamental part of the negotiation process. One may believe they could be anything, but if all evidence gathered from social contact indicates otherwise, maybe that particular property is just not part of oneself after all. If the difference between external and self-perception proves insurmountable, that experience may yield a severe lack of social orientation.⁸⁴ Since the work of Eric Erikson, this moment of failed *Identitätsarbeit* is commonly referred to as an identity crisis (Straub 85).

⁸³ “You can really see how the lady turns Turkish!”

⁸⁴ “Identitätsprobleme sind *Orientierungsprobleme*”; “Problems of identity are problems of orientation” (Straub 86).

In sum, identification is inherently processual, dynamic, and interpersonal. It is the continual exercise of social orientation that assesses and correlates personal and public perceptions. Accordingly, I agree with Jan Pieterse's terminological modification:

Identity is best thought of as identification. Identity is too easily viewed as fixed and static; thinking of identity as *identification* brings out the agency in identity formation and is more insightful. ... *Identification is ongoing and relational.* Ethnic identification is a matter of ongoing relational positioning. (32 original emphasis)

Particularly in the context of cultural diversity, it is crucial to recognize that any momentary identification is always the result of social negotiation and therefore potentially subject to change. This potential increases through changes in the cultural environment and the corresponding increase in challenging experiences that demand *Identitätsarbeit*. Of course, any such reorientation requires time, both on an individual level and, even more so, on the collective one. Especially in the latter case, it is necessary to admit change to develop gradually over the course of generations rather than expect immediate adaptation of an entire group. Examples of slowly processed changes include the ongoing efforts to establish public acceptance of a unified Germany, a national self-perception still adjusting only hesitantly to a less essentialistic, more transnational mindset in a European context, or more recently Germany's steady intake of refugees from Syria and other war-plagued places. In their programs, ethno-comedians not only comment on all of these topics and implement their social critique through these deliberate choices in topics; they also hope to contribute to diminishing related social tensions by advancing an attitude of democratic pluralism based on critical self-reflection and empathy, for instance by

fighting one of the most powerful elements to thwart these processes of negotiation – inveterate stereotypes.

2.2.4 The Nature of Stereotypes

The question of mutual identification is particularly crucial in a multicultural society where the environment changes faster than elsewhere and in multiple directions at once, and thus requires a much more frequent reassessment of self, Other, and the in-between as the sum of all conceivable alternatives. As developed in the excursus into identity studies, identification as basic social orientation is indispensable and in its interactive nature fundamentally dependent on external perception. From a postcolonial perspective, this universal dependence on others immediately triggers questions of power-relations, particularly in the case of ethnic minorities. Likewise, the excursus described the permeability, changeability, and transitoriness of identification patterns which outline possible ways to a slow but steady development of transcultural convergence.

Projecting the trajectory of this development, El-Tayeb's *Queering Europe* (2011) announces a postnational and postethnic Europe that has already begun to take shape. She postulates that migration processes, crosscultural marriages with multiethnic offspring, communal bonds of various minorities, and a generally growing political orientation towards a value-based, transnational European community undermine – or “queer” – the conventional markers of national and ethnic identifications. While all of these phenomena certainly contribute to a diversification of European societies, I believe both of El-Tayeb's labels are still premature. These developments undoubtedly take place, yet they do so against an all but constructive historical background. Considering supposedly overcome notions of the past which continue to haunt the present, El-Tayeb even seems to admit this burden when she references Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (1997):

Haunting makes visible historical memory as a constantly (re)constructed process, shaped by interventions into the present that always also contest visions of the past. In the current construction of a European identity and history, the haunting of Europe's silent racializations and ethnicizations continues to place people of color outside the limits of the new, inclusive, "postnational" community. (xx)

Whereas she treats these "hauntings" as a lag from the past, the innovative communities she describes are particularly progressive exceptions but still surrounded by very real national borders, laws, and histories. As long as they constitute the exception rather than the norm, the few "new, inclusive, 'postnational' communit[ies]" seem barely sufficient to proclaim a completely new Europe just yet.

The fallacy consists in underestimating mental barriers that have grown widely unobstructed for centuries. El-Tayeb's examples of performative racism have not been perceived as wrongful for all that long, and in some cases still are not. By comparison, for a much longer period majority societies accepted racist – or sexist – practices as the norm, mostly without realizing let alone condemning the nature of any such actions. Discrimination of all kinds is of course a thing of the past where it grew its roots, but in the sense of entering critical discourse it has only rather recently become one of the present as well. The naturally slow transformation of public perception requires thorough *Identitätsarbeit*, especially when the notions to be overcome enjoy the strong support of weighty stereotypes.

Straub asserts "Stereotype und normierende Konstruktionen kollektiver Identität finden sich insbesondere dort, wo die Kollektive groß und unüberschaubar werden" (100).⁸⁵ Returning to the paradigmatic case of Turkish Germans in Germany, this observation is correct. For decades,

⁸⁵ "Stereotypes and standardizing constructs of collective identities are found particularly in those cases where the collective is large and difficult to assess."

the overly simplistic perception by the traditionally norming majority classified people in a convenient binary as either Germans or Turks – to the point that “Turks” became conflated, even synonymous with “Ausländer,” i.e. foreigner – and each side was associated with generalized, vaguely defined attributes. Accordingly, a key leverage point in the migrants’ struggle against cultural misconceptions, considered by ethno-comedians and postcolonialists alike, is stereotypes.

Bhabha characterizes a stereotype as ambivalent, interdependent, and the basis for subjectification (100–102). Since it postulates homogeneity where there is actually diversity, its generalization needs to be profoundly ambivalent in order to apply at least a bit better to the whole group. By contrast, for instance, if it ascribed distinct features it would still apply to some people; but there is a strong chance that empirical evidence to the contrary would soon be overwhelming and reveal the stereotype’s utter inapplicability on a larger scale. The resulting guarantee for absurd mismatches should become immediately apparent. Yet, even in their superficial ambivalence, the potential for contradiction and ethnic non-sense becomes obvious straightaway.

Ethno-comedy exploits this potential for humoristic purposes since eliciting laughs remains the primary surface value of any comedy show. However, revealing the absurdity of common misconceptions also affords the hybrid artist an opportunity for public renegotiation of ways to identify. This is where I see the metaphorical surplus value of ethno-comedy, the possible effect that exceeds mere entertainment. Ridiculing the obvious inadequacy of cultural stereotypes as inappropriate generalizations opens a gate to reflect critically on images of the foreign, to question perceptions of national identifications, and to re-evaluate the relations of minorities and majority.

Exactly how great this gate is becomes clear in light of Bhabha's second characteristic of the stereotype. Since each cliché references and builds on others, the deconstruction of one soon leads to an unraveling of the whole web. For instance, during one of his *Hassprediger* performances, Serdar Somuncu compares eloquently, in detail, and without the trace of an accent the nature of Turkish and German male genitalia, pretends to notice the high level of vulgarity and excuses himself by saying: "Ist Ihnen das zu vulgär? Entschuldigung, ich habe erst sehr spät Deutsch gelernt!" Referencing his alleged language problems as a foreigner, the glaring discrepancy between a common stereotype and the factual counter-example creates laughs as well as the need to reconsider the cliché. Simultaneously, Somuncu's fluent German undermines the stereotypical image of the linguistically challenged foreigner. Based on his education, his progressive libertarianism then calls into question any cliché connected to traditional patriarchy, and so the deconstructive chain reaction continues. Suspending one stereotype makes it necessary to immediately challenge others as well due to their interdependence.

Of course, many a stereotype roots in distant realities and some may even still apply from time to time; but most turn out to be relics of a past that has long been overcome by social and cultural change. While the widespread language problems were a reality for most guestworkers in the early 1960s, maintaining this generalization wrongs most of today's second and third generations of a Turkish background who also attend universities, become doctors and federal chairmen, or occupy prime-time positions on national TV because of their witty eloquence.

Other stereotypes were manufactured mainly through the imaginative European othering of the Ottomans which occasionally led the target culture to actually adopt and mirror the European projections, as outlined by Said. Ceylan, for instance, mocks the persisting Orientalist image with belly dancing. Elsewhere, the reverberations of this alleged air of exoticism – frequently ascribed to Turks from Luther to Mozart, Goethe and beyond – are taken more

seriously albeit with a capitalist touch. One example are calculatingly cliché hookah bars which deliberately revive the old images for profit through a re-constructed ambiance of difference; but immediately upon leaving such an establishment this air of exoticism is instantly undermined and contradicted, for instance by the all too familiar multitude of döner joints scattered throughout the adjoining neighborhoods. Drawing attention to these progressions of a society and the resulting crevices in its cultural conceptions, ethno-comedy stages the deconstruction of overcome patterns and paves the way for renegotiating ethnic identifications.

How crucial this comedic contribution to ethnic representation can be, becomes evident in an experience shared again by many of the most popular artists. This experience is directly related to Bhabha's third point, the basis for subjectification. Some comedians received letters of complaint by members of various minorities remonstrating that their specific group had yet been insufficiently ridiculed in their shows.⁸⁶ This neglect was interpreted as publicly manifesting their cultural insignificance. Accusations like this testify to the identity-establishing powers of cultural stereotypes. Despite their nature as generalized pseudo-knowledge, their mere existence in any given context still signifies at least the very existence of its object. Therefore, the stereotype possesses a symbolic quality which acknowledges the presence of something and so functions as a basis for its subjectification. This quality does not redeem the backwards essentialism behind stereotypes, but it shows that any public recognition is perceived as preferable to none at all.

Nonetheless, ethno-comedy has been blamed repeatedly of propagating and hence reinforcing false images, causing more damage than relief for the targeted groups. Göktürk draws attention to the dangers of reinscribing racial stereotypes particularly in today's times of medially globalized stages, but also recognizes a potential to effect change: "As the circulation and repetition of the material in a globalized public sphere configures new audiences, the distinction

⁸⁶ Greeks, for instance, complained to Kaya Yanar (Kaiser); eventually, he introduced the characters of "Sirtaki-Man" and Costas, complete with full fictional biographies on the show's former homepage.

between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is perpetually reinstated and, at times, blurred” (“Jokes and Butts” 1710). This important blurring effect is a hallmark of successful ethno-comedy, where the significant difference to harmful, mindless repetition of clichés lies in a subversive approach to binary models of thinking that provides the space and conditions for their transition.

In 1990, Davies still doubted the potential for jokes to have any serious impact on their social environment due to their triviality in comparison to more purposeful behavior (*Ethnic Humor Around the World* 9). It seems indeed plausible that other social acts could have more drastic effects on public opinions. If humor’s low impact factor were accurate, then Göktürk and others had little to worry about in terms of perpetuating stereotypes through jokes. However, the profound subliminal consequences of long-term reinscription can no longer be convincingly repudiated. Fortunately, cliché-based humor also offers a distinct possibility to alter public perceptions of stereotypes.

Examining the shows and effects of U.S. comedians Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor, for instance, Leon Rappoport was able to show that when using stereotypes as sources for humor these artists were in fact “deflating them, draining the emotional poison out of them, and allowing laughter to enter where before there had only been aggression or anger” (80). In this light, overcoming a stereotype actually necessitates its preceding re-inscription into the public mindset; it needs to be addressed in order to be rendered harmless. What sets ethno-comedy apart from all other positions in the discourse of multiculturalism is its traditional fool’s license which allows the performers to call out a problem openly, expose it to ridicule, and employ the liberating forces of communal laughter to defeat each of its components one by one.

Not all stereotypes are threatening, some may even be advantageous. Travel companions, for instance, use cultural clichés to create a rough sense of orientation on unfamiliar territory. Probably not all Spanish people have a *siesta* or take their dinner at 10pm, but enough people do

to make it worthwhile providing these ideas to the inexperienced tourist in order to explain common phenomena like comparatively quiet noon times and regularly busy nights in public places. However, as soon as a generic cliché triggers the premature condemnation of a group or an individual, a stereotype becomes a prejudice, which in turn provides fruitful grounds for racism. While ethno-comedians mock all stereotypes for their inherent ridiculousness, undermining those based on ethnicity constitutes a particularly significant step in the fight against racism and as such is the genre's most valuable contribution to society.

A final characteristic of stereotypes which Bhabha mentions only briefly at another point but which bears great relevance for both postcolonial and ethno-comedic studies alike is their external origin: Someone labels someone else. This attribute is closely related to the identity-establishing feature mentioned earlier. Bhabha emphasizes the power-political benefits for the majority society entailed in the deliberate maintenance of ethnic stereotypes, usually by fostering particular narratives of the past while suppressing any counter-positions (95).

Until recently, the rules governing selection of these past points of reference followed what Nietzsche called "monumental historiography". This was concerned with constructing a heroic self-image of the political "we"-group, and mythically enhancing it through negative images of the enemy. During the 1990s a turning-point occurred in the politics of the past, when different states began to reflect on their historic guilt, and through public confessions to incorporate a "**negative memory**" into their self-image. (A. Assmann 175 original emphasis)

While Germany continues to baffle tourists with its vast number of negative war memorials commemorating guilt and shame instead of honor and bravery, its mentality towards ethnic diversity still leaves much to be desired. As El-Tayeb has shown, the means of suppression are fundamentally similar: enforcing a rigid perspective that benefits the majority and neglects counter-narratives. Observing the situation of migrants – particularly those of color – in all of Europe she finds that the central question asked by a (white) majority remains the quixotic “What happens to Europe if these people stay?” Echoing Assmann’s description of suppressive myths she states:

Half a century later, it should seem fairly obvious that the vast majority of migrants did stay and that the face of Europe has changed accordingly. The logical conclusion however, that they are by now as European as those worrying about them, is rarely drawn, prevented by an often unspoken, but nonetheless seemingly very precise, racialized understanding of proper Europeanness that continues to exclude certain migrants and their descendants. (xii)

El-Tayeb argues that “all parts of Europe are arguably invested in ‘whiteness’ as the norm against which ethnicization is read as a tool of differentiation between insiders and outsiders” (xiv).

Affirming cultural superiority through stable images of the Other’s inferiority is a pattern certainly familiar from colonial settings. However, it fits equally well to other multicultural environments even without a specifically colonial background, as can be observed of course in the case of Turkish Germans in Germany.

In his *Hassprediger* routine, Somuncu relates his first steps on German television. Despite his native proficiency in the German language, his slightly foreign physical appearance severely limited his options: He was not only cast exclusively as a burglar, a car thief, or drug dealer, but

always had to fake a broken accent commonly associated with the unemployed, uneducated, and culturally isolated criminal migrant from Turkey. Perpetuating the image of Turkish inferiority for decades, German mass media only recently began casting actors of a migrant background also for roles outside the pejorative cliché.

The continuing influence of long-term stereotyping becomes particularly obvious on the job market. In March 2014, the federal “Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration”⁸⁷ published an empirical study in which over 3,000 job applications were sent to various German employers (“Diskriminierung am Ausbildungsmarkt”). The success rate for applications displaying German names was significantly higher than those with a Turkish-sounding name, despite German passports and comparable qualifications. In light of these findings, the social need to re-assess perceptions of ethnicity appears all the more crucial when stereotyping overrides all other expressions of identity.

In a more pointed way, stereotyping in its unidirectional⁸⁸ orientation is a form of partial identity theft. As mentioned above, personal identity is the momentary sense and continual articulation of a stable self-image. Furthermore, personal and collective identifications are processual and completely dependent on interactions with other individuals. Stereotypes affect both kinds of identity. As preconceived pseudo-knowledge, they thwart the processual by suggesting fixed identities; and they often taint the interactive, particularly in the form of prejudice, by seemingly eliminating the need to become acquainted with others through simulating familiarity where in fact there is none. Key here is the dependence on others to cultivate a sense of identity. If the perception of the other is clouded by stereotypes, these

⁸⁷ “Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration.”

⁸⁸ Of course, both parties involved may be stereotyping each other, so in a way there is reciprocity. The act of stereotyping as such, however, is essentially unidirectional as it is a non-negotiated form of identifying the other.

predefined images create a bias in the necessary negotiation process and essentially rob the individual – and by extension the collective – of the opportunity to self-identify freely.

The further an individual is removed in his or her identification from the imposed stereotype the more difficult become social orientation and the creation of a stable self-image. Analyzing the situation of people of migrant background over generations – from those who first emigrated to their children and beyond –, revealed the necessity to rethink conventional kinds and concepts. What makes a foreigner, what are the limits of Germanness, what happens when the Turkish-German hybrid does feel in-between and like none of a kind? These questions are at the core of ethno-comedy. True to its roots in the *Kabarett* tradition, the genre addresses the problematic pseudo-knowledge of stereotypes, exposes its superficial nature, and tries to replace it with a more differentiated view in order to find answers to these questions that are more appropriate to the current conditions in Germany. As a result, exercising a humorous but corrective influence constitutes a contemporary form of popular enlightenment as outlined by Terkessidis:

Mit ihrem grundlegenden Ansatz bleiben Kabarett und Satire von Autoren mit Migrationshintergrund letztlich dem Prinzip der Aufklärung verhaftet: Sie thematisieren die „Vorurteile“ als Bruchstellen des erworbenen Wissenszusammenhangs und drängen auf eine Integration des Wissens. (300)

In their basic principles, Kabarett and satire by authors of migrant background remain true to the notion of enlightenment: They problematize “prejudices” as breaking points of an acquired knowledge and push for the integration of this awareness.

Expanding the number of discourse participants, articulating their positions, and reassessing the assumed *status quo* under the comparably amiable conditions of a comedy show expedites the mental transitions necessary to establish an understanding more suitable for the continuous cultural change happening around us.⁸⁹

In light of its gradual but consistent change, a nation in continuous (multi)cultural transition will need to reassess itself. I agree with Bhabha when he says in a 1990 interview with Jonathan Rutherford: “It is actually very difficult, even impossible and counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily coexist” (209). The two decisive points in this statement are “different” and “easily.” In his book *The Location of Culture* (2004), Bhabha argues for the existence of “incommensurable differences” (312) that are impossible to erase once imprinted in an individual through enculturation. Despite these essential differences coexistence is still very much possible but it requires communal effort. Overcoming the differences then consists not in futile attempts of their elimination but assessing each other and finding shared commonalities that establish a sense of related orientation – *Identitätsarbeit*. This approach dismisses the idea of a homogenous society entirely and instead aims for a social contract based on unity of the diverse as recently proclaimed by President Gauck.

Next, Bhabha outlines a way by which the necessary exchange may be facilitated: “The production of meaning requires that these two places [the I and the You] be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space” (53). It is here that identities are renegotiated. The realization that differences may be fundamental but never original guides this passage and lends a particular twist to the idea of hybridity:

⁸⁹ Over the course of increasing Europeanization and globalization it is not even necessary for each individual to migrate in order to experience cultures different from their own. Transnationalism affects everyone simply because it alters people’s environments whether or not they personally take an active part in it.

For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives. (Rutherford 211)

Recognizing a soupçon of hybridity in all of us, the Third Space abandons the concept of cultural originality, subscribes to a constant state of change, and enables the negotiating parties to develop new options to identify themselves both individually and respectively. Accordingly, Bhabha calls it a “process of hybridity [which] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford 211). The same process confronts stereotypes, and although it cannot abolish them it can certainly diminish their obstructing influence within a multicultural society.

Ethno-comedy tries to create these Third Spaces through a communal experience – the passage – that bears the potential to affect the mentalities at issue, create new perspectives, and help the audience to find new ways to identify individually and as a community. In the sense that this potential for mutual re-identification can shape an alternative future, ethno-comedy is deeply political as it can contribute to directing the continuous change into the “right” channels. What Bhabha claims for the notion of hybridity is then true for a whole genre centered around multiethnic artists and their combined efforts to productively re-examine cultural stereotypes: It “is about the fact that in any particular political struggle, new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively” (Rutherford 216).

2.2.5 Role Play as Technique

Referring back to the necessary element of heteronomy in any identification process, particularly in the case of second-generation hybrids, another obstacle on the way to harmonious co-existence is the general classification as “foreigner.” Obviously, this is a whole status and not a single stereotype, but it is structurally similar: This label is ambivalent, the basis for subjectification, and usually assigned by someone else. Often based on visual markers only, the clear boundary implied by this excluding classification frequently wrongs cultural hybrids. In addition to rethinking German society as diverse and changing, the analog counterpart of foreignness needs to be reassessed as well.

In Europe, there is a curious double standard at work in its perception – once inside a nation, and once on a pan-European scale – and each time the label signifies something else. For instance, Italians in Germany are foreigners by definition, but appear less foreign to Germans than Asians, Arabs, or Africans. Analyzing this idiosyncratic pattern, El-Tayeb ascertains today’s implicit European norm still to be white and Christian: “When push comes to shove ‘white and Christian’ seems to be the smallest common denominator to which debates on European identity are reduced, and anyone not fitting this description remains an eternal newcomer not entitled to the rights of those who truly belong” (xx).

Accordingly, contesting this dubious understanding of foreignness and adjusting the variety of possible individual, national, and European identifications is certainly one of the main goals of many polycultural artists around the globe. In her essay “Strangers in Disguise” (2004), Deniz Göktürk showed how the Marx brothers in the 1930s U.S. adapted ethnic role play familiar from the vaudeville tradition for their immigrant comedy in early sound film productions. They used “the disruptive and disintegrative potential of gags, foreshadowing spectacle and performance over narrative consistency ... as excess and anarchy, attacking social conventions

and revealing the absurdity of everyday life” (“Strangers in Disguise” 109). Sixty years later, Turkish-German actor and director Hussi Kutlucan almost seems to emulate the occasionally chaotic comedy of the Marx brothers. His tragicomedy *Ich Chef, du Turnschuh* (1998, *Me Boss, You Sneaker*) “develops as a wildly anarchic spectacle where the plot often gets lost in sidelines, but which is notable for scenes that foreground masquerade and ethnic role-play” (“Strangers in Disguise” 113). The overall goal remains the same for the Kutlucan, the Marx brothers, as well as today’s ethno-comedians: to explore “possibilities of transgressing ... symbolic regimes of victimization and marginalization ... through strategies of humor and irony, carnival and anarchy, distancing and reversal, masquerade and mutual mimicry, delusion and role-play, in short, monkey business” (“Strangers in Disguise” 103). As hybrid artists, they all occupy a privileged space in these cultural renegotiations as they can claim both an inside and outside perspective. Through their art they are able to present, question, and revise current identifications of both majority and minorities alike.

After the Marx brothers took ethnic ridicule from the stage to the screen, today’s ethno-comedians are putting it back on the boards. They take their socially assigned role as foreigners and reframe it as a role on stage. As a result, there is a fluent passage between personal and stage identities. Under the protective cloak of comedy, they attack the mental barriers of stereotypes and outdated norms and thus afford everyone the opportunity to question their ideas of individual, ethnic, and national identity. Terkessidis pointed out how the majority’s identification depends likewise on an element of heteronomy. Modifying this influence by empowering the minority position destabilizes the identification of the majority and through the ensuing insecurity necessitates its respective modification as well.

Die deutsch-türkischen Künstler zwingen also die einheimischen Zuschauer/innen und Leser/innen zur Nicht-Identität. Auf eine absurde Weise inszeniert sich der Kabarettist – der „Türke“ – dabei als Referenzpunkt der „deutschen“ Identität. Schon immer haben „Vorurteile“ über bestimmte Gruppen spiegelverkehrt das Eigene der hegemonialen Gruppe bestätigt. In der heutigen Bundesrepublik ist es aber vor allem die als homogen betrachtete Gruppe der „Türken“, die häufig mit Straffälligkeit, Misogynie oder Fundamentalismus identifiziert wird, die der vollkommen heterogenen deutschen Gesellschaft vermittelt, daß sie zum einen überhaupt noch eine einheitliche Identität besitzt und zum anderen, daß diese Identität rechtsstaatlich, gleichberechtigt und demokratisch ist. Da der „Türke“ somit das positive Selbstbild der Autochthonen garantiert, stellt das Klischee des „Türken“ – verkörpert im deutsch-türkischen Kabarettisten oder Satiriker – eben auch einen Punkt dar, von dem aus diese Vorstellung angegriffen werden kann. Der Kabarettist führt dem einheimischen Publikum an sich selbst dessen Identität vor wie auch dessen rassistische und ausgrenzende Prämissen. (299)

German-Turkish artists force the native viewers and readers into a state of non-identity. In an absurd way, the Kabarett artist – the “Turk” – stages himself as the point of reference to the “German” identity. Ex negativo, “prejudices” about certain groups always confirmed features of the hegemonic group. In contemporary Germany, it is mainly the allegedly homogenous group of “Turks” – often associated with criminality, misogyny, or fundamentalism – that gives a completely heterogeneous German society the impression that, for one, it still does possess a unified identity, and for another that this identity is constitutional, equitable, and democratic. Since the “Turk” thus guarantees the positive self-image of the autochthonous, the cliché of the “Turk” – embodied by the German-

Turkish Kabarett artist or satirist – constitutes a point from which this image can be attacked. The Kabarett artist displays the identity of the native audience, including its racist and exclusive premises.

As a result, ethno-comedy provides the framework in which representatives of the former Other enact their public subjectification, thus resisting the passivity once imposed by their othering, and renegotiating majority/minority relations and identifications.

These performances by hybrid comedians have to be clearly separated from Katrin Sieg's concept of ethnic drag, which she defined as "the performance of 'race' as a masquerade" (2). Ethnic drag designates a heavily stereotyped impersonation of an Other, a questionable practice of racism in disguise. While the concept has shed a great deal of light on German equivalents to American blackface, in the case of self-identifying Turkish Germans a Turkish or German mask could never reach the discriminatory power of drag due to its unavoidable self-referentiality. Sieg specifies that "ethnic drag excludes the material bodies of cultural Others and appropriates or ventriloquizes their voices" (86). As a material body accommodating elements of two cultures, however, Turkish Germans simply cannot imitate a German or Turk in the same arguable way that a German hobbyist with no migrant background can pretend to be a Native American for carnival. In fact, it is a central goal of ethno-comedy to undermine the whole idea that there was anything like "the Turk" or "the German," which opposes the very basis for something ethnic drag could then emulate.

The comedians may very well emphasize different parts of their polyculturality at different times of a show. Ceylan, Yanar, Somuncu, and others frequently switch perspectives, referring to themselves alternately as Germans, Turks, or hybrids. In their reliance on popular stereotypes, each instance might still count as an imitation of clichéd images; but even if the

exaggeration of each label should somehow fail to trigger critical reassessments of ethnic labels in the audience, the constant switching creates an even stronger demand to reconcile personal conceptions of ethnic identifications with on-stage demonstrations of counterdrafts, not least when the artists abandon ethnicized identifications altogether and refer to themselves simply as humans.⁹⁰

This demand for renegotiation has no explicit agenda; first and foremost it highlights merely the general need to reassess current conditions and presents a range of points worth reconsidering. The general course, however, is clearly discernable as advocating a pluralist, polycultural, and transnational society. By directing attention to phenomena of cultural change, hardened perceptions could become nuanced and ways to interpret and embody Germanness or Europeanness multiply.⁹¹ Softening minority boundaries by emphasizing the transitions occurring across generations within different ethnicities reveals the permeability of individual and collective identifications, erodes the presumed norm of the white Christian German, and undermines all backwards beliefs in ethnic originality.⁹² For instance, many Turkish Germans no longer feel like part of a minority but identify completely as natives regardless of ancestral origin.

[So] verdeutlicht das Verwirrspiel mit der Identität, daß letztlich genau die scharfe Trennung zwischen dem angeblichen „Deutschen“ und dem angeblich „Türkischen“ attackiert wird. Kabarett und Satire allochthoner Autoren zeigen eben, daß der „Türke“ ohne den hegemonialen Blick ebensowenig existiert wie eine deutsche Identität ohne die Konstruktion des „Türken“. (Terkessidis 300)

⁹⁰ Germans who still reject the German part of Turkish Germans could be said to perform a reversed type of ethnic drag: Trying to enact and thus maintain an obsolete notion of supposedly genuine Germanness, they play a role by wearing a mask of the past and pretending to embody a non-existent, idealized culture.

⁹¹ This pluralization also preempts any potential for actual ethnic drag.

⁹² In accordance with my explanations in 2.2.3 I use the term “Germanness” in the same way Maxwell and Sacha do, who describe it as “something self-proclaimed and as something externally ascribed, ... as neither immutable nor ephemeral, but durably constructed within a given social and historical context” (1).

The deliberate confusion of identities shows how the sharp distinction between the supposedly “German” and the supposedly “Turkish” is being attacked. Kabarett and satire of allochthonous authors illustrate how, without the hegemonic gaze, the “Turk” exists no more than the German identity without its construction of the “Turk.”

This claim challenges natives in particular to check and possibly adapt their view of what constitutes national authenticity. Other ethnicities might aim to be recognized as a minority, resisting their blanket identification as migrants or Muslims or other diffuse generalizations, and thus take a crucial first step towards independent articulation and self-representation.

On stage, ethno-comedians can introduce, relate, and discuss all of these roles. Constantly switching perspectives, presenting different understandings of numerous roles, and always mocking dogmatic opposition to free self-identification – be it religious, nationalist, or racist – they outline a variety of possible reinterpretations of our societal model instead of enforcing a single, equally dogmatic alternative. The audience is only brought to realize the need for revision but it has to find the specific way on its own and within itself. The jester-like ethno-comedians thus serve the ancient, non-dogmatic double function of amusing entertainers and enlightening facilitators.

Whereas most jokes come across easily, their message of transnational humanism is sometimes obscured by their continuous role play. The liberalism in their presentation may appear confusing to some since it asks a relatively high degree of cognitive participation on the side of the audience. Moreover, the artists oftentimes approach the topic of identity formation in a highly self-referential way and so create a great deal of overlap between their roles of stage character and private individual which sets them apart from conventional actors. Pschibl acknowledges this complication and even goes a step further: “Der Kabarett-Darsteller tritt auch

als ‚Privatperson‘ außerhalb seiner Bühnenrolle auf. Seine Aussagen werden vom Publikum mit seiner persönlichen gesellschaftspolitischen Auffassung gleichgesetzt” (118).⁹³ While I doubt the degree of Pschibl’s generalizing statement of the audience’s constant unreflective equalization, some overlap certainly further blurs the lines between identities, fact and fiction, and makes it all the more necessary to get actively involved in reassessing personal and social perceptions.

2.2.6 Turkish-German Ethno-Comedians

At times of increased ethnic diversification, it may come as no surprise when the calls for renegotiating social structures originate predominantly in the periphery. Berman, for instance, stresses the tendency for the German majority society’s stolidity in the face of cultural change, and at the same time she highlights the perceptiveness revealed in counter-narratives of the marginalized: “Whereas minority artists who give voice to the experience of migrants and debates in the public sphere interact with the transforming social, political, and economic landscapes, fiction writings and films produced by majority Germans have been slow to recognize and acknowledge the changing fabric of German-speaking societies” (*German Literature on the Middle East* 238).⁹⁴ From a postcolonial perspective, ethno-comedy constitutes exactly this: an artistic site of articulating counter-narratives that break with heavily stereotyped perceptions in order to renegotiate identifications and ways of coexistence in majority/minority relations.

⁹³ “In addition to his stage role, the Kabarett artist also performs as a private person. The audience equates his statements and personal sociopolitical opinion.”

⁹⁴ Adelson also shares this perception in her study on *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature*.

The general idea of attempting to exert political influence through art interlaced with humorous criticism is nothing new. In fact, comedy as a relatively safe, rule-governed space for social subversion is an antique concept.⁹⁵ Even ethnic ridicule is not particularly innovative. However, the particular combination of a hybrid artist, self-deprecating humor, and a socially constructive intention gave rise to a distinctly different kind of comedy that enjoys increasing popularity.

Lately, ethno-comedy has become an almost global phenomenon where artists first play the fool and then – with varying degrees of subtlety – insert cultural criticism. In Canada, Russell Peters uses his Indo-Canadian identity to mock both East Indian and Canadian clichés; Mexican-American Gabriel Iglesias opens to Mariachi music and exposes U.S. and Latino stereotypes to ridicule; in the U.K., British-Iranian Omid Djalili calls himself an ambassador to multiculturalism and pokes fun at Western conceptualizations of the Oriental but also at regional differences within the kingdom; Swiss-South-African Trevor Noah makes his mixed-race heritage and ethnic observations key themes in his routines; and in Germany, at least a dozen Turkish-Germans approach the very same issues of cultural identity, national and international variety as well as politics and prejudice in humorous ways. In terms of humoristic mechanisms and the potential for cultural political subversion, the German-Turkish constellation is paradigmatic for the global phenomenon of ethno-comedy. With its cross-religious and even intercontinental foundations this specific variety constitutes a particularly ostensive example of the genre.

The first migrant contributions to the German arts scene – be they literary or theatrical – preceded the genre of ethno-comedy by roughly one generation. Artists like the author Emine Özdamar or the 1980s *Kabarett*-duo Şinasi Dikmen and Muhsin Omurca (alias *Knobi-Bonbon*) all grew up in Turkey and used their respective platforms to examine life in Germany as Turks.

⁹⁵ Consider the often obscene and politically subversive comedies by Aristophanes like *Lysistrata* (411 BC), for instance (Holtermann 182–184).

Sometimes this entailed euphemistic visions of a distant motherland, such as in Özdamar's *Life is a Caravanserai* (1992) or the protagonist's dreams in Omurca's cartoon *Kanakmän*. Instead of facilitating mutual, transcultural approaching, Dunphy has shown how these exoticisms in fact widen the cultural gap between Germans and Turks (165).⁹⁶

Unlike these initial artists, today's ethno-comedians reflect and exploit their hybrid status and occupy a culturally more ambiguous space. The first artist to gain national fame by publicly exploiting his ambivalent cultural background in Germany was Kaya Yanar in his show *Was guckst du?!⁹⁷* in 2001. Until 2005 he portrayed Arabs, Turks and Greeks, Germans and Russians, and Italians as well as Polish and Indian people in 120 episodes.

Three central elements defined Yanar's humor: puns, comparisons, and self-deprecation. Much of his material was based on stereotypes and resulted in cheap witticisms like: "What do you get when you cross an Indian with a German – a currywurst!" Offending Germans and Indians alike maintained an amicable balance in which both parties could laugh at and, more importantly, with each other. Yanar took his comparative humor to another level when he engaged repeatedly with cornerstones of German culture such as the daily prime time news program *Die Tagesschau*. Introducing his satirical recreation "Tagesguck"⁹⁸ with an orientalized version of the traditional opening theme and staffing it with one of his stock characters, a primitive bouncer of Turkish background, as the news anchor, allowed him to portray current events through an unconventional perspective while the contrast of crude staff and conservative setting created comedic effects. The most significant facilitator of Yanar's success, however, was

⁹⁶ For a detailed description of specifically Turkish forms and traditions of *Kabarett* as well as an analysis of ways in which they continue in Turkish-German theater, literature, and satire, see Erol Boran's *Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarett* (2004).

⁹⁷ "Was guckst du?!" translates roughly to "What are you looking at?!" With its particular punctuation it echoes the aggressiveness stereotypically associated with less educated Turkish youths.

⁹⁸ As verbs, the German "schauen" and "gucken" are synonymous for "to watch." The nominalization "Schau," i.e. show, only works for "schauen" which is why its incorrect substitution with "guck" not only references the title of Yanar's show *Was guckst du?!* but also emulates typical language mistakes made by non-native Germans.

his self-deprecating humor. In one episode, he temporarily identifies as explicitly Turkish in order to give the German-identifying part of his audience some advice on how to flirt:

[*Clip showing a German fail at flirting*] So, meine Damen und Herren, wird das natürlich nie was. Wie Sie wissen, fördern wir bei *Was guckst du?!* die Völkerverständigung zwischen Deutschen und Ausländern. Wer könnte euch das besser zeigen als ich, der Kaya Yanar, der Multikulti-Botschafter, das Sprachrohr der dritten Generation, der Vermittler zwischen Orient und Okzident, der Superstar... [Voice from Off interrupts] „Kaya, es ist ok!“ Richtig... Na, jedenfalls, ihr Deutschen braucht noch ein bisschen Nachhilfe. Ich zeig euch jetzt mal live, wie wir Türken eine sensationelle Anmachquote von 123% hinkriegen! (Yanar, *Was guckst du?!* 1)

[*Clip showing a German fail at flirting*] *Like this, ladies and gentlemen, you will never succeed. As you know, we at Was guckst du?! foster international understanding between Germans and foreigners. And who better to teach you than me, Kaya Yanar, the ambassador of multiculturalism, the mouthpiece of the third generation, the mediator between orient and occident, the superstar...* [Voice from Off interrupts] “Kaya, that’s enough!” *Right... Anyway, you Germans could do with a little tutoring. Now I’ll show you live how we Turks accomplish a success rate at flirting of 123%!*

While “Germans” get to laugh at (male) “Turkish” overconfidence, “Turks” laugh at (male) “German” awkwardness around women, and ideally everyone at themselves, too. Positioning himself in between cultures turns a formerly inferior neither-nor stance towards cultures into an empowered as-well-as state and provides Yanar with a seemingly above-average cross-cultural

expertise. With obvious self-irony, he exaggerates his cultural capital for humorous effect and the license to mock others in return. Altogether, this recipe creates almost unique liberties in terms of artistic self-expression.

Of course, the freedoms thus generated are neither absolute nor completely unimpeded. Pschibl, for instance, highlights the authoritarian German Empire and the National Socialist dictatorship which each ran rings around comics critical of the regime (319). In a less extreme but likewise threatening manner, today's civic protest movements in Germany like Pegida or HoGeSa (see 2.1.5) often show aggressive, even racist undertones and portray an image of resistance against any culturally pluralist ambitions. On an international scale, riots and death threats as in the case of the Danish Mohammed cartoons of 2005⁹⁹ or actual assaults like the Islamist massacre in the Parisian Charlie Hebdo headquarters in 2015 testify to the delicate nature of humor, regardless of any supposed artistic freedom.¹⁰⁰ Although it is worth noting that, strictly speaking, none of the authors fit into the ethno-comedic paradigm established at the beginning, violent reactions like these still indicate a profound ambivalence in perceptions of ethnic humor and the risks ultimately inherent in any kind of ridicule. When Kaya Yanar received threats by Muslims who felt offended in their religious sentiments, he abandoned the entire field of religion as a comedic source (Yanar, "Religionswitze").

His moderately confrontational course enabled his commercial success which in turn paved the way for others. Django Asül, born and raised in Bavaria, focuses exclusively on Turkish-German people but constantly highlights Lower Bavaria – jokingly – as a third

⁹⁹ In an interview with Hamed Abdel-Samad, the arts editor of the Danish newspaper, Flemming Rose, argued that the publication had been a social experiment that had not created a new situation but only exposed the current *status quo*. In his opinion, violence begins where words fail. Asked to comment on words that ignite violence, he argued against censorship and in favor of freedom of expression, based on the rationale that nobody could ever control other people's utterances but everyone could learn how to control one's own emotional reactions (Abdel-Samad 106–110).

¹⁰⁰ The traditional carnival parade in Cologne, a stronghold in respect of contemporary carnival, was to include a truck referencing Charlie Hebdo but the event organizers vetoed it at first in order to maintain a festive atmosphere ("Rosenmontag"). When local rival Düsseldorf announced it would feature such a truck, Cologne eventually caved.

ethnicity.¹⁰¹ Although Asül's *Kabarett* predated Yanar's success, his heavy Bavarian dialect and stress on regional issues fixates him to this day as more of a local phenomenon, albeit with slightly increased popularity in the wake and aftermath of Yanar. Bülent Ceylan, on the other hand, also makes no secret of his upbringing in the German city of Mannheim, but his localism colors the content of his performance not nearly as much. In contrast to Asül, he focuses on German-Turkish relations in general. He maintains Yanar's mass-compatible model of light entertainment but relinquishes his multimedia approach of implementing video clips on stage. One of the only two popular female performers currently broadcasting this particular kind of comedy is Idil Baydar who gave metaphorical birth to the proletarian epitome of Turkish-German girl stereotypes, Jilet Ayse, and the cliché German granny Gerda Grischke from Berlin. The other one is Enissa Amani who is not of Turkish but Iranian background, and whose young career as a comedian skyrocketed with her first tour in 2015 and a late-night TV show in early 2016. Murat Topal worked for nine years as a policeman in Berlin-Kreuzberg before he quit and used his experiences as material for ethno-comedic performances. Actor Fatih Çevikkollu prefers the *Kabarett* ways of expression and portrays himself as a calm yet sharp-tongued intellectual. Lastly, at least on stage Serdar Somuncu emphasizes the more serious style of political *Kabarett* as well but simultaneously pushes the boundaries of delicate topics and good taste.¹⁰²

Thus the faces of ethno-comedy are manifold. The two artists whose work I intend to examine are Serdar Somuncu and Bülent Ceylan. In contrast to the comparatively mono-dimensional acts of Murat Topal, Idil Baydar, or even Django Asül, Somuncu and Ceylan

¹⁰¹ The stage pseudonym consists of the stereotypical gunslinger name "Django" and a deliberate misspelling of the German word "Asyl", i.e. asylum, self-ironically suggesting the image of a rogue migrant unleashed on stage.

¹⁰² Somuncu's former online show *Hatenight* (<www.hatenight.com>) as well as his satirical analysis of Turkish-German relations *Der Antitürke* (2009) operate similarly yet each with a different emphasis: Both are humorous; but whereas the former was a platform for experimental aggression (see 6.1.2) with the occasional "off-topic" rant on something outside ethnicities, the latter is much more contemplative and focuses exclusively on fostering the mutual understanding of Turks and Germans.

represent the most controversial and the most popular of the current performers with the same pan-German focus in topics but quite different approaches to ethno-comedy.

The slightly older Somuncu was born in 1968 in Istanbul but raised in Germany. He spent many years travelling the nation and neighboring countries, performing dramatic readings of both Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1925/26) and Goebbels' speech of 1943 in the Berlin Sports Palace. Appropriating the troubled German past and insisting on his right as well as his cultural obligation to actively engage with it, Somuncu developed the most comprehensive and radical position in the business. The resulting antagonism by German right-wing radicals attending his shows in protest culminated when his 1000th performance took place on the historical date of January 30th in Potsdam,¹⁰³ where his seventh death threat by Neonazis caused him to go on stage in a bullet-proof vest.¹⁰⁴ After he gained increasing popularity, his 2009 program *Hassprediger* ("Preacher of Hate") was repeatedly renewed and extended for additional showings well into 2014. The aggressive overtone, the deliberate provocation, and the utter disrespect for any hegemonic ambition characterize this artist's attitude of defiance and confidence.

From 2008 to 2013, Somuncu broadcast his own show *Hatenight* on the internet in addition to his stage performances. Sponsored only through membership fees on his website, the self-proclaimed "Hassias" preached his "hate-ism" on a weekly basis where he explained the concept of "immanent deconstruction." He infiltrates an object of hate and, once a part of it, acts more extremely than anyone else, thus exposing the system's innate flaws.

Finally, he works regularly as an author where he displays quite different sides of his creative self. Apart from two tour journals, he published a collection of short stories, for example, in 2004 or *Der Antitürke* ("The Anti-Turk") in 2009 where he addresses German-Turkish

¹⁰³ On January 30th, 1933, Hitler seized power.

¹⁰⁴ In an interview following these events, Somuncu said this particular threat had been the best thing that could possibly have happened in his fight against right-wing radicalism, as it showed the continuous immediate relevance of his topic (Klesmann and Blankennagel).

relations, backgrounds, political problems, and potential solutions to social tensions. Together with Simon Akstinat he composed a comical but critical comparison of the Bible and the Qur'an in 2011. Two years later, he wrote *Zwischen den Gleisen* ("Between the tracks") which tells the fictional story of two real RAF terrorists in Germany around the time the Berlin Wall came down. Here, he explains the protagonists' concept of terrorism as "immanent deconstruction," thus creating curious parallels between their story and his own approach to socially influential comedy. His readings, writings, and on-stage as well as on-line performances portray him as a complex character and most will be included in this comprehensive study.

Ceylan, on the other hand, steers clear of excessive provocation and follows the rather compliant course of Kaya Yanar. Born in the city of Mannheim in 1976 as the son of an early Turkish guest worker and a German Catholic mother, his approach to fathoming cultural identity also consists of ridiculing ethnic stereotypes and employing various *dramatis personae*. Unlike the slight Yanar, however, Ceylan uses both his physical fitness as well as rough rock music to convey an image of playful power in an atmosphere of heady spectacle. Catering to more mainstream tastes compared to Somuncu, he was able to sell out the Commerzbank-Arena in Frankfurt with over 42,000 fans attending his show *Wilde Kreatürken* ("Wild Creaturks") in 2012. In 2011, Ceylan already became the host of his very own comedy show, entitled *Die Bülent Ceylan Show*, which finished its fourth and final season in fall of 2013 and is currently succeeded by a similar format called *Bülent und seine Freunde*. Together with his stand-up routines these performances will also be part of my analysis.

Through humorous deconstruction of stereotypes, Turkish-German ethno-comedians like Kaya Yanar, Serdar Somuncu, or Bülent Ceylan enable their audience to reconsider individual and collective identifications of self and Other. In their attempt to help modify a deeply skeptical part of the German collective memory that developed over 1200 years, their contribution to

society is profoundly political in nature. Striving to intensify contact and exchange between social periphery and center, the integrative efforts of these artists may be based on foregrounded entertainment but ultimately further cross-cultural understanding and growth as a people.

The approach to exploit the extended liberties provided by humor to manipulate the minds of others has a long tradition which takes its roots in the medieval jester figure. Parallel to the extensive German-Turkish entanglements, this figure adopted a variety of facets until the ethno-comedian became its latest manifestation and continued these entanglements on a new level. Through the social position of the jester, polycultural artists have the possibility to self-empowerment and cultural participation. Following Foucault's epistemological interest of who is allowed to say or do what, when, and under which conditions, the intention behind chapter three is to explore how different forms of jesters emerged and how they engaged with their respective environments. The subsequent second genealogy examines monumental moments in the jester tradition with a particular focus on the social position of its protagonists.

3 – The Jester Tradition

As the first sophisticated form of their kind that is well-documented in their time, jesters of medieval German origins constitute my second historical point of departure. Tracing their special position in society helps to better classify and comprehend the contemporary phenomenon of the ethno-comedian. Recognizing the metamorphoses of this social type over time not only clarifies the professional connection between the fool and comedian as two variations of the same kind; but shining a light on the roots and developments of this ancient type also helps to explain its latest token because it offers valuable insights into some persisting social patterns and humoristic mechanisms as well as the resulting political significance still tangible today.¹⁰⁵

Carl Gustav Jung summarizes these tokens as manifestations of the mythical trickster archetype that has taken various forms and “been a source of amusement right down to civilized times, where he can still be recognized in the carnival figures of Pulcinella and the clown” (144). As an incarnation of the trickster, the jester is an ambivalent persona between devilish humor and provider of truths who has acquired various and partially contradictory roles over the centuries and through them keeps adapting to ever new circumstances. Modern jesters may hence draw on any number of traits associated with this social status, provided that they act within the limits of this particular role.¹⁰⁶ While Jung’s understanding of the archetype seems to emphasize notions of continuity among emergences, Peirce’s concept of types and tokens focuses more on elements of difference in each appearance. Juxtaposing both allows me to embed a current phenomenon in a historical context and use this background to highlight its uniqueness within specific traditions.

¹⁰⁵ In 1906, Charles S. Peirce distinguished general types from specific tokens in order to differentiate between a concept, or type, and its actual occurrence, the token (“Token und Type”). I use his terms to underscore the relation between the jester as a general type and its various manifestations occurring over time.

¹⁰⁶ Linton distinguishes “status” and “role.” The place of the individual within a social system is his status; the respective roles are cultural patterns of behavior to express that status. Each individual has several statuses and can choose with which role to realize each status, although one cannot act out several roles of any one status at once (311–313).

As a social type, the jester figure has no rigid cluster of set character traits but is a dynamic status that changes its role-related appearances sporadically in adaptive reactions to socio-historical developments. This holds true for real jesters as well as fictional ones across the arts, who stand in a relationship of constant exchange and mutual inspiration. Constantly oscillating between their core functions of entertainment and enlightenment, they exist across time periods and in various shapes. Each manifestation has been referred to by its current and later generations as fools and jesters, so that each deviation added a facet to the general pool of possible features that later figures could adopt, adapt, or ignore altogether. Due to this essential dynamism, I agree with El Hissy when she says: “Die Figur des Narren, Harlekin oder Tricksters würde durch den Versuch ihrer Verortung bzw. festen Positionierung erstarren” (67).¹⁰⁷

In light of the contemporary entertainment industry much has changed in terms of professional amusement since the Middle Ages, a progression that could cast doubts on the applicability of medieval labels for current phenomena. In the Middle Ages, the role of courtly comedian fell mostly to individuals who were personally responsible for a humorous idea and its enactment. Today, much of the traditional fool’s business has become part of the modern entertainment industry with its trained joke writers, production companies, prop masters and effect specialists, costume designers, market analysts, and managers marketing contractually signed artists. However, although this capitalist division of labor creates a vast plurality of hegemonic factors influencing today’s performances, many core elements of the medieval type remain the same. Among these are the potential for political influence as already outlined in the previous chapter, specific situational conditions to increase this potential as described in the following chapter, and a few distinct social functions discussed in this chapter. The courtly fool hence remains a timeless icon of the whole social type.

¹⁰⁷ “*The figure of the jester, harlequin, or trickster would ossify at the attempt to localize or fix its position.*”

Although the figure seems to have developed independently from the German-Turkish entanglements, its changing interpretations share numerous similarities with the equally changing German perceptions of Ottomans: Some jesters were admired for their sophistication, others feared for their powers, a few were considered diabolical, some were shunned, many temporarily hired, and hardly any were ever fully trusted. When the first Turkish-German comedians finally appropriated the profession of amusing entertainer in Germany, even the most popular of all German jester characteristics gained an intercultural point of reference.

From a sociological point of view, the main parallel between medieval German jesters and Turkish-German ethno-comedians consists in an often shared initial sense of not-belonging at society's periphery. In an act of self-assertive empowerment, fools and ethno-comedians turned this exclusive neither-nor state into an inclusive as-well-as perspective, converting a formerly adverse situation into a perception of privilege:

Throughout history, talented misfits have used their difference as a means of survival, foregrounding and capitalizing on the very stigma that threatens their existence. Excluded from the power center of society, these individuals have emphasized and relied upon their difference for a living. The artist, the fool, the social critic ... all stand aside from the center in order to critique it. Although they are not allowed within the ruled lines of society's pages, these "others" gain a certain freedom, a latitude that can only be experienced in the open space of margins. By "performing" their marginality, social outcasts call attention to their subordinate status; by commodifying this performance, they ensure that the dominant culture literally pays a price for this disparity. (Gilbert xi)

Exploiting people's propensity for amusement, Turkish-German artists used the influential role of the jester as a means of representation. Over the centuries, various forms of fools had acquired many partially contradictory features, rendering jesters highly ambiguous and often paradoxical characters. Today's ethno-comedians take advantage of this ambiguity to entertain but also to manipulate the mutual perceptions of natives and people of migrant background. In their programs they try to reframe social perceptions of ethnic normality and to facilitate people's habituation to a diversified demographic.

My following historical overview and second genealogy considers linguistic elements, paintings, passages of Scripture, and, of course, literary texts to illuminate key aspects along the jester tradition. After a brief semantic assessment (3.1), the next section examines the unique positions of jesters and their own kind of Third Space between majority and minority society (3.2). Exercising different functions over time, the status of jester obtained a variety of roles to realize this status which lends the type its versatility. Section 3.3 looks at these various roles and provides first insights on jesters' social functions. Afterwards, reconstructing the history of the fool's scepter, the *marotte*, illustrates the jester's gradual transmogrification from a once ostracized misfit to an appreciated comic and critic and further elucidates these primary social functions (3.4). Finally, we turn to the professional distance necessary for any social critic. It preserves the exclusivity of a jester's special position but also threatens to leave the former misfit's progressive reintegration into society a mere approximation (3.5). Scrutinizing society from a distance and subsequently confronting it humorously with its own peculiarities is the key feature that allowed the jester type to survive until today. The last section concerns itself with the close predecessors of contemporary comedians, the artists of late 19th century *Kabarett*, as the historical hinge between medieval fools and modern comedians. They followed this model of social critique explicitly, paving the way for today's ethno-comedic token of the jester type (3.6).

3.1 Foolish Terminology

From a linguistic point of view, the dynamism of the jester type is still reflected in contemporary applications of the German word *närrisch*. Translated today, it means foolish, harebrained, or silly. In all cases, the English translation bears a predominantly negative connotation and implies primarily a lack of “sense, judgment, or discretion” (“Merriam-Webster”).¹⁰⁸ The first translation – foolish – is a derivative of the word *fool*, just as the German word *närrisch* goes back to the *Narr*, i.e. the fool or jester. Whereas in the Middle Ages these terms were almost identical and most commonly referred to the complex position of courtly advisor and entertainer, it seems that modern English preserved only a small portion of the old jester semantics. In German, however, many more characteristics survived. Unlike the derogatory term *foolish* the multi-faceted semantics of *närrisch* cover to this day a much larger spectrum of potential attributes.¹⁰⁹ It includes the limited English variety, but depending on its context of use it also encompasses the ideas of resourcefulness and freedom, the biting wit of satire associated with carnival, an element of unpredictability, the power of subversion, the threat and temptation of a little anarchy, and in some contexts even closeness to the devil, death, and evanescence as will be shown shortly.

Despite the possibly disturbing nature of the latter end of this semantic spectrum, terminological references to the *Narr* can also carry the very opposite meaning at the spectrum’s other end. There, it includes positively endearing elements. Phrases such as “in jemanden / in etwas vernarrt sein” (“to adore someone or something”) or “einen Narren an etwas gefressen haben” (“to dote on something”) can express a strong passion that may seem quite charming. In English phrases, by contrast, when someone “acts the fool” the expression indicates silly behavior only. There is neither anything endearing about it on the outside, nor anything

¹⁰⁸ The only other definitions offered by Merriam-Webster are “absurd” and “trifling.”

¹⁰⁹ Whereas Merriam-Webster lists 40 synonyms for “foolish,” the German Duden finds almost 200. Among them are royal and miserable, hellish and heavenly, cruel and passionate, important and animalistic, carnivalesque, burlesque and scary, strange, intense, immortal, fat, disgusting, and beautiful (“Duden”).

exceptional on the inside like a false bottom under which there resided a sharp criticism, a hint at heaven and hell, or a hidden insightful truth. *Närrisch*, however, can refer to all of these features. While the English language dropped different meanings once associated with the esteemed courtly fools and thus gradually demoted jesters to mere jokers, *närrisch* refers to a long tradition of entertainment that includes the sage and the silly, the appealing as well as the appalling parts of the ambivalent figure.

The distinction between *närrisch* and *foolish* is crucial because today only the concept of *närrisch* helps to put this chain of linked phenomena into an appropriate historical context and explain them better. For the lack of a more suitable term, I therefore want to translate *närrisch* as *jester-like*. As such it applies – to various degrees – to the jester manifestations as medieval fools, baroque harlequins, the “Hanswurst” character in 17th and 18th century drama and its later counterpart “Kasperle” in puppetry, the clowns of cabaret and the circus, *Kabarett* artists, and ultimately to modern-day comedians, i.e. the whole spectrum of the social type. In the following, the terms jester and fool will be used interchangeably, but always in the broad sense of *Narr*.

3.2 Locating Society's Periphery

Although the jester is a popular figure in medieval art and literature, he remains a complex, ambivalent entity despite and because of his many references. Matejovski showed how perceived madmen, crazies, possibly possessed people, the physically crippled and mentally disabled were all subsumed under the same label in the discourses of medicine, law, and theology, but none of these professions proved able to compile an exhaustive list of its binding character traits (33–92). While these disciplines attempted to locate the origin or essence of foolishness within the confines of their own self-defined limitations as a field, the academic discipline of sociology emerging in the late 19th century finally allowed for a broader perspective on the phenomenon. Only then the common denominator of all people thus subsumed became visible: their intentional or unintentional antagonizing in socially structured spheres. Everyone could be labeled a fool based on abnormal behavior or an unusual appearance (Mezger, “Narren, Schellen und Marotten” 9). The judging instance creating these norms and values was neither just medicine, nor jurisprudence alone, nor the clergy by itself; it was all parts of society at once, which created the multifaceted attributions too complex for any one discipline to fully integrate. As a social phenomenon, however, the jester type becomes apparent as an entity combining any set of qualities currently regarded as abnormal by any socially accepted standard.

Conceptualizing fools as indirect, negative products of their respective socio-political environment, also explains the source of their ubiquity in medieval art and courtly life – the attraction of otherness. In real life and in literature, jesters are uniquely flexible in their ability to create a contrast to anything conventional which predestines them to outline and represent the unfamiliar, the unusual, and the exceptional. The effects thus generated may vary from laughter to shock and provoked thought, depending on intent or portrayal.

Most of the classic jester variations have typically been considered nonconformists ever since. Their exclusivity becomes particularly obvious in a work by Gerhard Altenbach known as *Die Ständetreppe* – the “staircase of classes” (Mezger, *Hofnarren im*



Image 3: Gerhard Altenbach „Die Ständetreppe“ (1616). Prof. Berghoff, Hartmut, Director. *German History in Documents and Images*. Web. 2 May 2014. <<http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/images/30009827-p%20copy.jpg>>. (Public Domain)

Mittelalter 52). This image from the early 17th century displays the social order from Pope to princeling in its late medieval hierarchy with only two human figures outside this supposedly natural order: on the bottom left, the child that has yet to grow into its place in society, and right, the jester who points to the great equalizer in the middle – death. While the common man, clergy, and nobility are bound by their respective *ordo* and hence have to adhere to the laws and norms of their time, the jester has none. In relation to the general populace he is a social misfit, defined by and hence a part of society and yet, as its negative, at once outside it. The jesters’ craft may be appreciated anywhere but as individuals they belong nowhere.

As soon as society classified someone as a fool, an equally important second step followed: an estimation of that person’s social risk factor. Depending on the potential threat to society posed by the individual, the fool was deemed either harmless or dangerous. In the latter case, depending on the level of institutional sophistication of the respective town or city, the culprit was exiled, sent on a supposedly curing pilgrimage, or locked away, for instance “zu

Hause, in Türmen und Verliesen der Stadtmauer oder in den oft vor den Toren aufgestellten ‘dordenkisten’ (Tollkisten), ‘unsinnige heiser’, ‘dolhuißgen’ oder ‘hundthuyseren’” (Häßler and Häßler 24).¹¹⁰ When attested harmless, a number of conceivable occupations presented itself, the one as courtly entertainer only being the most well-known. Other, less popular possibilities included simple work or craftsmanship at home or with neighbors, while the family was held accountable for any damages. Matejovski calls these dealings with fools a “nüchternen Sozialpragmatismus, ... der sich primär um kosten-minimalisierten Erhalt der öffentlichen Ordnung und Sicherheit sorgte” (Matejovski 75).¹¹¹

This predominantly peripheral position is laid out already in the original conceptions of the very first jesters. Etymologically, the German term *Narr* dates back to the old high German word *narro* which denoted a “Geisteskranken oder Irrsinnigen, der über die Gabe der Vernunft ... nicht verfügt“ (Röcke 52).¹¹² Another possible root lies within the field of agriculture where the word to this day may refer to a misshapen fruit or crop (Mezger, “Narren, Schellen und Marotten” 6). In any case, when applied to a human being the term originally signified a deficient body or mind and referred first and foremost to the disabled as well as all people who displayed socially unacceptable behavior.

This separation fed a potent socio-structural binary: the power and its opposition, mainstream and minority, the norm and the other. In a way, the healthy, sane, and righteous qualified for further classification and were allowed to occupy social positions in accordance with the clerically sanctified *ordo* as illustrated by Altenbach; the sick, mad, and corrupt, however, were pushed to a social periphery that granted no further distinctions. As Foucault showed in

¹¹⁰ “at home, in towers and dungeons of the city wall, or in various huts and houses often erected for the insane or silly outside the city gates.” All of the terms above consist of two parts: the first meaning crazy, silly, or base, and the second denoting a small house or hut.

¹¹¹ “sober social pragmatism that is concerned mainly with minimizing costs for upholding public order and safety.”

¹¹² “the mentally disordered or insane who have no command over their ability to reason.”

Madness and Civilization (1964), crazies, crooks, and cripples respectively were oftentimes expelled or incarcerated together because one way or another they all violated established norms and as such constituted a single collective of unacceptable otherness.

Their peripheral status was directly related to changing mainstream conceptions of their condition; a dynamic center redefining continually what currently constitutes normality and how to treat its deviations. Thus causally entwined, a change on either end effected an immediate reaction on the other. For instance, the gradual establishment of an alternate power – perceived, for example, as a religious, ideological, or economical threat – demanded an appropriate reconfiguration of the old center with due regard to the newly altered periphery.¹¹³

3.3 Roles of Jesters

In the Middle Ages, marginalized fools in the sense of physically or mentally disabled people did not become jesters in the conventional sense until they re-entered courtly society and a gradual reevaluation of their condition eventually generated this specific new social role on their account. This inclusion could occur in a variety of ways, and each reinterpretation of a fool's qualities and potential value or function added another facet to the overall social type. This section traces the conceptual origins of the German jester figure from its first medieval appearance up to the peak of its popularity in the 16th century.

¹¹³ Popular examples include the Protestant movement instigated by Martin Luther, Black Power under Malcolm X, or women's rights in recent decades. In each instance, a marginalized social group grew so influential that the dominant participants of cultural discourse could no longer ignore or suppress it. Conversely, with increasing popular support for environmental sustainability, gun control, or gay rights, proponents of opposing conservative perspectives could form the new minorities of tomorrow. Based on this fluid concept of culture, it is impossible to answer the question when exactly a group abandons its peripheral status and merges with the dynamic center and *vice versa*.

From today's point of view, entertainment is still any jester's primary purpose and, among other possible aspects, it was this value in particular that granted the formerly exiled misfits access to courtly society. It is also responsible for the old distinction between *natural* and *artificial* fools. Since the 15th century, the former subsumed "Menschen, die von Geburt oder durch Krankheit mit Abnormitäten, Gebrechen und/oder geistigen Defekten gekennzeichnet sind" (Häßler; Häßler, 22),¹¹⁴ the latter came to be known as *Schalksnarren* who literally act the fool in return for the infamous fool's license (Röcke, 52). Before the artificial fools eventually stole the show, it was the natural ones who set the hare running.

Discovering the entertainment value of madmen raised curiosity among the general populace and intensified contact between the majority society and its periphery. "It was doubtless a very old custom of the Middle Ages to display the insane. In certain of the *Narrtürmer* in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe the madmen chained within. They thus constituted a spectacle at the city gates" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* 68). Delighting in their otherness, people sought the bedlams where the exhibited satisfied public voyeurism. The same applied to cripples whose deformities likewise offered an intriguing, almost otherworldly experience to medieval sensation seekers. The relocation of this ghoulish spectacle from the peripheral city gates to the castle at the center constituted a key turning point on the way from fools to courtly fools.¹¹⁵

A sophisticated interpretation of disability based on Christian doctrine complicated the existence of these so-called natural fools at court. Two parts of the Holy Scripture troubled the physically and mentally disabled in particular. The first one was Genesis 1:27, stating that God

¹¹⁴ "people who are marked by abnormalities, disabilities, and/or mental deficiencies either since birth or through sickness."

¹¹⁵ Mezger emphasizes the habit of potentates to surround themselves with all sorts of exotic or otherwise strange folks which fostered the presence of the disabled at court (*Hofnarren im Mittelalter* 81).

had made man in His image. Consequently, according to medieval rationale, malformed men could not possibly be a legitimate part of His plan of salvation and by negation were therefore considered to side with the devil – *tertium non datur* (Mezger, “Narren, Schellen und Marotten” 5). Disability was thus equaled to sin and perceived as the outward manifestation of inner evil.¹¹⁶

The second part was the idea of original sin, the root cause of all folly. Patriarchal clergy declared all fools and felons to be descendants of Eve, the conceptual progenitor of all sinners (Mezger, “Narren, Schellen und Marotten” 12). This reading substantialized associations of the disabled with the devil. Moreover, because of Eve’s transgression man had lost immortality. In view of that, cripples also became living monuments of *vanitas*.

As a result, the inclusion of handicapped individuals at court could serve three very different purposes. In addition to the deviant entertainment value mentioned above, Mezger speculates that their feature as a memento of evanescence provided a second way for the fools’ courtly re-entry, analogous to the slave consistently reminding a victorious Roman general of his mortality as a human (*Hofnarren im Mittelalter* 38).¹¹⁷ The mere sight of a misshapen man could have served to induce a sense of humility and gratitude in the beholder. As a symbol of death and evanescence, these first jesters were endowed with a particularly somber aura. A third opportunity for social re-integration finally consisted in royal charity for the purposes of profiling oneself as a magnanimous Christian ruler. From the outset, the spectrum from amusement to humiliation, from laughing at the disabled to being humbled by them carries a fundamental ambivalence that constitutes one of the jester type’s most iconic features.

Re-integrating the abnormal back into society ultimately granted access for the imps and pranksters, the artificial *Schalksnarren*, who superseded their predecessors in four steps. The first

¹¹⁶ Conversely, fair features, particularly in the novels of courtly romance, always indicated a righteous soul to the medieval spectator.

¹¹⁷ This function of *memento mori* is still present in Altenbach’s *Ständetreppe*, where the fool points towards Death, the great equalizer, located in the lower center of the image and framed by mankind’s highest.

step occurred already from within the ranks of the natural fools. “Da wären zum Beispiel die ‚klencker‘. Das sind echte Krüppel, die den Passanten aber falsche, erdichtete Geschichten über ihre Verstümmelungen erzählen” (Johannsmeier 208).¹¹⁸ Soon, the profitability of this possibility inspired a subversively inclined clientele of other misfits. In a second step, an intellectual subculture of courtly fools arose that, in full capacity of its physical and mental health, now infiltrated and manipulated its surrounding social system. Mimicking physical and mental deficiencies, these *Schalksnarren* were able to satisfy the public’s desire for entertainment but also to take better care of themselves.

In a third step, the artificial fools differentiated their kind into mean and elevated variations: While some developed a sense of humor based on buffoonery, others made a profit from provocative jest and quick-wittedness (Mezger, *Hofnarren im Mittelalter* 72). Bodensohn confirms that “der Dumme August stärker seelische und vitale Mißverhältnisse [figuriert], während der Schelm mehr dem anarchischen Untergrund des Intellekts entspringt” (127).¹¹⁹ Through often helpless acquiescence of public humiliation the natural fools had created a form of existence for their superior, artificial pendants and in the final fourth step – after a century of co-existence – was exiled again because of them (Barwig and Schmitz 220-222).

After this supersession, the artificial fools had overcome much of the biblical burden defining their existence. Throughout the 15th and 16th century, the ascending court jesters lost much of their former satanic aura as *vanitas* reminders (Röcke 51). Instead, they experienced a gradual yet consistent upgrading in their growing social perception as entertainers.

¹¹⁸ “There are, for instance, the ‘klencker,’ actual cripples who tell passers-by bogus stories of their mutilations.”

¹¹⁹ “August mirrors more physical and mental deficiencies whereas the prankster emerges from the anarchical underground of the intellect.”

In this period, we also find the most esteemed representative of the social type, the fool as courtly advisor. The fool's license had granted unique freedoms of speech to its proprietors, which opened the possibility of interspersing humorous speech with critical thought and commentary. From this privileged position emerged the function of fools as advisors. Depicted in contemporary emblems as equal or sometimes even superior to kings (expressed in Image 4 through posture and gesture), these wise fools possessed a power and freedom that separated them once more from society at large.



Image 4: Fool and king. Wager, Wulf. CEO. *Narren-Narro*. Web. 7 May 2014. <<http://www.narrenspiegel.de/Grafiken/narrkoenig.jpg>>. (Public Domain)

Simultaneously, the aristocracy's desire for amusement rose, which caused an inflationary demand for the amusing kind of court jesters between 1500 and 1550 (Mezger, *Hofnarren im Mittelalter* 58). The initial interpretive patterns of *vanitas* and insanity paired with the profession of entertainer had created a deeply ambivalent but most powerful combination:

Seit dem Aufschwung des Hofnarrentums finden sich diese beiden Deutungsmuster im Motiv des Narren zu einem Amalgam verschmolzen. Seither steht der Narr sowohl für Unvernunft als auch für Wahrheit und Prophetie, verkörpert er nicht nur lästerlichen Spaß, sondern auch Ernst und den Blick auf ein nicht selten angsteinflößendes Dahinter. Dabei macht das Oszillieren zwischen Furcht und Heiterkeit bereits die Essenz des Narren aus. (Pilarczyk 26)

Ever since this upsurge of courtly fools these two interpretative patterns amalgamated in the motif of the jester. Since then, the jester represents stupidity but also truth and prophecy, embodies not only blasphemous drollery but also seriousness and the often scary peak behind the curtain. Oscillating between fear and fun is the essence of the jester.

The former outcasts had become professional performers and as such joined a vast array within the “bunten Herrscherhöfe des Barock, in denen es – je nach Geld und Geschmack des Fürsten – von Zwergen, Krüppeln, Mohren, Riesen, Spielleuten, Possenreißern, Alchimisten, Astrologen, Tierbändigern und Artisten wimmelte” (Barwig and Schmitz 226).¹²⁰ As artists, the misfits of the past remained partially exotic in their ambiguous nature; but by exploiting people’s desire for entertainment, they had found a way to empower their peripheral position and establish themselves as active co-creators of the cultural landscape.

Using humor as a means of protecting speech, gaining a voice in public, and then influencing the current *status quo* is the primary jester-like path to power. Despite the obvious risks inherent in humorous but ambivalent speech – i.e. misinterpretation, offense, confusion – it still provides a relatively convenient way for a minority to catch attention and partake in cultural political discourse. It is this exact same mechanism that Turkish-German ethno-comedians employ today.

¹²⁰ “the colorful courts of the Baroque, which were – depending on the wealth and taste of the potentate – filled with dwarves, cripples, moors, giants, minstrels, clowns, alchemists, astrologists, animal tamers, and artists.”

3.4 Of Marottes and Mirrors

Willingly becoming an object of ridicule granted unique freedoms to artificial fools, who soon used these freedoms to empower themselves, invert the initial directionality of laughter, and mock their audience in return.¹²¹ The process of this diversification is documented neatly in the artistic interpretation of the jester. As indicated earlier, there is a strong correlation between the lives of real jesters and the social type's representation within the arts. The amalgamation of its various versions becomes particularly evident in their elaboration of the nowadays traditional jester-like attire, specifically in the marotte. The following focuses on this iconic feature of the iconic fool and the different phases of its development to illustrate the gradual progress of the fools' on-stage subjectification and the accompanying changes in their social function.

Around the year 1500, the artistic elaboration of the jester figure had been completed. While mostly clerics had deducted its alleged inner qualities from Bible-based interpretations of disability, writers and painters designed a corresponding external appearance for their own depictions and endowed the figure with various symbolic attributes: motley clothes, pointy shoes, an abundance of bells, headgear alluding to evil as devil's horns and stupidity as donkey ears, sometimes a coxcomb for sexual desire – each one symbolizing the mockery of self or others, a certain mental state, and social status. The most notorious of all accessories was the marotte. The changing shape of the so-called fool's scepter parallels the evolution of the whole social type and thus constitutes its perfect symbol, mirroring precisely each significant step in early jester history.

¹²¹ The inversion merely added to the spectrum of possible targets and did not suspend the (self-)mockery of the fool.

The marotte is the oldest of accessories and documented in its raw originary form already in the fool's first iconographic representation (see Image 5), the initial of psalm 51 in the Bible: "Dixit insipiens in corde suo 'Non est Deus'"

("The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God')."¹²² Its primordial signification is unclear. Barwig and Schmitz, for instance,

refer to the aphorism "Für die Spötter wird der Stock bereitgehalten / und Prügel für den Rücken der Toren"¹²² as one possible source of inspiration (223). It seems unlikely, however, that its first appearance already contained an allegorical reference. Mezger believes that, initially, the marotte was "ein ganz gewöhnliches Ast- oder Wurzelstück ..., das allenfalls geglättet, ansonsten aber nicht weiter bearbeitet war" ("Narren, Schellen und Marotten" 14-15), which corresponds with Image 5.¹²³ The depiction containing the club dates back to the 13th century when the word "fool" still referred primarily to publicly ridiculed, physically or mentally disabled people. In line with Mezger's claim, it seems more convincing to me to assume the origin in a walking aid, for instance for exiled lepers. As such, it had a purely pragmatic use that in all likelihood preceded the object's theological interpretation and later artistic illustration.



Image 5: Ps. 51: Dixit insipiens in corde suo "Non est Deus". Dr. Marciari-Alexander, Julia, Director. *The Walters Arts Museum*. Web. 7 May 2014. <http://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W114/data/W.114/sap/W114_000126_sap.jpg>. (Public Domain)

¹²² As quoted in Barwig and Schmitz, 223. Cf. Die Bibel, Prov. 19:29: "Den Spöttern sind Strafen bereitet und Schläge für den Rücken der Toren"; "Punishment is made for mockers, and beatings for the backs of fools."

¹²³ "an ordinary branch or part of a root that had been smoothed at best but not processed any further."

A middle-high German novella from about 1300, entitled *Die halbe Birne* (“*Half a Pear*”), testifies to the original form of the marotte as well as the current social perception of fools.¹²⁴ After the knight Arnolt has been humiliated in public by the Princess, his manservant Heinrich suggests Arnolt infiltrate the court disguised as a fool and wait for his moment of revenge. The knight disguises himself by changing into rags, shaving his head, and covering himself in dirt in obvious imitation of a natural fool. His only prop is a precursor of the marotte as described in verse 154:

einen kolben swære als ein blî,	Einen Kolben, schwer wie Blei,	<i>A club as heavy as lead</i>
den nemet zuo eime leitestabe.	nehmt als Wanderstab.	<i>take as your cane.</i>

Heinrich strips his master of all visual clues indicating his class and substantiates his new role with precise negations of all commonly acceptable behavior. He suggests various forms of typically foolish demeanor, such as irrationality and noise, and encourages the use of violence, especially in cases of excessive abuse (158–160). Matejovski summarizes his elaborate role play:

Arnolt, zum schmutzigen, häßlichen, gewalttätigen und undisziplinierten „gebûre“ geworden, versammelt in diesem Erscheinungsbild fast alle Attribute ethischer, sozialer und intellektueller Defizienz, die der Imaginationsraum höfischer Theorie und Dichtung kennt. (251)

Arnolt, having become a dirty, ugly, violent, and ill-disciplined boor, combines in his appearance almost all the attributes of ethical, social, and intellectual deficiency imaginable in courtly theory and poetry.

¹²⁴ The question of authorship is not settled. Grubmüller and others assume Konrad von Würzburg, yet the works of Zwierzinas and Laudans suggest otherwise (Wolf 404-405).

The flipside of all norms demarcates the scope of foolish operation. Accepting the role of fool not only allows for unorthodox behavior, it virtually requires it to save appearances. Once the performance compromises the status, the fool's license disappears and tolerance for irregular behavior will cease to normal limits. Accordingly, there is a strong correlation between a fool's freedom of action and public expectation (see 4.1).

As indicated by the novella, when the first natural fools re-entered courtly society as objects of ridicule, their clubs may indeed have served occasionally as primitive weapons of self-defense when their public mockery became unbearable. Adhering to an antithetical world view, arts eventually stylized their simple sticks as a symbolic negative correlate to a king's scepter.¹²⁵ Other illustrations of Psalm 51, for instance, include the pious King David opposite the atheist fool, a juxtaposition which suggests the marotte as the regalia of rebellion in contrast to the scepter as a sign of peace (Röcke 53). In the hands of an atheist – according to Christian doctrine an adversary of God and hence automatically a fool – the once ordinary stick gained portentous symbolism. As a defense weapon against bullies but also a sign of disorder and the rejection of God, the marotte could be perceived as an instrument of aggression signifying the attribute of wicked violence. This reading becomes particularly likely in psalm illustrations depicting the fool side by side with the devil like in Image 6.



Image 6: Ps. 51, fool and devil. Dr. Marciari-Alexander, Julia, Director. *The Walters Arts Museum*. Web. 7 May 2014. <http://thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/W41/data/W41/sap/W41_000176_sap.jpg>. (Public Domain)

¹²⁵ Mezger emphasizes a tendency towards comparative contrasting in theological thought during the Middle Ages ("Narren, Schellen und Marotten" 26). Depicting the fool next to the devil illustrates how birds of a feather flock together, whereas a more nuanced image of fool and king with distinct structural points of comparison (like clothes, posture, or accessories) falls into the category of antithetical juxtapositions.

Over the following three centuries, form and function of the marotte changed drastically. In the early 14th century, the thick end of the club was first shaped into a dollish face highlighting the child-like features of the jester. Later, it turned into an image of its dully self-obsessed owner, before it was eventually replaced altogether by a mirror, increasingly corresponding to the biblical idiom: *stultitia sibi placet* (Mezger, “Narren, Schellen und Marotten” 15–17). This development reflected the figure’s transformation from someone initially perceived as an aggressive, somber outsider into a socially integrated, seemingly benign narcissist. The ultimate step was taken when the sapient fool turned the mirror around on the audience, like *Eulenspiegel*,¹²⁶ and through humorous scrutiny became the metaphorical reflector of society at large.

Within the arts, the marotte thus bears a twofold relevance: First, it reflects the overall development of the jester from its origin outside of society and its norms up to the socially re-integrated artist of an acknowledged albeit still *abnormal* status. Second, its ultimate function as mirror substantiates this social position regarding the jester’s main function in society. The fool’s scepter is certainly no ordinary mirror considering its qualities of exaggeration, commentary, and imagination; but its position in relation to society is symbolic for the jesters’ exclusive situation.¹²⁷ Despite their re-integration into society they stand in opposition to it, now even more so than as the mere outcasts they were before. Their position is in fact paradoxical: Accepting the status as jester means the deliberate occupation of a place simultaneously inside and outside of society, being a part of it and yet distanced from it.

¹²⁶ *Eulenspiegel*’s compound name consists of a symbol of wisdom, i.e. the owls, and the jester-like mirror.

¹²⁷ Contradicting Heinz Greul’s assertion of this mirror function in his book *Bretter, die die Zeit bedeuten. Die Kulturgeschichte des Kabarets* (1971), Pschibl denies it. For her discussion of *Kabarets*’ potential to influence its audience, see *Das Interaktionssystem des Kabarets*, esp. 313-330.

3.5 Mind the Gap – Professional Distance

Professional humor allowed the fool access into many places. Community, however, was not one of them. The notion of distance in the relation between fools, their role, and society deserves some attention because it reveals further risks and ambiguities connected with the jester profession.

Although the fools regained access to society, they still occupied their own sphere even at the center of medieval life. From the outset, the relation between the fool character and a given society has been characterized by this fundamental divide, which is also documented in contemporary literature. For instance, the courtly infiltration as displayed earlier in the novella of the *Half a Pear* rested entirely on the premise that no one paid close attention to the supposed natural fool. Either underestimated or shunned altogether, the disguised knight was able to circle ever closer to the Princess' chambers and ultimately wreak his revenge.

Later artificial fools remained detached from their audience in two ways. On a physical level, the stage separated the anonymous group from the commodified artist. Even walking among the spectators or audience interaction cannot fully suspend the social distinction between people with and without the fool's license. On a social level, jesters were no longer underestimated but, as a result, often met with ambiguous attitudes. Their humorous performances were mostly appreciated. For one, however, since everybody could potentially fall victim to the jester's japes the ubiquitous risk for ridicule posed a constant threat to anyone associating with jesters; and for another, many people were jealous of the artistic kind for their seemingly easy living, or envied the advisory kind for their freedoms and closeness to power centers. Despite the growing popularity of courtly fools, this latent skepticism and resentment also maintained a subliminal feeling of distance and mistrust towards the unpredictable artists.

No longer confined to the *Narrtürme* at the city gates, the fool had left the literal periphery and re-entered society in diverse manifestations. However, the overall status as a peculiar companion still remained, and despite the physical presence the individual was still marked as different and strange on many levels. Among one's own kind this may have been different; but influential positions and the profession of almost unobstructed mockery well preserved the gap between society and its jesters until today.

Meanwhile, the nature of this vocation benefits greatly from this gap. Since society in all its quirks and qualities typically constitutes the main subject matter of comedic performance the most productive perspective derives from an extensive immersion into it while constantly maintaining a professional distance towards it.¹²⁸ In his late 18th century compendium *Geschichte der Hofnarren* (1789, "*The History of Courtly Fools*"), Flögel looks back at the medieval jester and describes one's comedic repertoire as follows:

Bald macht er den Rector Magnificus in der Stellung des Leibes, bald einen Spanier in höflichen Gebärden, bald einen Deutschen im Gange, bald einen Florentiner im Reden und Schnarren, bald einen Neapolitaner im Krähen. Mit einem Worte, er kann der ganzen Welt in Reden, Gebärden und Kleidern nachäffen. (15)

Now he mimics the posture of a Rector Magnificus, next the courtly gestures of a Spaniard, then the walk of a German, then the buzzing talk of a Florentine, then the crowing of a Neapolitan. In short, he can imitate the talk, gestures, and appearance of the whole world.

¹²⁸ A humorous counter-example of what a continual lack of professional distance could amount to is found in the *Lalebuch* (1597), the model for the later *Die Schiltbürger* (1598). The wise men of the Lalen are in high demand as advisors across the country, but their absence leads to a deteriorating situation at home. Henceforth, they pretend to be dumb so that their advice was no longer sought, indulging in the most foolish activities, until their second nature ultimately becomes their only reality and they remain forever silly (von Bahder).

The objectivity inherent in the jester's position equalizes all targets: men and women, commons and potentates, craftsmen and scholars, the foreign and the familiar.¹²⁹ The jester identifies with none, may become each through deliberate masquerade, and confronts them all alike. The technique of role play has characterized numerous jester manifestations from the first courtly fools to the Harlequins all the way to Turkish-German ethno-comedians like Bülent Ceylan and Kaya Yanar with their individual dramatis personae. As the motley clothes in Image 7 illustrate metaphorically, most jesters are hybrid creatures, and all are the faceless embodiment of ambivalence as indicated by the mask.



Image 7: Arlecchino. Tretikov, Lila, Exec. Dir. *Wikimedia Foundation*. Web. 12 May 2014. <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arlequin-comedie.jpg>>. (Public Domain)

By virtue of this versatility, every jester's impersonation has at least two dimensions: the discernable role as referent, and the style of performance as comment. As a result, every act requires interpretation. Scrutinizing mankind, its idiosyncrasies, regional, national or international differences, the jesters' job consists in detecting recognizable patterns, reflecting and possibly reframing them for comedic presentation. Behind the comical appearance, however, there lurks the unpredictable potential for critical expression which separates silliness from satire.

The keen dissection of conditions, trends, and habits demands a daring character, wit, and strength. With a profound disrespect for established societal structures, the medieval fools just like their later adaptations as baroque and romantic harlequines, both real and literary, as well as *Kabarett* artists and today's ethno-comedians all possessed the powerful potential to disrupt the rut – always oscillating between fear and fun –, to draw attention to cultural curiosities, and through their implicit commentary even outline alternatives to contemporary shortcomings.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Next to ridiculing class differences and habits of profession, mocking intercultural curiosities has a long tradition. With a hybrid artist in today's ethno-comedy, however, the structural constellation is quite different (see 4.3).

¹³⁰ On the history and development of literary jester figures, see Heide Pilarczyk *Der literarische Narr* (2004).

3.6 Linking the Ages – Through Kabarett to Ethno-Comedy

Through the jester figure it had become possible for authors and entertainers to question and laugh at almost anything. Anarchic humor as attitude offered a liberated and liberating perspective on all aspects of life, including abusive authorities, pervasive religion, and (other) social maladies. Its exceptionally free speech allowed for meaningful contributions in carnivalesque form from medieval jesters to Baroque harlequins.

During the Age of Enlightenment, however, the possibility for worldly relevance in humor, comedy, and laughter decreased in the perception of a growing number of people. Bakhtin describes the declined status of laughter in the 17th century like this:

Laughter ... can refer only to individual and individually typical phenomena of social life. That which is important and essential cannot be comical. Neither can history and persons representing it – kings, generals, heroes – be shown in a comic aspect. The sphere of the comic is narrow and specific (private and social vices); the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter. Therefore, the place of laughter in literature belongs only to the low genres, showing the life of private individuals and the inferior social levels. Laughter is a light amusement or a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt or low persons. (*Rabelais and His World* 67)

In Germany, the demise of carnivalesque satire turned into a virtual hiatus of subversive humor when Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-66) banned its then most popular representative Harlequin from higher literature as well as the stage, so that according to Horst Steinmetz “keine Komödie aus der Zeit von 1737 bis ca. 1790 überliefert ist, in welcher der Harlekin aufträte”

(97).¹³¹ In his article *Der Harlekin* from 1966, Steinmetz supports one of the central claims of this dissertation, i.e. that all manifestations of jesters ultimately remain representations of the one general jester type. His understanding of the Harlequin is identical to my view of the jester figure: “Trotz der sicherlich großen Variationsbreite der verschiedenen Harlekingsfiguren bleibt doch jeder einzelne Harlekin *der* Harlekin, mit dessen Auftritt der Zuschauer automatisch bestimmte Vorstellungen assoziiert” (100).¹³² In the view of Gottsched, however, after the vast proliferation of professional jesters in the 16th century the solemn age of reason had no more room for any stage variation of the Harlequin or jester figure, especially for the rather mindless Pickelhering and Hanswurst characters.

Only in the late 18th century, after some fifty years of shadowy existence at the periphery of artistic craft, the Harlequin finally resurfaced in the writings of Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) as a comical but sophisticated figure of counter-protest to Gottsched’s original protest (Steinmetz 105). Although the perceived inadequacy of a humorous approach to serious topics remained alive in the eyes of many, Tieck’s intellectually relined jester figure initiated the steady rehabilitation of humorous but critical entertainment that spared no-one.

The first institution to seek and employ people of a jester-like mindset was the *Kabarett*. The German *Kabarett* goes back to the French *cabaret artistique*. When Rodolphe Salis inaugurated the *Chat Noir* in Paris, 1881, he had intended it to be a platform for aesthetic discourse run by artists for artists. Twenty years later, however, *Kabarett* in Germany was open to the general public. Incorporating elements from across the arts, it offered an eponymous variety:

¹³¹ “There is no known comedy from 1737 until about 1790 in which Harlequin appears.”

¹³² “Despite the certainly large variety of different Harlequin characters, each one remains the Harlequin and the audience automatically associates certain expectations with his appearance.”

Strukturell bündelt das Kabarett die dem Theater entlehnten Formen der Szene, des Einakters, des Dialogs und des Monologs mit den von der Literatur übernommenen Formen der Lyrik, der Prosa und des Essays und den der Musik entstammenden Kategorien Lied, Song, Chanson und Couplet. (Budzinski and Hippen 164-165)

Structurally, the Kabarett combines elements borrowed from theater like the scene, the one-act play, dialogue, and monologue, with elements taken from literature like poetry, prose, and essays, as well as with categories originating in music like the hymn, song, chanson, and couplet.

Their connecting moment was clearly not artistic unity but the pivotal idea of combining light entertainment with critical thought and expressing it by any means available. A project like this was cut out for the multifaceted jester type with its license to critique.

When the first German *Kabarett*, the *Bunte Theater* in Berlin, opened its doors in 1901, the founder Ernst von Wolzogen adapted the French model and took the roles of court jesters as explicit models for the employed artists (McNally and Sprengel 10). Greul reminds us how Wolzogen, on the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary of the kingdom of Prussia, congratulated Wilhelm II., wishing him the sense of humor necessary to bear the truths told to him by the well-meaning poets and dream readers who performed in funny fools' attire at his venue (qtd. in Pschibl 318). The type of the fool had thus obtained a new, contemporary shape to occupy its social position of old: "Die klassische Figur des bundesrepublikanischen Kabarettis war der Narr als Kleinbürger: ... liebenswert oder boshaft, töricht oder verschmitzt" (Budzinski

and Hippen 65).¹³³ As an integral part of their social role, *Kabarett* artists at the turn of the last century remained separated from the majority population but still enjoyed the exclusive freedom of tongue-in-cheek speech.

Over the following years, several variations of the *Kabarett* emerged such as the artistic or the literary one, but most lasted for a few decades only. While intellectually more demanding forms of *Kabarett* stagnated in the immediate post-World-War-II era, the light entertainment of stand-up comedy found a grateful public during the 1950s and far into the 60s (Budzinski and Hippen 309). “Perhaps the most enduring of the cabaret’s progeny has turned out to be the stand-up comedian” (Appignanesi 239).

After a regular comedy boom in the 1990s, ethno-comedy constitutes one of the latest variations in this continual diversification of professional entertainment, combining aspects of *Kabarett*, comedy, and stand-up. In contrast to traditional *Kabarett*, a comedy performance is usually associated with someone acting a character as opposed to the focus on the artist’s own personality (Lareau 26). In accordance with *Kabarett* but different, for instance, from sketch-comedy, stand-up typically uses self-scripted texts “aimed at political or personal hypocrisies” (Appignanesi 239). Within ethno-comedy we find elements from all of the above: artists enacting fictional characters both on stage and in pre-shot video clips, accompanying their political satire – sometimes versed or in song – with a piano reminiscent of early cabaret, or standing in front of an audience proffering personal opinions. The genre belongs intrinsically neither exclusively to comedy nor *Kabarett* but oscillates in form and content between the two depending on the respective artist’s preferences. Where Ceylan, for instance, pursues a more light-hearted comedy approach to his material, Somuncu operates on the other end of the ethno-comedic spectrum and follows primarily a *Kabarett* style of intellectually demanding, sometimes dark humor.

¹³³ “The classic figure of German Kabarett was the jester as the *petit bourgeois*: endearing or vicious, silly or mischievous.”

Contrary to Bakhtin's experience that the nature of laughter never recuperated, we find reinvigorated traces of its old powers in today's jesters of ethno-comedy. The broad appeal and resulting cultural political efficacy of ethno-comedy proceed characteristically from the humor's particularly strong ties to the people and their real-life concerns. Compared to slapstick or situational humor, goofy parodies, jokes based on Schadenfreude, puns, or the fictitious problems of individuals where the content of a joke is only vaguely related to the life of the listeners, Turkish-German ethno-comedy features artists whose main material results from their living representativeness of an on-going coalescence of quite different ethnicities. Especially in its variations more suitable for the masses, the genre may remain a part of the lower stratum of cultural production. As opposed to most other kinds of comedy, however, through its choice of topics, mode of operation, and extensive media coverage unprecedented in the jester tradition this genre possesses an above-average potential to exercise a socially beneficial influence.

Experimenting with old forms of entertainment, updating them thematically and conceptually, and using the stage as a platform (largely) free of domination puts the jesters of ethno-comedy at the forefront of intercultural discourse. As artists of a polycultural background, they blend preceding forms of presentation in hopes of finding the proper realignment to address the cultural change they themselves embody. Bachmann-Medick emphasizes this potential, too, when she says: "Migranten, Künstler und Intellektuelle verkörpern ... Hybridität, insofern sie sich kosmopolitisch zwischen den Kulturen bewegen und ihre mehrfache Zugehörigkeit ... kreativ entfalten können" (200).¹³⁴ Ironically, in addition to their social position, this drive to reinvent and creatively exploit this position is an equally traditional feature of jester-like artists:

¹³⁴ "Migrants, artists, and intellectuals embody ... hybridity as they move cosmopolitically among cultures and express their multiple affiliations creatively." Through Bachmann-Medick's use of the attribute "cosmopolitically" I believe her "zwischen" designates an inclusive "among," not the "between" Adelson objected to in her *Manifesto*.

The European avant-garde, usually at its most radical when its makers were young . . . , has variously fed off popular forms, and mixed the conventional genres. The compulsion to innovate which characterizes the modern is not, even now, merely fashion or a consumption-lead aesthetic. At its best, it is shaped by the artist's insistence on the freedom to demolish worn-out forms so that truth can emerge anew. In what we blithely call our post-modern times, where our technologies urge us to recycle the past, repeat, record and remember, the stimulus to experiment, to break free, is still there. (Appignanesi 251)

This creative impetus to reconfigure a pre-existing form and adapt it to ever-changing circumstances already occasioned the medieval transition from natural to artificial fools and influenced the entire subsequent evolution of cohesive jester manifestations. Likewise, it also inhabits the political satirists of the early 20th century as well as the proceeding genre of stand-up and its most recent specification as ethno-comedy arising in the 21st.

The resulting constructiveness in their discursive participation owes a lot to the ambivalent social position of the artist, who is at once immersed in and separated from society. Similar to the scientist and different from the philosopher only regarding the mode of presentation, the comedians finds themselves examining various aspects of life, reaching out into its totality of potential topics, observing and dissecting anything from a distanced, meta-point of view before reflecting it comically edited on to the audience. Many themes are perennial like relationship problems or misuse of governmental powers; but with each new generation of jesters new socially sensitive issues are subjected to scrutiny. At the core of contemporary ethno-comedy we find questions of cultural hybridity, changing identifications, and the occasional lack of orientation in the current age of globalization.

Akin to Wolzogen's idea of *Kabarett*, the entertainment value in ethno-comedy still facilitates the distribution of critical thought to generate the essence of satire that is well-balanced between *prodesse et delectare*. In their mutual mission to cross-culturally enlighten their audience, the ethno-comedians continue the instructing, informing, and cautioning functions that are familiar from the medieval jesters' positions as courtly advisors, their perception as prophets as well as symbols of evanescence. Through their thematic focus, these ethno-jesters can function as cultural mediators, discuss current developments regarding majority/minority relations, and promote the fluid nature of the current cultural landscape.

Despite the profound changes from a German medieval community to its modern counterpart – the transformation from feudalism to democracy, the significant loss of papal power, scientific and technological advances as well as the now dominant belief in capitalist modes of production already mentioned at the beginning – the position of the artist humorously reflecting society at large either on stage or in writing remains an essential part of German culture. The social type of the jester, located on the brink between in- and outside society, allows us to draw a direct, multifaceted connection from the archetypal figure of the courtly fool past the harlequins and first *Kabarett* artists all the way to stand-up and ethno-comedians. This pattern allows us to interpret the modern-day phenomenon of ethno-comedy as yet another variation within a long tradition of critical entertainment.

Culturally diverse backgrounds then lead to different modern manifestations of jesters around the globe that each apply similar methods of maintaining their status and use it to address potentially delicate topics. While my analysis focuses exclusively on the situation of Turkish-German artists in Germany, the general pattern of an artist's self-empowerment through humor is a global phenomenon. The underlying basics of humorous cultural intervention may well be

abstracted from the case at hand and applied to different constellations in other countries, too (cf. 2.2.6).

The following chapter will take a closer look at these basics and inspect central techniques and conditions of cultural labor through comedy. The first genealogy examined the cultural historical background to contemporary Turkish-German ethno-comedy while the second one traced the sociological generation of professional fools. The final overview reviews some of the means by which these artists enter and influence the cultural political discourse of multi-ethnic pluralism in Germany, before my case studies provide some concrete examples.

4 – Carnavalesque Humor

This chapter deals with humor as a strategy, a shield, and a weapon. As already betrayed by the martial metaphors, the notion of humor in the context of a comedy show is essentially interactive: It obviously involves a joker, but also an audience. Physically, they are connected through the setting, yet the primary field of action lies on the planes of cognition and emotion. It is here that the ethno-comedians intend to strike, where they employ their manipulative tactics, and attack current misconceptions through their weaponized humor.

Despite the aggressive imagery, the overall goals of ethno-comedy are profoundly peaceful. According to some of its most prominent representatives, the genre aims at abating inner- and cross-cultural tensions and creating social understanding and harmony.¹³⁵ To do so, the artists follow a two-step approach. First, they deliberately evoke these precise tensions during their shows and then release them concertedly with the audience through shared laughter. As will be shown, the multi-directionality of this carnivalesque laughter preempts a bias of ridicule and hence produces a sense of equality and community. Secondly, the comedians exploit the audience's friendly predisposition thus created to insert critical reflections on social heterogeneity into their comical routines. As a result, the spectators experience to various degrees emotional and intellectual stimulation tailored to the cultural political agenda of ethno-comedy.

My last genealogical excursion completes my analytical framework and provides the final piece of theoretical background prior to the actual analyses of Ceylan's and Somuncu's work. Chapter two portrayed Turkish-German relations and identified key leverage points for comedic intervention in concepts of identification, the nature of stereotypes, and the technique of role play. Chapter three examined the jester tradition and delineated the social location and functions

¹³⁵ Cf. Serdar Somuncu's *Der Antitürke* (152-153) or Pahlke-Grygier on Kaya Yanar.

of fools. Now we turn to the carnivalesque event and the particular situational conditions in which Turkish-German jesters exercise their waggish craft today.

The first half of this chapter relies mostly on Bakhtin's studies. It uses his insights on medieval carnival to highlight continuations and differences regarding the setup, atmosphere, and modes of interaction during a carnivalesque event (4.1). Bakhtin's model also brings into focus the main rhetorical strategies still at play in ethno-comedy (4.2). The second half of this chapter concerns itself with ethno-comedic twists in Freudian humor theory (4.3) and important psychological effects of laughter (4.4). The latter two sections in particular explain core concepts of ethno-comedic humor and make the genre's political potential plausible. Complementarily, the last part of this chapter contests central doubts often shed on comedy's possibilities for exercising cultural political influence while firmly embedded into Adorno and Horkheimer's *culture industry* (4.5). Before we get to the commodified event of the present day, we trace its origins once more to the Middle Ages to sharpen our understanding of its conceptual foundations.

4.1 The Carnivalesque Event

Through a firm belief in Christian doctrine as well as the general adherence to the *ordo* system, much of medieval life occurred within strictly regulated patterns. Complementing this rather stern and orderly everyday life between faith and feudalism was regular communal excess facilitated by feasts. Bakhtin distinguishes two types of feast, separating the official from the unofficial ones. The former "sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it" (*Rabelais and His World* 9) whereas the latter, subsumed by Bakhtin as *carnival*, "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from established order" (*Rabelais and His World* 10). As a platform for articulating counter-narratives and contesting the established order, ethno-comedy is profoundly carnivalesque.

The carnivalesque event bore three deeply interconnected characteristics: a temporary sense of liberty, the uninhibited articulation of truth, and the imagination of transformations. In many respects, the hallmarks of ethno-comedy remain akin to these properties. The most important one is liberty, granted or taken, as the basis of everything carnivalesque. Bakhtin defines this liberty as “the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (*Rabelais and His World* 10). Johansmeier calls carnival “die große Freizone” (“*the great free zone*”) and emphasizes its literal lawlessness:

Während sieben Wochen im Jahr wird nichts außer Mord und Totschlag verfolgt, alles ist erlaubt – wenn es nicht die persönliche Freiheit des anderen bedroht. Alles ist erlaubt, was gegenüber Institutionen und Körperschaften unbotmäßig und offensiv sein könnte: gegen Kirche, Rat, Adel, Patrizier. Sieben Wochen lang ist auf den Plätzen und Märkten, in den Kirchen und Straßen nicht nur für alle das feudale Recht, sondern in gewissen Grenzen die bürgerliche Gesetzgebung aufgehoben. In diesem Freiraum haben die Groteske, das Fest, der Roraffe oder das Salmenlaufen ihren Ort sowie lästerliche Lieder, freche Sotties, obszöne Aufzüge und gewagte Reden, Farcen und Burlesken. Dies ist die Zeit der Spielleute und Buffonen, der Masken und Mimen. (142)¹³⁶

For seven weeks each year nothing other than murder and manslaughter was prosecuted – unless it threatened the individual freedoms of others. Everything was allowed that could look insubordinate or offensive to people and institutions: to the church, to the council, the nobility, patricians. For seven weeks, not only feudal law but in part even civil law was suspended on public places and markets, in churches, and on the streets. In this area of freedom, the grotesque, the feast, the “Roraffe” and the “Salmenlaufen” have their space,

¹³⁶ Later, Johansmeier even mentions all of three months of games and celebration in the municipal year (144).

*just like blasphemous songs, insolent jibes, obscene attire and daring speeches, farces, and burlesques. This is the time of minstrels and buffoons, of masks and mimes.*¹³⁷

Of course, on a formal level there are nowadays no more juridical exemptions associated with ethno-comedic live shows and the events are much more controlled and managed compared to medieval times.¹³⁸ However, on a content level we still find distinct means of psychological liberation and reorientation. Looking at medieval feasts, Haubl emphasizes their Dionysian quality contrasting the structured daily routine: “Die Gesellschaftsmitglieder genießen nicht das kulturell Höchste, sondern das kulturell Niedrigste: nicht den Geist, sondern den Körper, nicht die Identität, sondern die Identitätsdiffusion, nicht die Ordnung, sondern das Chaos” (127).¹³⁹ Through their continuous rotation of targets, the all-encompassing chaos thus created by contemporary ethno-comedic jokes involves everyone and hence also affords everyone the opportunity to develop a different outlook on identifications of self and others. Collapsing antiquated structures and mannerisms of differentiation can subsequently generate a sense of solidarity. From the ruins of shattered obstructive notions of bigotry, hypocrisy, and latent racism and with the rhetorical guidance of the artist there emerges a chance for the audience to freely cultivate a shared feeling of community.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ The term “Roraffe” refers to gaping monkey heads as ornaments on church organs, possibly originally tied to the bellows (Johannsmeier 105-106). “Salmenlaufen” is a traditional procession (cf. Johannsmeier 114-115).

¹³⁸ Some large-scale events or moments of particular exuberance still warrant a temporal leniency of the law under the same condition of maintaining a largely threat-free environment. Popular examples in Germany include the heyday of carnival in Cologne, motorcades at weddings, or attending late public screenings and not keeping the peace at night during the World Championships of soccer.

¹³⁹ “*Members of the community enjoy not the culturally high but the culturally low: not the spirit but the body, not identity but its diffusion, not order but chaos.*”

¹⁴⁰ Exactly how compelling this effect is certainly varies considerably with each artist and especially the mode of experience. Whereas the festive character of carnival is still true for contemporary live shows, their TV broadcasts come with obvious limitations in this regard. While experiencing the sensation of an exceptional time definitely applies to the live act, television, and even more so the internet, almost completely suspend this sense of witnessing something extraordinary in the viewer at home. At the same time, however, the general gaiety of the event as well as its thought-provoking content still protrude into the living room where they generate at least a chance for an unprecedented level of influence for today’s jesters.

The second property Bakhtin attributes to the carnivalesque event is truth in the sense of candor. Today, artistic freedom and freedom of expression paired with the audience's implicit expectation from jesters to be offensive, untamed, and radical in their display still afford the artists a unique opportunity to speak freely with limited fear of public outrage. The fool's license becomes all the more valuable in the context of subject matters that are as emotionally loaded as the experience of ethnic discrimination. The license still frees its holders from the social obligation to mince words and permits the public exposure of any social, cultural, or political deficiencies. Accordingly, comedians often deliver their licensed social criticism in comical forms of jokes, politically incorrect obscenities, deliberate inversions of accepted patterns, and frequently provocative humor.¹⁴¹

With its topical focus on questions surrounding ethnic identifications, the scope of subjects in ethno-comedy is not only far more shaped and distilled than the carnival of old; it also bears a much stronger contemporary relevance in its heightened ambition to extend its influence outside its own temporal and spatial boundaries. Ethno-comedy addresses many problematic issues that arise in daily interaction and so relocates factual tensions into a carnivalesque frame of comedic art where they can be openly subjected to humorous reflection. The new boundaries of these extended liberties regarding the choice of topics and their portrayal depend much on the perception of each artist. Like Yanar, Ceylan consciously stays away from Islam as a source for critical jokes (see 5.3.1); Somuncu does not (see 6.2.4). The desire to deconstruct what causes actual social tensions between ethnicities – discrimination, small-mindedness, prejudice – and to further mutual understanding in everyday life instead is at the heart of ethno-comedy.

¹⁴¹ Regarding the question to what extent this sense of liberty also applies to members of the audience, see 4.1.2.

Alongside the freedom to criticize we find its constructive complement of creative liberty which already heralds the third main property of the carnivalesque event. Repeatedly, Bakhtin stresses the fundamental function of medieval carnival “to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement” (*Rabelais and His World* 34). The comparative humor of ethno-comedy thrives on constructive social criticism. The very essence of the genre is the freedom to scrutinize the existing state of affairs, but at once also to outline or at least imply possible alternatives.

Particularly in today’s times of ubiquitous political correctness, the candid presentation of counter-narratives to the established official “tru-isms” might create an emotional and cognitive dissonance in the audience that demands conscious attention. Reflecting on the notion of tolerance, Serdar Somuncu, for instance, comments in one of his routines on the controversy regarding the desire of the organization Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği (DITIB)¹⁴² to build a huge mosque in Cologne:

Die Türken, die DITIB – das ist eine halbseidene Organisation – wollen in Köln eine Moschee bauen. 8.000qm oder 80.000. Und die Kölner Gutmenschen demonstrieren gegen die Nazis. Die Nazis wollen die Moschee natürlich nicht: [*primitive voice*] “Wir wollen keine Moschee!” Und die Gutmenschen sagen: [*high-pitched*] “Blablabla!” Weil sie gegen Nazis sind, sind sie indirekt für die Moschee, ohne darüber nachzudenken, ob man ne Moschee braucht. Wenn man mich fragen würde, wär die Antwort leicht: NEIN! Ich brauch zum beten keine 8,000qm Moschee! Ich brauch zum vögeln auch keine 80qm Muschi! Da reicht ne Idee. Oder ein Teppich... (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 41)

¹⁴² The “Turkish-Islamic Union of the Academy for Religion” is located in Cologne, an institution of the Turkish government, of Sunni faith, and in charge of religious care, education, and instruction, the building and maintenance of places of prayer and education, the instruction of lay preachers, the organization of social and cultural activities and language courses as well as professional education for Turkish Muslims living in Germany (“DITIB”).

The Turks, the DITIB – that’s a shady organization – want to build a mosque in Cologne. 8,000sqm or 80,000. And the do-gooders of Cologne protest against the Nazis. Of course, the Nazis don’t want the mosque: [primitive voice] “We don’t want a mosque!” And the do-gooders say: [high-pitched voice] “Blablabla!” Because they are against Nazis they are indirectly in favor of the mosque, without asking themselves whether or not the mosque is needed. If you asked me the answer would be easy: NO! I don’t need an 8,000sqm mosque to pray! Just like I don’t need an 80sqm pussy to fuck! The idea is all it takes. Or a rug...

Somuncu introduces this by stating that sometimes tolerance also means differentiated intolerance (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 40). His subsequent reflection exemplifies this unusual point of view and shows how an exaggerated sense of tolerance fosters the cultural self-abandonment of a city. In contrast to nonreflective acceptance, tolerance presupposes a stable basis that allows for reasonable concessions but also the possibility of rejection. In the historically handicapped environment of Germany the latter is still more demanding to communicate, even in light of the flagrant immodesty displayed by DITIB’s claim for a deliberately ostentatious mosque. The potential Nazi parallel hence exacerbates the emotional challenge for historically aware Germans even further. Despite its parodist features, Somuncu’s blunt but comprehensible portrayal of ignorant attitudes on both German and Turkish sides creates doubts regarding conventional modes of thinking, or sometimes lack thereof. As a result, Somuncu’s audience needs to integrate his counter-rationale and possibly even develop alternative ways of argument.

In this moment of reorientation we find the third main feature of the carnivalesque event which is imagined transformation. Bakhtin describes carnival as “the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal” (*Rabelais and His World* 10). With its postcolonial endeavor to renegotiate contested majority/minority relations, ethno-comedy is all about “becoming, change, and renewal.”¹⁴³ In the course of increasing multiculturalism, the German demographic landscape is in a state of continuous change, becoming ever more diverse. Much of the comedians’ material consists in highlighting the inadequacy of old-fashioned mentalities, for instance towards migration, or nonreflective overcompensations as pilloried by Somuncu. The vast degree of cultural change that already occurred over the past decades and will keep happening in the immediate vicinity of almost every single citizen lends this comedic site its cultural political significance. Fostering an open-minded sense of community, “renewal” then is not the confirmation and reassurance of the past but a reassessment of the present and an attempt to realign people’s perceptions in accordance with an increasingly pluralist society. “This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 34).

4.1.1 Setting

In the Middle Ages, carnivalesque events were commonly held on the marketplace. Obviously, the specific place of performance changed significantly over the years but a number of vital parallels between the medieval market and a modern venue still exist. In constant reference to the medieval pattern as outlined by Bakhtin, the following focuses on ontological, structural, and visual aspects regarding the space of a contemporary ethno-comedic performance.

¹⁴³ Again, the emotional feast experience is reserved mainly for the live show. However, the particular perspective on time as flux may still be conveyed as a general idea to the home viewer as well.

Bakhtin describes the nature of the medieval location in the following way: “The marketplace of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was a world in itself, a world which was one; ... The marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 153-154). Key here is the ontological notion of extraterritoriality. Carnavalesque events nowadays have long been turned into completely commercialized businesses; despite the now common formalities like the requirement to purchase tickets, the presence of security personnel, on- and off-site marketing like ads, posters, and the sale of merchandise, possible media attendance, and the enabling management machinery working tirelessly in the background – during the event itself a certain temporary sense of extraterritoriality still unfolds.

The already mentioned situational properties of expanded liberties, the emphasis on a truthful demeanor, and the outlined transformations of a society in flux help to generate this feeling of extraterritoriality. In addition, we also find frequent fluctuations between fact and fiction within the artists’ material. Whether or not, for instance, a self-referential anecdote by Ceylan or Somuncu stretches the truth depends on each viewer’s interpretation. After all, although the contents of their programs tend to exhibit strong relations to reality, the events as such remain firmly rooted within the realm of art, rendering their contents innately ambiguous and therefore thought-provoking. Bakhtin stresses this equivocation as well: “fools ... stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar mid-zone as it were” (*Rabelais and His World* 7). Outside the ordinary and inside its mirror image, isolated from but in touch with everyday reality, ethno-comedy is located on an ambivalent threshold, an extraterritorial space with its own freedoms and challenges.

In terms of structural features of the carnivalesque event, the formal, physical separation of artist and audience has increased since the Middle Ages. At least for the case of Rabelais's depictions, Bakhtin insists that medieval "carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (*Rabelais and His World* 7).¹⁴⁴ At any ethno-comedic event today we still find a clear separation of spheres between artist and audience, i.e. stage and house.

Significantly, however, only an initial split allows for its subsequent transgression. Without establishing these boundaries in the first place, they could not be crossed later in a symbolic act. Consequently, it is crucial for today's artists to adhere to the common forms at first in order to pointedly break these norms later. Göktürk points to the same idea when she says that "it is important to remember that revolution and control, anarchy and containment, inclusion and exclusion are always closely interrelated in comedy. There can be no transgression without the knowledge about the norm" ("Strangers in Disguise" 104). Interestingly, the symbolism inherent in this transgression points precisely to the sentiment underlying Bakhtin's observation on carnival: It suspends the formal distinction and visualizes how artist and audience despite their separate roles remain parts of the same society, afflicted by the same cultural developments, and over the course of the evening exposed respectively to the same humor (see 4.3).

Finally, breaking these boundaries becomes all the easier through an important visual standard, the mono-dimensional backdrop.¹⁴⁵ The sense of extraterritoriality is established primarily by the act of the artist and the event as a whole; it does not depend on elaborate signifiers to generate an alienating illusion like classical theater or opera. True to this style of

¹⁴⁴ Outside of Rabelais' novels, the specific attire of jesters clearly distinguished the fools from any other group in the medieval *ordo*; in fact, the visual identification was mandatory for most fools which facilitated the development of their typical dress in the first place.

¹⁴⁵ By mono-dimensional I mean devoid of complex meaning. Somuncu occasionally performs in front of nothing but a closed curtain. In stadiums, Ceylan uses technologically advanced décor like screens and pyro-technique to provide visual support for his atmosphere of spectacle but with no significance for the show's content (see 5.1.2).

visual simplicity, the performances of Ceylan and Somuncu but also those of most other current artists feature but a few background decorations, hardly any props, maybe some music either live or recorded. What little the artist needs is readily available on stage and clearly visible to anyone (cf. Pschibl 57), which creates a kind of sneak preview into the upcoming show. Moreover, it generates an experience similar to Brechtian theater when the audience watches the comedian using different props to embody different stage persona without any pretense of full artistic immersion into any one character. Without impeding the audience from immersing itself in the carnivalesque atmosphere, the simplicity of the setting minimizes the potential for distraction, allows for an exclusive focus on the artist's performance, and thus facilitates the comprehensibility of the act.

This simplicity of visual style typically extends to the artists, too, whose outfits tend to be governed by casual modesty as well.¹⁴⁶ What Pschibl pointed out for *Kabarett* certainly holds true for ethno-comedy as well regardless of the specific artistic approach: The performances stand and fall with the artists' success to suspend the formal distinctions and convey the idea that they are one among equals (313). Given the overall goals of the genre – to create social understanding and harmony – an ordinary, down to earth look could actually prove favorable when trying not to repel audience members through an overly posh appearance. Moreover, as a fashion statement the tendency towards the simple but straightforward might help to convey the desired image of frankness and honesty. In order to level with the audience, the artists benefit from avoiding all unnecessary invisible boundaries through a hierarchical mistake in attire.

¹⁴⁶ The more an artist's personal preference regarding the nature of the show leans towards a *Kabarett* approach, the more some people are inclined to dress up and perform in collared shirts or even a smart casual suit. Ceylan and Yanar with their comedic approach typically wear jeans and a t-shirt whereas Somuncu typically prefers polo.

4.1.2 Audience

This section looks at the typical composition of a contemporary ethno-comedy audience, the usual atmosphere at an event, and common artist/audience interaction. The cultural hybridity of the Turkish-German artist typically attracts a correspondingly diverse audience, predominantly of German and Turkish origin but certainly of other ethnicities, too. Unfortunately, there are no statistical averages available as to the ethnic backgrounds of a standard audience at a live performance of ethno-comedy, let alone of respective television quotas. However, during their shows, Somuncu, Ceylan, and others frequently address specific parts of their audience where the reactions disclose an approximate percentage of self-identifying Turks and other present ethnicities. According to these impressions gathered from filmed performances and shows I attended personally, the diversity level seems to equal the national demographic with about 20% of migrant background gathering at a live event which could indicate the genre's cultural significance in society as a whole.

During the carnivalesque event of the Middle Ages the marketplace venue, according to Bakhtin, "always remained 'with the people'" (*Rabelais and His World* 153-154), a sentiment equally true for today's ethno-comedy. Despite the exclusive, jester-like liberties enjoyed by the contemporary artists, there may be a spatial but no hierarchical distinction between them, the audience, or among its members. To the greatest extent, the carnivalesque event remains free of conventional domination. In contrast to separating everyday categorizations based on income, ethnicity, gender or religion this event acknowledges difference but employs several means to establish an overarching sense of camaraderie. Bakhtin describes the same function when he ascribes a powerful, socially connective effect to the carnivalesque event:

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. ... [A]ll were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. (*Rabelais and His World* 10)

In a culturally diverse society, ethnicity is definitely a distinguishing factor, albeit officially not endowed with hierarchical implications. At a live performance of ethno-comedy, this perceived distance between ethnicities is suspended both literally and figuratively: one audience consisting of many different people, all assembled by the unifying interest in ridiculing their differences and laughing their everyday ramifications out of the bar. The carnivalesque atmosphere of freedom helps to generate a first sense of familiarity among its participants which provides a fruitful basis for accomplishing the ethno-comedians' goal of renegotiating majority/minority relations.

From the audience's perspective, the extended liberties of the carnivalesque become most obvious in its interaction with the artist. The absolute numbers of the audience may vary considerably, from the few hundreds commonly found in more intellectually oriented *Kabarett* style places to the tens of thousands crammed into entire soccer stadiums to attend the latest mass media spectacle for the broad mainstream. In any case, audience participation is an integral part of every performance.

There are two types of audience interaction, a basic and a more exceptional one. Its basic involvement affords the audience an opportunity to communicate in conventional forms with the artist directly and frankly as it gets to provide immediate feedback by means of laughter and applause, silence or – chiefly in *Kabarett*¹⁴⁷ – even complaints. By their mere presence, the

¹⁴⁷ In a genuine *Kabarett* show the means of immediate audience response include deliberate heckling of the artist and vice versa. At present, this particular phenomenon of accepted mutual harassment is not yet established in ethno-comedy. So far, the accepted right to ridicule or even offend remains solely with the artist.

audience already contributes to the very formation of a show. In her performance studies, Fischer-Lichte formulates the audience's role like this:

Die Zuschauer werden als Mitspieler begriffen, welche die Aufführung durch ihre Teilnahme am Spiel, d.h. ihre physische Präsenz, ihre Wahrnehmung, ihre Reaktionen mit hervorbringen. Die Aufführung entsteht als Resultat der Interaktion zwischen Darstellern und Zuschauern. ... Das heißt, die Aufführung ereignet sich *zwischen* Akteuren und Zuschauern, wird von ihnen gemeinsam hervorgebracht. (47 original emphasis)

The audience is perceived as fellow players who help generate the performance through partaking in the play, i.e. through their physical presence, their perception, and their reactions. The performance is the result of this interaction between artists and spectators. ... This means that the performance emerges between artists and spectators, it is generated concertedly by both.

The spectators' role as (possible) fellow players becomes all the more prominent in a second, more exceptional variety of interaction. The moments, when the structural barriers of stage and house are transgressed constitute another important component in the creation of the distinctive, extraterritorial sensation at a carnivalesque event. Fischer-Lichte refers to this as the "feedback-Schleife:"

Was immer die Akteure tun, es hat Auswirkungen auf die Akteure und die anderen Zuschauer. In diesem Sinne lässt sich behaupten, daß die Aufführung von einer selbstbezüglichen und sich permanent verändernden *feedback*-Schleife hervorgebracht und gesteuert wird. Daher ist ihr Ablauf auch nicht vollständig planbar und vorhersagbar. (59)

Whatever the actors do, it has an effect on other actors and other viewers, too. In this sense, we can say that a performance is generated and controlled by a continually mutating feedback-loop. For that reason, its course is never fully plannable and predictable.

Instead of entirely separate spheres we find an often dialogic situation in which the artist addresses the audience openly, the audience responds, and the artist even incorporates some of the reactions into the remainder of the show. This transgression of spheres is another crucial step in the establishment of a comparatively intimate atmosphere at an official happening.

This co-creative element has immediate implications for the final form of any act. The active involvement of audience members, according to Pschibl, renders each event unique as it prompts improvised dialogues, individual adaptations to present conditions, and unscripted comments throughout the show (50-51). Somuncu, who perceives himself predominantly as an actor (see 6.1.1), summarizes his experience like this:

Es handelt sich bei jeder Aufführung um ein Unikat, an jedem Abend herrscht sozusagen Premierenatmosphäre. ... Auch die Möglichkeit, mit Worten derart zu illustrieren, ohne dabei mit Bühnenbild und Requisiten zu arbeiten, ist eine Ausnahme im Theater. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 113)

Each performance is unique, every night we have the atmosphere of a premiere. ... The possibility to illustrate so fully just by means of words, to work without décor or props, is an exception in theater.

The audience lends an element of uncertainty to each performance which the artist can use to establish a more personal, carnivalesque connection with it. As opposed to regular theater performances, this emphasis on immediate audience involvement has a long tradition in *Kabarett* and is also deeply ingrained in the situational frame of ethno-comedy.

A little later, Somuncu adds yet other elements of instability to this frame when he recalls past performances and regrets:

... dass die Erfahrungen, die die Zuschauer in den unterschiedlichen Städten machen, abhängig sind von meiner Tagesform oder den äußeren Umständen. Manchmal würde ich gern die beste Vorstellung konservieren und die dann auf Knopfdruck immer wieder abrufen. Dann wäre die Angelegenheit aber sicher um einiges *unpersönlicher*. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 194 my emphasis)

... *that the viewers' experiences in the different cities depend on my form on the day or on external circumstances. Sometimes, I'd like to preserve the best performance and repeat it at the push of a button. It would then be a lot less personal, however.*

Although the unpredictability of each event clearly bears its performative risks, too, it also offers a space to create the intimacy typical of the carnivalesque experience for both artist and audience. Somuncu, for instance, often welcomes people with a handshake. Ceylan engages his audience in brief exchanges as well, learns viewers' names, and recurs to them throughout a show.

The unique event character produced by these interactions poses a minor problem of unpredictability not only to the artist but also to the analyst. I agree with El Hissy, however, that the degree of variation in program-based productions remains limited enough to create

distinctiveness but not overthrow the main script (169). Spontaneous interaction is hence a mostly welcome way of involvement for the audience and a tolerable factor of uncertainty for the theorist.

Because the audience usually knows about these particular conventions of the ethno-comedic event, it arrives with a primed mindset, expects and partakes in these common forms of interaction. This advance calibration works as both an advantage and disadvantage for the artists. The comedic frame signifies entertainment, a good time, and most people enter the venue already in high spirits. The very nature of the event wins half the battle for artists striving to establish an atmosphere beneficial to an amusing program. Carrell confirms that, according to Freud, “the most favorable condition of the production of comical pleasure is a generally cheerful mood in which one is ‘inclined to laugh.’ A similarly favorable effect is produced by an expectation of the comic, by being attuned to comic pleasure” (304). The difficulty arising from a primed audience mindset is then to implement a serious thought into a fundamentally comical context without destroying its entertaining essence. Walking the tightrope of having to reconcile a serious ambition with a silly situation is one of the most difficult tasks of any ethno-comedian.

Bakhtin referred to medieval carnivalesque events as little “islands of time” (*Rabelais and His World* 90). The most fundamental principle of their extraterritorial status, liberty, afforded the opportunity to openly articulate oneself and imagine alternative designs of being. In contemporary Germany, many ethnic minorities struggle for equal participation in the creation of German culture and social life, but often find themselves stuck in a peripheral position determined by prejudiced attitudes of the heteronomous majority society. The carnivalesque event of ethno-comedy grants a space of special conditions from which hybrid artists can outline alternative states of coexistence and communicate them to a broad public. Such a space is as rare as it may be influential. In 2010, political scientist Hamed Abdel-Samad looked at Europe in

general and Germany in particular and faulted: “Es fehlt eine Atmosphäre, in der ehrliche Kritik zulässig ist und die frei ist von Stimmungsmache, Apologetik und Überempfindlichkeit” (103).¹⁴⁸

In 2000, on tour with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (1925) in Liechtenstein, Somuncu noticed:

Die Zuschauer sind offen, sowohl für die witzigen Seiten meines Vortrags, aber auch für die ernstesten und direktesten Passagen. Sie scheinen zu erkennen, dass in der unvoreingenommenen Annäherung an die Materie ein wesentlicher Vorteil verborgen ist. ... Obwohl wir mitten in Europa sind, fühle ich mich plötzlich wie auf einer einsamen, wertneutralen Insel, auf der es besser als anderswo möglich ist, seine Meinung zu sagen, ohne dabei in den Sog einer verfänglichen Geschichtsbetrachtung zu geraten. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 254-255)

The viewers have an open mind for the funny parts of my presentation as well as for the serious and direct passages. They seem to realize that an unbiased approach to the material yields significant advantages. ... Even though we are in the middle of Europe, I suddenly feel as if on a lonely, neutral island where it is much more possible than elsewhere to state one’s opinion without getting caught up in the maelstrom of tricky interpretations of history.

On stage, Somuncu found what Abdel-Samad still had been looking for ten years later, and what he keeps exploiting in his ethno-comedic performances until today: the carnivalesque liberty of free political expression afforded by the rhetoric of humor.

¹⁴⁸ “We lack an atmosphere where honest criticism is acceptable and that is free from cheap propaganda, apologetics, and hypersensitivity.”

4.2 Rhetorical Strategies

From carnivalesque extraterritoriality proceeds the possibility to merge humorous entertainment with socio-critical commentary. While the comedic frame of the event and the specific role as jester already provide the artists with an extended freedom of expression, there are several tactics at work in ethno-comedy to maintain and further expand these liberties. Due to the mono-dimensional backdrop, an ethno-comedic performance pivots mostly on the artist's use of body and language, which is why the vast majority of these tactics are rhetorical. Ranging from the plain choice of words to coloring stylistic devices, to the tone of voice and body posture, every perceptible thing that somehow contributes to the creation or interpretation of meaning in a performance falls into this category of rhetoric.

This section looks at four key tactics most frequently found in an ethno-comedian's rhetorical arsenal. The most obvious one is the use of irony to protect the speaker and attack a target indirectly. A less obvious one is the purposeful deployment of foul language, a deliberate transferal of unofficial speech into an official context which can convey an air of frankness and allow for more straightforward criticism. Since Turkish-German ethno-comedians mock predominantly Turks and Germans, most jokes target at least parts of the audience which makes it imperative to maintain an amiable atmosphere. In addition to the bonding effect of shared unofficial language, the third important strategy to propitiate the audience is the careful balancing of mockery with praise. Finally, time-honored techniques of the grotesque, including the characteristically carnivalesque tactics of humorous exaggeration and profanation, conclude this overview.

4.2.1 Irony

The metaphorical mirror of the jester just like the satire of political *Kabarett* and ethno-comedy all feed on the immediate concerns of their social environment, yet each portrays its critical positions primarily through the distorted lens of parody. When trying to convey a joke and a message at the same time, success or failure depend on a comprehensible presentation by the artist and the apprehension of the audience. Key among satire and parody as ethno-comedy's principal modes of presentation is the ambivalent element of irony. While it protects delicate utterances, it sometimes troubles said apprehension.

Bakhtin refers to irony and sarcasm as “cold humor” and therefore as opposed to actual hilarity and the true spirit of carnival (*Rabelais and His World* 38). When he stresses “that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times” (*Rabelais and His World* 11), it becomes obvious that his perspective is tied exclusively to his own socio-cultural context. He fails to recognize irony's power for implication and perceives it instead as pure derision without any productive value. Ironically, his criticism that “bare negation is completely alien to folk culture” (*Rabelais and His World* 38) remains completely accurate. For instance, if we look at the ironic subversion of ethnic stereotypes in ethno-comedy, we find it is far from bare negation through its indirect but very much constructive portrayal of its insinuated opposite.

The possibility of the audience missing an implication due to the ambiguity of any indirect statement is an ever-present risk for all comedians. Schrodts, however, provides us with a convincing theory as to why this risk is negligible. He assumes a common “competency for irony” in most adults that, based on indispensable contextual knowledge, facilitates the recognition of ironic statements (11). Like Ritter (74), he suggests that their function is to share opinions without stating them directly (14). If successful, the opinion is mutual, affirmed through

laughter, and a sense of community established with the listener. Accordingly, the audience's primed mind is also crucial for recreating hidden meanings.¹⁴⁹

Understandably, irony is one of the central tools in any jester's arsenal since it provides funny effects as well as an additional safety net. Whereas most ironic formulations are merely comparatively clever forms of humorous speech, sometimes, despite their fool's license, artists only dare present particularly provocative statements in these indirect expressions. After all, the audience may expect challenging ideas, offensive language, and the occasional insult; but within the collective creation of a successful show there is still a limit as to how much abuse it will take.

4.2.2 Foul Language

In close proximity to indirect obscenities and abuse lies the field of foul language.¹⁵⁰ Its subliminal effects are among the most powerful and ancient constituents in the creation of Bakhtin's carnivalesque "atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity" (*Rabelais and His World* 153). As another distinct rhetorical device its application is far from arbitrary and supports all three of these characteristics.

As outlined before, the specific freedom of carnival affords the artists an opportunity to speak frankly. With characteristic candor they address social discrepancies directly and in the process do not shy away from occasional crudity. The constraints of political correctness usually displayed in conventional discourse are cast off, diminishing the respective degree of commonly

¹⁴⁹ There are extreme differences as to which circumstances possess the power to prime, however. Attending a show certainly qualifies; yet when the same artist posts a statement online which is then read, for instance, on a home computer, some people lack the necessary insight to recognize possible irony. Somuncu regrets this when he says: "Es ist erschreckend, wenn ich zum Beispiel auf meiner Facebook-Seite eindeutig ironische Nachrichten poste, gibt es trotzdem viele Leute, die das nicht erkennen"; "*It's scary, when I post clearly ironic statements on facebook, many people just don't get it*" (Buhre). Clearly, Schrod's common competency for irony works for most but not for all.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Bakhtin: "Profanities and oaths (*jurons*) are in many ways similar to abusive language. They, too, invaded billingsgate speech. ... Profanities and oaths were not initially related to laughter, but they were excluded from the sphere of official speech because they broke its norms; they were therefore transferred to the familiar sphere of the marketplace. Here in the carnival atmosphere they acquired the nature of laughter and became ambivalent" (*Rabelais and His World* 17).

constraining artificiality.¹⁵¹ Bakhtin highlights the rhetorical potential of this linguistic emancipation and elaborates on its particular relevance for the artist/audience relationship:

Abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties are the unofficial elements of speech. They were and are still conceived as breaches of the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability. These elements of freedom, if present in sufficient numbers and with precise intention exercise a strong influence on the entire content of speech, transferring it to another sphere beyond the limits of conventional language. Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idiom, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally. The marketplace crowd was such a collectivity, especially the festive, carnivalesque crowd at the fair. (*Rabelais and His World* 187-188)

Profanities manifest a freedom of speech that enables the audience to read a high degree of straightforward honesty into the words of the artist. Moreover, they help accomplish the desirable effect of creating a sense of group intimacy between audience and artist. Like the show's dialogical layout described earlier by Fischer-Lichte, this choice of language further supports the illusion of communicating on a quite intimate level and again strengthens the impression of an extraterritorial experience out of the usual.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Bakhtin: "Every age has its own norms of official speech and propriety. And every age has its own type of words and expressions that are given as a signal to speak freely, to call things by their own names, without any mental restrictions and euphemisms" (*Rabelais and His World* 188).

The result is a subtle but distinctive bonding effect between the artist, the audience, and among its members, or at least a heightened sense of sympathy even when in front of a TV set. Through “the use of these colloquialisms . . . all hierarchic barriers between men were lifted and a true familiar contact was established” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 188). Despite all the possible provocation and abuse, this natural style of delivery – even in its seemingly counter-productive form of an insult – still charms the audience and makes it susceptible to the artist’s social criticism.¹⁵²

4.2.3 Praise and Mockery

Ethno-comedy’s subject of desires and fears regarding ethnic identifications, its main access points through clichés and prejudice, and the old comedic tendency to exaggerate almost everything create a delicate mix with a very fine line between a good jest and plain personal offense. Humor at the edge certainly pushes the emotional boundaries of the individual and sometimes crosses them. To keep the audience entertained the comedians follow a tripartite strategy.

The most obvious and general balance to preserve is between offensive and non-offensive humor. Not every joke needs to attack parts of the audience; some, for instance, only turn against the comedian and thus create a temporary relief for the viewers. For another, the artists strive to maintain a careful balance of mockery between targeted groups. A clear bias or even isolation was unacceptable since they would violate the carnivalesque maxim of perceived equality.

¹⁵² The same mechanism holds true when participants of official political discourse resort publicly to billingsgate speech. Joschka Fischer commented in 1984 on the decision of former Vice President of the Bundestag, Richard Stücklen, to exclude Jürgen Reents from a meeting for churlishness, by saying: “Mit Verlaub, Herr Präsident, Sie sind ein Arschloch” (“Politik, wie Klein Moritz sie sich vorstellt...”); “*With all due respect, Mister President, you’re an asshole.*” In contrast to his colleague with his comparably minor misconduct, Fischer was not excluded, and his rude but authentic outburst earned him a reputation as a courageous, honest speaker. For the exact same reason, Donald Trump currently ranks first among the Republican candidates for U.S. elections in 2016. His sexist and racist remarks certainly discredit him in the eyes of many, but the current majority of conservative voters value their unquestionable candor over their questionable content (Frankovic).

Finally, to further appease the audience the comedians add yet one more set of pans to the scale. Their balance consists not only of regularly alternating the line of ridicule but also praising each present group alike. The more praise any one group receives, the more abuse it will accept as well.

This rhetorical strategy enters a volatile state when combined with irony, i.e. not all criticism is serious but not all praise may be sincere either. It is thus necessary to distinguish between the positive and negative varieties of each. This ambivalence becomes particularly obvious in Bakhtin's notion of "praise-abuse:"

The phenomenon of praise-abuse ... has an important theoretical, historical, and literary meaning. Positive and negative elements are, of course, inherent in every word of a living speech. There are no indifferent, neutral words; there can only be artificially neutralized words. In most ancient forms of speech the merging of praise and abuse, that is, a duality of tone, is characteristic. In the subsequent development this duality of tone subsists; it acquires a new meaning in the nonofficial, familiar, and humorous popular spheres. Thanks to the duality of tone, the laughing people, who were not in the least concerned with the stabilization of the existing order and of the prevailing picture of the world (the official truth), could grasp the world of becoming as a whole. They could thus conceive the gay relativity of the limited class theories and the constant unfinished character of the world.

(Rabelais and His World 432)

For Bakhtin, the positive and negative implications of a word are inextricably entwined, which is why highlighting one can always entail an indirect reference to its opposite as well, depending on tone. Much of its specific perception then depends on the way each individual audience member

interprets this ambiguous duality. In this context, Bakhtin not only seems to assume a quality similar to Schrodts competence for irony at least in the laughing people, he even appreciates it.

The potential for deliberate inversion is a key idea in any carnivalesque event. Just as the medieval jester rose and superseded the king during carnival, conversely everything high needed to fall. Highlighting the connection of high and low as two sides of the same coin and their often arbitrary separation, Bakhtin emphasizes the grounding quality of carnival. The temporary suspension of these distinctions creates a particular sense of realism, the essential principle of which is “degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body” (*Rabelais and His World* 19). Through degrading praise and mockery it becomes possible for ethno-comedy to expose the relativity of everything, including its central notions of foreignness, identity, or a supposed *Leitkultur* (“guiding culture”).

4.2.4 The Grotesque

From the Middle Ages to today, the carnivalesque event is interspersed with elements of the grotesque due to its tremendous versatility. The grotesque bears a greatly ambivalent potential for uplifting humor and lowering degradation but also for metaphors of transformation. Prior to examining all three of these in particular, a brief look at its etymological origin already helps to establish a general first understanding of the concept.

The term “grotesque” was coined in the sixteenth century in reference to newly discovered ornamental cave paintings of antiquity.¹⁵³ In the visual arts, the subsequently developing grotesque style portrayed paradisiacal scenes with a twist, featuring a vast array of

¹⁵³ The Oxford English Dictionary lists mid 16th century for the noun, Merriam-Webster 1603 for the first adjectival use. Originating from “Middle French, from Old Italian (*pittura*) *grottesca*, literally, cave painting, feminine of *grottesco* of a cave, from *grotto*” (“Grotesque”).

fantastical beings, often mythical hybrids composed across species including man and animal. On the one hand, these strange sculptures and paintings defied the common order of things and as such evoked a sense of exotic curiosity in the beholder. On the other, along with their intriguing qualities these ambiguous amalgamations typically possessed repulsive or threatening features as well, thus occupying a liminal space between the appealing and the appalling. This ambivalence of the grotesque, its simultaneous embodiment of the strange and the familiar granted the concept a lasting popularity.

Preceding its terminological qualification we find very similar elements across the medieval arts which warrant this label retrospectively. Although artists had no explicit knowledge of the term, its general idea was long familiar already and often implemented – in various degrees of subtlety – in depictions of public bouts and banquetry or drolleries in book illustrations and architectural ornaments. Bizarre creatures of a disturbing but also fascinating nature were a common sight in medieval travel literature as well. The peculiar fish-man encountered in *The Voyage of Saint Brendan* (~1120) depicted in Image 8, or the bird people battled in *Herzog Ernst* (~1180) are popular examples.

Clearly, the concept of intriguing ambiguous creatures predestined the grotesque as a key notion for today’s hybrid ethno-comedians. Reflecting on his own background, Somuncu once perceived himself as an indefinite blend of supposedly separate spheres:



Image 8: Fish-Man hybrid in “The Voyage of St. Brendan.” Short, Ian and Merrilees, Brian, eds. *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*. Web. 2 August 2014. <<http://saintbrendan.d-t-x.com/pages/Bestiaire/bestiaire05.html>>. (Public Domain)

Ich bin also anscheinend ein Mischwesen, ein Mutant. Lange Zeit bereitete mir diese Erkenntnis Schwierigkeiten. Hin- und hergerissen zwischen der Zugehörigkeit zu den Kulturen entschied ich mich mal für die eine, mal für die andere Seite. Eine Ambivalenz, die sich auf die Auswahl meiner Rollen auswirkte. Immer spielte ich zerrissene Persönlichkeiten: Kafkas Affen Rotpeter, der die Gratwanderung zwischen Mensch und Tier versucht; E. A. Poes William Wilson, der sich mit seinem eigenen Spiegelbild duelliert. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 101)

So, it appears I am a hybrid creature, a mutant. This realization troubled me for a long time. Torn back and forth between affiliations to these cultures, I sometimes opted for one, sometimes for the other. An ambivalence that affected my choice of stage characters. I always played torn personalities: Kafka's ape Red Peter, who tries the balancing act between man and beast; E. A. Poe's William Wilson, who duels his own mirror image.

During his early days in theater, it seems Somuncu deliberately transferred his struggle for identification onto the stage where he found the means to explore and express his inner fragmentation through performative art. Especially his role in Kafka and his subsequent turn to ethno-comedy anticipate Göktürk's contemplation: "Like the ape Rotpeter, the clever migrants know that they are always already performers, so why not turn it into a strength, play the perfect monkey and address the Academy" ("Strangers in Disguise" 122).

Somuncu developed this strength and in the process transcended the conceptual foundations of his initial strife. Over the course of his self-empowerment on stage, his perspective shifted: "Ich bin zwar auch Türke, aber was heißt das schon. In erster Linie bin ich

Mensch” (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 100).¹⁵⁴ This moment of clarity constitutes a base for his cultural politics of propagating transnational humanism through comedy, erode outdated concepts of nationhood, and promote social reorientation towards the transcultural instead. In his programs, Somuncu now offers his audience the opportunity to reevaluate itself in confrontation with his art (see 6.1.2).

Today, the grotesque still features in the routines of most ethno-comedians, predominantly as a source for humorous and/or degrading rhetoric. Like the linguistic ambiguity of praise-abuse, the visual ambivalence in images of grotesque hybridity creates significant overlap between humor and abjection, especially when the derision of one serves the amusement of another. According to Bakhtin, “the grotesque concept of the body forms the basis of abuses, oaths, and curses” (*Rabelais and His World* 27) but also of comically distorted depictions. To the artists’ advantage, even in a culturally diverse audience they can hence draw on universally accepted forms of obscenities to produce the same outcome.

The half humoristic, half degrading value of the grotesque becomes particularly apparent, for instance, when portrayals of genuine humans still emphasize their animalistic roots. In the case of Renaissance literature, Bakhtin underlines the carnivalesque preoccupation with the carnal, the primitive, and the primal. He shows how the grotesque centers on the corporeal, on bodily functions and limits. “The grotesque ... is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body’s confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside” (*Rabelais and His World* 316-317). Grotesque depictions will feature elongated noses, strikingly protuberant genitalia, bulging eyes, big ears and bellies. Much and more enters or leaves gasping

¹⁵⁴ “I’m a Turk, too, but that doesn’t mean much. First and foremost, I am human.” As will be shown in more detail in 5.3.2, Ceylan, too, prioritizes humanity over nationality when he sings: “Bin nichts Besonderes, bin nur gern bei euch, weil mir das Menschsein unter Menschen gefällt;” “I’m nothing special, just love being with you because I enjoy being human among humans” (*Nichts Besonderes* 1).

mouths and bared butts. In its most negative interpretation the multi-faceted word only describes an ugliness derived from deformity. Yet, its built-in inspiration for degrading profanity, caricature, smutty jokes, and timeless lavatorial humor still remains obvious.

In addition to these evaluative and comical options, the artistic attractiveness of the grotesque also results from its more complex connotations and high potential for metaphor. Building on the elements of hybridity and connective body orifices, grotesque depictions visualize the blurring of boundaries, i.e. between man and beast, inside and outside, known and unknown, beauty and ugliness, repulsion and compassion, desire and rejection. It questions orientational models, distorts familiar dichotomies, and opens up space for reflection. Analyzing the novels of Rabelais, Bakhtin makes evident how humankind is in constant flux, thus quintessentially opposed to fixed structures, and in constant need of carnivalesque inversions in order to adapt and renew lifestyles through the centuries. In his view, the grotesque is symbolic for the universally human state of constant change:

The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. The relation to time is one determining trait of the grotesque image. The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis. (*Rabelais and His World*)

The carnivalesque cornerstones of developing a conscious, communal realization of time and a world in continuous transformation resurface prominently in the image of the grotesque.

This image becomes particularly relevant in an age of globalization and even more so in the performative context of a culturally hybrid artist. Of course, considering the predominantly

negative connotations of the term today it would be outrageous to refer to respective artists as grotesque in themselves. However, as the living embodiments of two cultures literally growing together we find many of Bakhtin's decidedly positive, mythical qualities of old represented in the bodies of modern hybrid comedians pointing at an increasingly diversified future. Of course, it remains questionable to which extent this symbolism still occurs to contemporary audiences; but the idea of taking an extraterritorial time-out and realizing ongoing transformations in progress could account for part of the public's fascination with hybrid artists.

Finally, in addition to grotesque imagery there is verbal grotesqueness. Bakhtin states that "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" (*Rabelais and His World* 303). These traits fulfill precisely the same negating, exposing, and demanding criteria that Kurt Tucholsky desired of German satire in 1919 (Tucholsky) and which almost another century later still characterize the parodies in Turkish-German ethno-comedy. Even the functions outlined by Bakhtin remain largely identical: "to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (*Rabelais* 34). As a means of speech, the rhetoric of the grotesque generates a sense of alienation by introducing the strange and distorting the familiar. Blurring the boundaries in contemporary conceptions of ethnicity, the grotesque style accomplishes the same as the depictions of yore: It mocks and degrades, disturbs and amuses, and so masters the most difficult task of any ethno-comedian outlined earlier – to wed thought-provoking ideas with a humorous delivery.

4.3 Humor Theory

Now that the specific conditions of the carnivalesque event and the typical repertoire of grotesque rhetoric and imagery have been established, we turn to mechanisms of humor as the pivotal point of all comedy and the jester's primary weapon of choice. Humor is a double-edged blade in that it bonds the laughing but severs the austere. At the same time, it also shields words said in jest and thus functions as sword and armor at once. Before we look at some of the potential effects generated by this universal tool, this section outlines some of the theoretical foundations underlying humor's main structural and formal properties.

The question of what exactly amuses us is old but highly subjective and therefore impossible to answer conclusively. Carrell confides how "throughout history, from the ancient philosophers and the Bible, from the earliest scribes to contemporary writers, from folk medicine to modern medicine, humor and laughter have elicited discussion. Viewed alternatively and sometimes simultaneously as healthy and devilish, humor and its physical manifestation laughter have long been the subject of discourse and debate" (303). In his study on theatrical comedy, Bernhard Greiner, for instance, asks how exactly the comical gains shape. Referencing Nietzsche, he claims that comedies aim to reconcile Dionysian chaos and Apollonian form which created a constant state of tension between a textual basis and the interpretations through performers and spectators. After discussing various theoretical approaches, however, he ultimately concedes the conceptual elusiveness of something at once intellectual and physical (86). The deeply emotional, Dionysian side to the matter simply seems deeply opposed to scientific dissection. "In fact, there are intellectual people who think that the fun of the joke is gone when touched by the scalpel of analysis" (Sidis 1-2). In his studies on amusement, the philosopher Otto Marquard summarizes the opinions of various luminaries on the subject and, in doing so, underscores once more the futility in attempting a comprehensive definition:

Komisch ist – meint Kant in seiner dritten Kritik – und zum Lachen zwingt die „plötzliche Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts“. Komisch ist – meint Schelling im identitätsphilosophischen Ansatz – und zum Lachen zwingt „die Umkehrung jedes möglichen Verhältnisses, das auf Gegensatz beruht“. Komisch ist – meint Friedrich Theodor Vischer – und zum Lachen zwingt der Gegensatz zum Erhabenen. Komisch ist – meint Karl Rosenkranz – und zum Lachen zwingt „die Aufheiterung des Häßlichen ins Schöne“. Komisch ist – meint Bergson – und zum Lachen zwingt ein als Mechanismus sich gebendes Lebendiges. Komisch ist – meint Freud speziell im Blick auf den Witz – und zum Lachen zwingt eine momentane Verdrängungsersparung. Komisch ist – meint Plessner – und zum Lachen zwingt eine unabweibare, nicht unmittelbar bedrohliche, aber unbeantwortbare Situation. (59-60)

What is comical and elicits laughter – Kant says in his third Critique – is the “sudden transformation of tense expectation into nothing.” What is comical and elicits laughter – Schelling says in his philosophy of identity – is “the reversal of any possible relation based on opposition.” What is comical and elicits laughter – says Friedrich Theodor Fischer – is the antithesis of the sublime. What is comical and elicits laughter – says Karl Rosenkranz – is “the brightening of ugliness to beauty.” What is comical and elicits laughter – says Bergson – is when a human being behaves like an automaton. What is comical and elicits laughter – says Freud with special regard to the joke – is a momentary relief of tension. What is comical and elicits laughter – says Plessner – is an inevitable, not immediately threatening but unanswerable situation.

Inversion, misdirection, and a calculated play of power seem to be among the governing principles of humor. Ethno-comedy serves many if not all of the above descriptions, and the list is certainly not exhaustive. As a preliminary observation it seems that humor in its tremendous versatility simply defies categorization, so that all efforts to devise a unifying theory must fall short. Yet, since humor as a cultural political tool and weapon is the prerogative of the jester-like comedian a short venture into its rudimentary foundations is still indispensable.

Fortunately, when focusing on the specific content of ethno-comedic humor, some theories prove more productive than others. The social tensions typically occurring in any multicultural society at some point generate most of the material of an ethno-comedic performance. In the case of the Turkish-German variety, the routines regularly avail themselves of the treasury of mutual history, of past encounters, ancient fears and perceptions still manifest in many of today's stereotypes. From the Crusades to Constantinople, from fighting Ottomans at the Sieges to inviting Turks as guest-workers, but also both World Wars and contemporary politics – everything that entered the German collective memory at some point becomes available for a little reflection and a lot of ridicule.¹⁵⁵ Somuncu, for instance, even emphasizes the social obligation for fellow polycultural citizens to actively engage with the German past:

Auch wenn wir Türken keinen Großvater haben, der in der NSDAP war, auch wenn wir niemanden in der Verwandtschaft haben, der eine braune Vergangenheit hat, so sind wir doch mitverantwortlich für die Aufarbeitung der deutschen Thematik, weil wir keine gemeinsame Gegenwart und Zukunft verlangen dürfen, ohne auch einen Besitzanspruch auf die Bewältigung der deutschen Vergangenheit zu stellen. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 173)

¹⁵⁵ After all, the audience is still supposed to feel more entertained than lectured.

*Even though we Turks do not have grandfathers who were in the NSDAP, even if we have no one among our relatives with a brown [i.e. National Socialist, TH] past, we are still co-responsible for the workup of the German subject matter because we cannot demand a mutual present and future without contributing to the overcoming of the German past as well.*¹⁵⁶

In 1990, Zafer Şenocak and Bülent Tulay already raised the question: “Doesn’t immigrating to Germany also mean immigrating to, entering into, the arena of Germany’s recent past?” (6). Somuncu insists that it does and calls not only his fellow artists but also every member of a marginalized group to action in the joint construction of a shared, equitable future.¹⁵⁷

His appeal for the conscious involvement of the collective also reveals a significant progression from migrant to polycultural art. This reorientation is marked by a fundamental change in focus from initial migration topics to hybridized domestic ones, i.e. from an international to a transnational perspective. Ethno-comedy concerns itself less with actual migration but rather with highlighting heterogeneity and rethinking its organization.

The genre incorporates most of the problematic issues that arise in daily interaction and so relocates factual tensions into a carnivalesque frame of comedic art. In a way, the artists play with fire when they deliberately evoke these tensions; yet, within this particular frame they possess the ability to take bits and pieces of this metaphorical fire, approach and modify it in a comparatively safe space, and then release the remains diminished if not extinguished back into real life. This intervention constitutes their cultural labor.

¹⁵⁶ Through the alliance between Nazi Germany and Turkey up until February 1945 (see 2.1.4), chances are that many Turkish immigrants at least have relatives who supported those “with a brown past.”

¹⁵⁷ The Germans’ part in this process seems to be implied by the term “co-responsibility.”

The reason why comedy can function as such an excellent modifier lies in the nature of jokes, as explained by Freud on the one hand and the later Relief Theory on the other. Despite its post-centennial status, Freud's work on *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) still offers a fruitful framework for analysis.¹⁵⁸ Since ethno-comedy runs on a sequence of punchlines – either in a loose assembly of acts as in traditional *Kabarett* or a coherent narrative of linked stories – the unit of a joke is still applicable in this context. Looking at various examples, Freud attempts to discern their mechanisms, nature, and conditions. Essential characteristics like brevity and wit may be supplemented by assonance and word variations, allusions or faulty logic, all of which we find in ethno-comedy.

More importantly, based on Freud's findings in psychoanalysis Relief Theory argues that a good joke depends “on the tension arousal and release that must accompany virtually all humor. The general principle here is that there can be no laughter without some prior arousal of tension” (Rappoport 19). Carroll specifies these tensions as “generated by societal constraints” (313). Instead of evoking random tensions, ethno-comedians of course select specific cross-cultural ones created through the close contact of numerous ethnicities. “Humor, according to Freud, can then be seen as the release of inhibition ... on both the personal and the national level” (Brandt 362). This outcome grants the widely received genre of ethno-comedy its cultural political significance as a positive modifier of multicultural relationships.

Regarding form, Freud distinguishes two general types of joke, the innocent and the tendentious. Both produce pleasurable effects, yet in the case of the former it remains “a moderate one; a clear sense of satisfaction, a slight smile, is as a rule all it can achieve in its

¹⁵⁸ There are numerous other theories around by now. However, I agree with Rappoport when he says: “We have an overabundance of general humor theories. Each of them emphasizes one or more answers to the question of what makes people laugh, but none of them, not even Freud's theory, really covers all the possibilities... In sum, therefore, when it comes to humor theory at large, you pay your monkey and take your choice, because one size does not fit all” (23).

hearers” (96). By implication, in case of the latter the potential for a higher degree of satisfaction is greater. Freud further classifies the tendentious ones as “either a *hostile* joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defense) or an *obscene* joke (serving the purpose of exposure)” (97, original emphasis). Ethno-comedy employs all three kinds depending on whether the artist intends to parody, provoke, or just lighten the mood. In terms of hostility and obscenity, however, ethno-comedy turns Freud’s assumptions on their head due to a significant structural alteration.

Structurally, Freud claims, “a tendentious joke calls for three people: in addition to the one who makes the joke, there must be a second who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke’s aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled” (100). The lynchpin of ethno-comedy, however, is the self-deprecating kind of humor which takes this structure to the next level. Through the thematic alignment of the ethnic material with the artist’s own polyculturality, most of the time joker and target collapse into one. Parody and provocation still occur, yet their self-ironic if not auto-aggressive nature removes potentially racist sentiments from ethnic humor and helps to create sympathy instead of anger among the equally targeted.¹⁵⁹ By preserving a rough balance between self-deprecation and forthright attack the artists can expand their fool’s license and afford quantitatively and qualitatively more hostile and obscene remarks while still maintaining an amiable atmosphere. Ethno-comedy’s pivotal tactic of self-deprecation reveals humor’s unique ability to function as sword and shield simultaneously.

In close relation to the carnivalesque strategy of grotesque profanation, Freud subsequently describes the intent behind tendentious jokes as the conversion of terror into delight. “By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout

¹⁵⁹ Hypothetically, polycultural ethno-comedians could still hold racist views towards others, but could only express those views outside the self-referential humor. The frequent and often explicit naming and shaming of any racist sentiment by all currently popular ethno-comedians, however, gives absolutely no reason to assume such views.

way the enjoyment of overcoming him – to which the third person ... bears witness by his laughter” (103). This effect resonates strongly with Bakhtin’s conception of medieval humor as a means of resistance: “The medieval and Renaissance folk culture was familiar with the element of terror only as represented by comic monsters, who were defeated by laughter. Terror was turned into something gay and comic” (*Rabelais and His World* 39).

In the Turkish-German context, most “enemies” are abstract attitudes like racism or religious fundamentalism along with their respective fears like xenophobia and Islamophobia. Ethno-comedians address these phenomena, expose the shortcomings of their proponents like Pegida, HoGeSa, and the NPD,¹⁶⁰ or the Salafi and other religious extremists, and ridicule their bigotry. This carnivalesque inversion of reframing something scary as something silly creates a power shift: Turning the formerly frightened into the laughing, deconstructs and deprives little by little a once terrifying concept of its mental hold over the people and empowers them instead. For example, in 2012 German journalists of migrant background received hateful letters and email from right wing radicals and were at a loss how to deal with them. They decided to read them out to the public and expose them to ridicule, thus coining the term *Hate Poetry*. These journalists are not professional entertainers like ethno-comedians, but their overall strategy to fight hate with humor remains the same (cf. Babayiğit).

To distinguish substantial from superficial comedy, Freud separates the joke from the jest: Both serve the same purpose, “namely, the protection of sequences of words and thoughts from criticism” (130), but as soon as “what a jest says possesses substance and value, it turns into a joke” (131). Obviously, the number of profound jokes in a show may vary greatly with each artist and the tendency to lean more towards a comedy or a *Kabarett* approach to the ethno-comedic genre. Freud’s subtle distinction shows, however, how quickly seriousness can enter comedy. It

¹⁶⁰ The “Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands,” an openly rightwing political party.

comes as no surprise then, when polycultural artists turn to comedy as a platform for public debate. “Just as watch-makers usually provide a particularly good movement with a similarly valuable case, so it may happen with jokes that the best achievements in the way of jokes are used as an envelope for thoughts of the greatest substance” (Freud 92).

The objective of ethno-comedy is not simply the amusement of its audience. The genre uses humor to entertain but also to release tensions or to cloak uncomfortable truths and criticisms. It exploits a crucial parallel between comedy and social criticism which makes them so compatible, i.e. that both appeal to the cognitive plane in order to manipulate emotional standpoints. As Freud pointed out, joking “is an activity which aims at deriving pleasure from mental processes, whether intellectual or otherwise” (96). In comparison to rather flat comedy, the carnivalesque event asks its audience to actively engage their mental capacities in order to process short insertions of critical value. Greiner even claims that everything comical must necessarily pass through the intellect to be recognized as something comical in the first place (86). Terkessidis supports this notion when he says: “Der eigentliche Ort des Geschehens beim Kabarett (und auch bei der Satire) [ist] das Bewußtsein des Publikums: ‚Methoden‘ und ‚Mittel‘ können nur wirken, wenn das Publikum ‚mitarbeitet‘” (299).¹⁶¹

Of course, comedy cannot replace sober dialogue but in its frank and free fashion it constitutes a valuable contribution to public discourse. Freud speaks of “a new species of attack” which he defines in the following opposition: “Where argument tries to draw the hearer’s criticism over to its side, the joke endeavors to push the criticism out of sight” (133). The critical parody of ethno-comedy seems to be the species’ next generation when it combines these features and draws over the hearer’s criticism by means of a joke. Comparing comedy to sober

¹⁶¹ “*The actual scene of action in Kabarett (and satire, too) is the consciousness of the audience: ‘methods’ and ‘means’ can only take effect when the audience cooperates.*”

argumentation I fully agree with Freud when he says: “There is no doubt that the joke has chosen the method which is psychologically the more effective” (133).

In sum, any ethno-comedic battle plan rests on four central factors. The most basic premise is a favorable, i.e. carnivalesque atmosphere. “Some degree of benevolence or a kind of neutrality, an absence of any factor that could provoke feelings opposed to the purpose of the joke, is an indispensable condition if the third person is to collaborate in the completion of the process of making the joke” (Freud 145). Secondly, at least some of the jests delivered under these circumstances need to possess substance in order to constitute a meaningful contribution to public discourse as jokes. Referencing contemporary discourse on cultural pluralism not only provides this substance but also a source for the third factor, the tensions released with a punchline. The decisive fourth criterion is laughter which completes the performance. Without laughter, all humor is but a blunt weapon without any subversive power.

4.4 On Laughter

I share Carrell’s view that “a joke text is not successful unless and until an audience finds it amusing” (304). Once a joke has accomplished this purpose, the expectable result would be a laughing audience. Freud’s distinction of a joke’s receiver and target already differentiates our conventional understanding of an audience but falls short whenever receiver and target are one. The self-deprecating humor of the ethno-comedian conflates all three categories of joker, target, and receiver, complicating the directionality of laughter even further. In general, laughter is essential for any comedy show, not only because it usually functions as a clear indicator for a show’s success or failure, but chiefly because it directly affects the mind and mood of each individual when it releases tension. Denying an audience this relief, however, modifies this pattern as well and creates yet other implications for the mental and emotional well-being of the

receivers. With the consciousness of its audience as ethno-comedy's main place of activity, the following concerns itself neither with anatomical factors nor the question of what exactly triggers laughing, but with the multi-directionality of carnivalesque laughter and its psychological aftereffects to show how the genre exerts influence on its viewers.

As has been established earlier, it is very much in the interest of the artist to form a perceived sense of solidarity with the audience in order to create an atmosphere of freedom and frankness that permits the raising of delicate topics. Laughter is an indispensable asset in this construction. As soon as someone not just sneers or smirks but actually laughs at a joke, chances increase drastically that the person will become well-disposed towards the joker. Accordingly, Schrodts ascribes a distinct social function to laughter as it strengthens group solidarity and marks communal attitudes and values (16).¹⁶²

This particular inclusive kind of laughter Bakhtin calls carnivalesque. He puts a special emphasis on its ability to express “the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it” (*Rabelais and His World* 11-12). In the context of a polycultural artist creating an – initially temporary – sense of community, this feeling of belonging gains particular relevance.¹⁶³ According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque laughter accomplishes what the special conditions of the eponymous event facilitate, the strengthening of a society through the connection and harmonization of its people. With its invigorating, community-building effects, the multi-directional laughter of ethno-comedy emulates these carnivalesque qualities and exploits them for purposes of representation and mediation.

¹⁶² Cf. anthropologist Mahadev L. Apte's idea of “joking relationships” which he defines as “patterned playful behavior that occurs between two individuals who recognize special kinship or other types of social bonds between them” and his respective claim that “joking relationships ... manifest a consciousness of group identity or solidarity” (qtd. in Carrell 303).

¹⁶³ Cf. Ceylan's credo for citizens of migrant background: “Wer nicht über sich selber lachen kann, der ist nicht integriert!”; “*Those unable to laugh at themselves are not integrated!*” (*Live!* 87-88).

If the audience does indeed bond with the artist, a shared space of critical reflection emerges where the performer can guide the listener and open potentially new perspectives on familiar topics. As a carnivalesque zone of free speech, an ethno-comedic event thus provides a unique platform for politically significant representation and the cultural participation of otherwise marginalized groups. It offers the possibility of presenting counter-narratives to official truths, pluralizing the number of discourse participants, and thereby establishing a more balanced state of affairs. The sense of community achieved through laughter is hence vital for exercising cultural political influence outside the bounds of a comedy night.

In elaboration of Freud's theories, Jauß showed how humoristic contestation of the *status quo* can serve three kinds of actions: taking an affirmative, negative, or alternative position (105). It is then up to the listener to either laugh with or at the protagonist. Considering the multi-directionality of laughter in contemporary comedy, this is a bit of an over-simplification. Since the Turkish-German ethno-comedians derive most of their material from aspects concerning Turkish and German ethnicities, parts of the audience typically constitute the target of most jokes. For these targeted parts, laughing with the protagonist then requires showing sufficient maturity and sense of humor to laugh at themselves until the tide turns and another part becomes the temporary target. The hybrid artists, in turn, laugh with parts of the audience at other parts of it, with those laughing at themselves, and through their self-deprecating humor also at themselves. The result is all-encompassing laughter that wreaks havoc with Jauß' pattern when the ethno-comedian confronts the spectators with ridicule of their own idiosyncrasies: Through their laughter they affirm the comical negation of something which then enables the renegotiation of an alternative position.

This creative moment rests on an affective difference: Usually, laughing *with* requires sympathy whereas laughing *at* creates a distance. In self-mockery, the distance thus established

towards oneself provides the necessary condition for self-reflection and reconsidering one's position. Moreover, it generates two paradoxical yet psychologically essential effects. For one, the shared experience of laughing rotationally with others at oneself strengthens the sense of community between the artist, the audience, and among its members, thus bringing people together. For another, the grounding profanation of oneself accomplished through the ability to accept and endure ridicule fosters an empowering sense of sovereignty, i.e. withstanding self-degradation enables self-growth in the sense of Straub's *Identitätsarbeit* (cf. 2.2.3).

The tensions commonly thwarting this sense of community in everyday life provide the very foundation for this laughter. Instead of evoking artificial tensions from invented scenarios, ethno-comedy deliberately selects, channels, and transforms elements of discomfort, anxiety, or even fear that arise, for example, from real, oftentimes prejudiced perceptions of difference. According to Bakhtin, even the extreme cases of fear and terror can be modified, even defeated as they are merely the result of an obsessive seriousness (*Rabelais and His World* 47). The simple mention of certain emotive words – for instance from religious discourse, economic factors, or rightwing radicalism – already suffices to conjure the necessary tension within many audience members and which the punchline then releases through laughter at either others or oneself. That way, “humor, especially ethnic ridicule humor, helps us to cope with the risky or fearful nature of interpersonal relationships. This idea follows from the fact that anyone who seems clearly different from or alien to us because of their appearance, language, or behavior is almost always perceived as an immediate or potential threat” (Rappoport 7).

Watching people laugh at something usually causes a sense of relief in someone originally skeptic or even scared of said thing. Westbury et al. explain this sensation as an evolutionary component of laughter which bears particular relevance in the context of comedy abating fears:

The laughter that is often engendered by relief of this sort may serve a useful and plausibly adaptive communicative role by sending a message to others that I thought there was something dangerous out there (and you might think so, too) but now I know that there is not. ... It has proven adaptive across evolutionary time for us to be structured in a way that makes us involuntarily let conspecifics know about anomalies that we have recognized are not at all dangerous, since anomalies are generally experienced as frightening. (153)

Mutually shared laughter at ethnic stereotypes undermines the perception of something as threatening, the way Rappoport suggested. In terms of bringing people together, this humanizing effect of laughter seems a uniquely powerful tool which stresses once more the privileged position of ethno-comedians and their valuable potential in renegotiating societal perceptions.

Alternatively, detecting and ridiculing the silliness inherent in most objects of fear can also inverse the power relations and produce a sensation of symbolic emancipation. The aim is then not to unify groups of people, but to eliminate their power imbalance. Through exposing immediate social concerns to carnivalesque laughter, ethno-comedy even possesses the potential to project this sense of liberation past itself and produce a similarly emancipating effect outside the symbolic act within the comedic frame.

This feat of empowerment can be found in the most unexpected of situations. For instance, a music video produced in 2012 by the Hamas called for terrorist acts against Israel. In 2014, a Hebrew translation found its way to youtube. Instead of reacting with fear, however, young Israelis parodied both song and video, even danced to it at weddings, and thus defeated its hatefulness through humor (“Spiel mir das Lied vom Tod”). Another example is found in Syria during times of war under the Assad dictatorship in 2014. Although half the population had already fled, many still remained in ruined cities and turned to humor as a last refuge. Posting

jokes and caricatures in different languages in various social media constituted a form of dark but sustaining and empowering protest (Glotzmann). Instead of being dominated by fear or prejudice these people exposed it to ridicule, withheld and subverted its manipulating powers and so re-gained some control. In both instances, humor functioned as a coping mechanism which could soothe not only mental but even physical discomfort. Carrell cites a study by Ofra Nevo in Israel from 1993 which “found a positive relationship ‘between tolerance of pain and humor’” (316). In light of this potential, humor seems to be a most efficient weapon to fight and conquer ills.

The subjectifying qualities of on-stage representation paired with the emancipatory powers of carnivalesque laughter create a twofold effect very much reminiscent of Bakhtin’s Renaissance events. Now as then, “laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power” (*Rabelais and His World* 94). Ethno-comedy adds its own specific set of “interior censors” to this list. After a thousand years of cross-cultural entanglements, the laughter elicited by today’s Turkish-German comedians makes a powerful, widely broadcast contribution to the public liberation from fear of the foreign, of Islamization, and cultural alienation.

In her essay on “Jokes and Butts” (2008), Deniz Göktürk reflects on the unprecedented distribution of comical material and tries to imagine some of the consequences for humor in a global public sphere.

In the age of mass media ... jokes are no longer private. We all know that a joke that would be offensive if told in public might be acceptable behind closed doors among friends. The butt of the joke in Freud’s model would rarely hear about the joke, but in today’s world, given the information flow, the joke gets to its subject quickly (“Jokes and Butts” 1710).

This sense of immediacy is particularly true for televised ethno-comedy, where almost every other joke aims at parts of the audience. Göktürk's concerns highlight once more the vital importance of establishing a familiar atmosphere between artist and audience, so that otherwise offensive jokes become acceptable. With respect to broadcast performances, the audience's state of emotional resilience depends mostly on the artist's self-deprecation to make otherwise hostile laughter bearable.

Since it originates from carnivalesque freedom, the laughter in ethno-comedy is deeply libertarian in nature. Although Bakhtin asserts that "laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian" (*Rabelais and His World* 95), the conscious celebration of symbolic liberation from fears, prejudice, or discrimination seems at least to imply its own set of values by negation or inference. For instance, ridiculing excessive violence by male fundamentalists or racists as an expression of low self-esteem (preferably in combination with an allegorical reference to exaggerated shortcomings of the grotesque body) clearly outlines a desired, opposite code of conduct. In its own way, laughter is still "related to the future of things to come and ... to clear the way for them" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 95). The explicit propagation of any such code is a rare feature in ethno-comedy, as the upcoming case studies will confirm.

In addition to the liberating relief of tension through laughter, a particularly potent twist in the pattern maintains the tension but shifts its trajectory from creating emotional pleasure to requiring cognitive effort. Typical mainly in the *Kabarett* approach to ethno-comedy, some punchlines contain a physically uncomfortable core message. A joke can deliver a gut-wrenching truth in a still digestible manner, yet in the process creating the familiar sensation of laughter sticking in one's throat. The resulting non-release of tension or suffocation of laughter generates emotional unease and in its backlash affects the cognitive plane all the more powerfully.

Withholding, restraining, or postponing the relief through laughter is a seldom but central device in the artist's repertoire for conveying especially significant bits.

Laughter is the single most powerful gadget of today's jesters, multilateral beyond metaphor: dispensed, it unites; denied, it highlights; directed, it questions. At the disposal of an ethno-comedian, laughter creates a positive link between ethnicities and becomes the subtle manipulator of social perceptions. The careful orchestration of laughter thus procures the potential for ethno-comedy's cultural political intervention. Of course, various systemic obstacles threaten to compromise this potential. The following reflects on the top three.

4.5 Exploiting the Kulturindustrie

Despite all the psychological tricks, humor strategies, and ironic weaponry, there are still a few crucial objections to the very possibility of ethno-comedy's subversive power. The alleged counterproductive reinforcement of stereotypes was already refuted earlier. However, the mind-numbing nature and effects of capitalist mass-production, the counter-carnavalesque "venting argument," and the "preaching to the choir"-objection pose three noteworthy threats to the assumed significance of the whole genre and thus deserve some attention. All three feature in *The Culture Industry* (1944) by Horkheimer and Adorno which justifies its consultation. The following describes each general objection in a little more detail before relating it specifically to ethno-comedy.

First, Horkheimer and Adorno paint the somber picture of a completely synchronized media landscape under the supreme command of rampant capitalism. What used to be platforms for art have degenerated into marketing-oriented machines openly mass-producing trash: "Lichtspiele und Rundfunk brauchen sich nicht mehr als Kunst auszugeben. Die Wahrheit, daß sie nichts sind als Geschäft, verwenden sie als Ideologie, die den Schund legitimieren soll, den

sie vorsätzlich herstellen. Sie nennen sich selbst Industrien” (142).¹⁶⁴ Part of this perfidious industry is its understandable claim that the audience after a long day’s work prefers, in fact wants nothing but light entertainment. Under the respective pretense of consumer-friendly production all executive powers agree accordingly “nichts herzustellen oder durchzulassen, was nicht ihren Tabellen, ihrem Begriff vom Konsumenten, vor allem ihnen selber gleicht” (143).¹⁶⁵ The resulting self-sustainability of the industry seems hostile to any sign of instability and almost impenetrable in its structure.

Secondly, the essay postulates that all acceptable forms of social counter-institutions are allegedly already absorbed and controlled by the system. True power can afford, possibly even desires, as Bakhtin put it, “small islands of time” (*Rabelais and His World* 90) that allow the populace a temporary inversion of conventional hierarchies, assuming that after their expiration everyone resumes the regular course relaxed and strengthened. Bakhtin’s enthusiastic description of the subversive powers of carnival and, by extension, related institutions like *Kabarett* and other critical comedy have often been doubted by this “venting argument.” Pschibl summarizes this position thusly:

Autoren wie Kühn, Budzinski oder Pelzer weisen dem Kabarett ... eine Art Ventilfunktion zu. Sie gehen davon aus, dass manche Kabarettgruppen eine mögliche Gesellschaftsveränderung eher unterdrückt als gefördert haben. Der „Unmut der Bevölkerung“ konnte sich ihrer Meinung nach in Kleinkunstabühnen „Luft machen“ und ging dabei für gesellschaftliche Veränderungen verloren. (Pschibl 32)

¹⁶⁴ “*Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries.*” All English translations are by John Cummings as printed in the edition “*Dialectic of Enlightenment*,” New York: Continuum (1993).

¹⁶⁵ “*not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves.*”

Authors like Kühn, Budzinski, or Pelzer ascribe a kind of venting function to Kabarett. They assume that some Kabarett groups actually suppressed rather than fostered social change. According to them, the “dissatisfaction of the populace” was able to “blow off some steam” on minor arts’ stages and was hence lost for social change.

Adorno and Horkheimer seem to agree with these authors when they argue that the truly subversive would never pass executive censorship and therefore anything remotely critical left only served to convey a false idea of opposition that ultimately even benefited the system.¹⁶⁶ Resistance to established structures seems futile: “Was widersteht, darf überleben nur, indem es sich eingliedert. Einmal in seiner Differenz von der Kulturindustrie registriert, gehört es schon dazu wie der Bodenreformer zum Kapitalismus” (153).¹⁶⁷ This scope includes all publicly broadcast *Kabarett* and leads some outside observers to doubt the critical value of any supposedly subversive production. Naturally, this skepticism increases proportionally to the growth in overall popularity of any such program.

Complementary to the production side of this dilemma, the audience faces the same problem. The industry is so multi-faceted that each individual may officially choose the form of entertainment appropriate to its class and status-specific desires, only to be trapped again in the make-believe choices provided exclusively by the executive powers.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. “Alle Verstöße gegen die Usancen des Metiers, die Orson Welles begeht, werden ihm verziehen, weil sie als berechnete Unarten die Geltung des Systems um so eifriger bekräftigen” (Horkheimer and Adorno 150); “*Whenever Orson Welles offends against the tricks of the trade, he is forgiven because his departures from the norm are regarded as calculated mutations which serve all the more strongly to confirm the validity of the system.*”

¹⁶⁷ “*Anyone who resists can only survive by fitting in. Once his particular brand of deviation from the norm has been noted by the industry, he belongs to it as does the land-reformer to capitalism.*”

Für alle ist etwas vorgesehen, damit keiner ausweichen kann, die Unterscheide werden eingeschliffen und propagiert. Die Belieferung des Publikums mit einer Hierarchie von Serienqualitäten dient nur der um so lückenloseren Quantifizierung. Jeder soll sich gleichsam spontan seinem vorweg durch Indizien bestimmten ‚level‘ gemäß verhalten und nach der Kategorie des Massenprodukts greifen, die für seinen Typ fabriziert ist.
(Horkheimer and Adorno 144)

Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification. Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type.

The critically inclined are destined to find only pseudo-critical material borne by the all-encompassing industry, which grants them a controlled space where for a limited time only they may feel empowered, proactive, maybe even militant.¹⁶⁸ Occasional, managed indignation, like “fun” in the eyes of Adorno and Horkheimer, is an equally medicinal bath: “Es wird von dem gesucht, der dem mechanisierten Arbeitsprozeß ausweichen will, um ihm von neuem gewachsen zu sein” (158).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer mention “die im System liegende Notwendigkeit, den Konsumenten nicht auszulassen, ihm keinen Augenblick die Ahnung von der Möglichkeit des Widerstands zu geben” (164); “*the necessity inherent in the system not to leave the customer alone, not for a moment to allow him any suspicion that resistance is possible.*”

¹⁶⁹ “*It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again.*”

Finally, the third and last resort of cultural pessimism holds that, even if there was a production that actually did foster a single critical thought in its viewership, the audience's deliberate selection of this program exposed their already divergent attitudes, which suspends the production's potential for truly expanding anyone's mind. Pschibl supports this point: "Der Zuschauer besucht üblicherweise ein Programm, das ihm ‚entspricht‘, das sein Interesse weckt und das seinem Sonderwissen, bzw. seiner gesellschaftlichen Grundhaltung entgegenkommt" (111).¹⁷⁰ This notion of preaching to the choir supplements the second objection in that preacher and choir may happily vent together in a regulated space, but ultimately still fail to spread their antagonistic ideas beyond their own alternatively minded circles.

A good seventy years after the publication of *The Culture Industry*, it seems that many of its lamented conditions are still in place: a huge degree of synchronicity among the media, an undeniable dominance of mass-produced light entertainment, and of course a firmly capitalist mindset shared by most executives. Against all these structural odds, ethno-comedy has found a niche and established itself as a genre that sells entertainment, therefore seeks to reach as many people as possible, but meanwhile exploits its popularity on the content level to reconfigure the *status quo* of minority/majority relations.¹⁷¹ It may not fully escape the industry, but it certainly rips promising tears into the close-meshed net once outlined by Adorno and Horkheimer. They even provide the first clues as to how this is possible.

According to them, the exhausting work life determines the nature of the complementing leisure time completely: "Das Vergnügen erstarrt zur Langeweile, weil es um Vergnügen zu bleiben, nicht wieder Anstrengung kosten soll und daher streng in den ausgefahrenen Assoziationsgleisen sich bewegt. Der Zuschauer soll keiner eigenen Gedanken bedürfen"

¹⁷⁰ "The spectator usually attends a program that 'suits' him, that arouses his interest, and that accommodates his particular knowledge, i.e. his basic attitudes towards society."

¹⁷¹ Measuring the effects of ethno-comedy on audience members would be an interesting future research opportunity. At this point, I merely want to draw attention to its cultural political potential and make it plausible.

(159).¹⁷² In favor of the philosophers, it is possible to read this description as a form of negative dialectics that diagnoses three ills and immediately implies the three corresponding cures.¹⁷³ The industrial commandments defining leisure then read as follows: The consumer shall not think, shall not be confronted with anything unfamiliar, and shall never have to invest any effort. Ergo, proper amusement in the eyes of Adorno and Horkheimer goes contrary to each point, i.e. it is thought-inducing, involves the unfamiliar, and does require an effort to be processed. Ethno-comedy possesses all three of the latter.

Especially in its elements more associated with *Kabarett* – references to current politics, its propagation of inclusivity, and the occasional choice of socially delicate topics – the active mind of the spectator is crucial for following a show. As Henningsen points out: “Der Kabarettist agiert nicht in der Wirklichkeit selbst, sondern im Bewusstsein des Publikums” (34).¹⁷⁴ Somuncu, for instance, confirms and expands this statement to the artist, too, when he notices on tour with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*: “Meine Reise, die auf der Straße begonnen hat, verlagert sich zunehmend in die Köpfe” (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 69).¹⁷⁵ Through his performances, he developed awareness for historically charged expressions and a more nuanced use of language, which he shares in turn with his audience.

Articulating, questioning, and perhaps ultimately altering mainstream conceptions of normality are standard hopes and practices of ethno-comedy. By highlighting cultural curiosities and ridiculing backwards attitudes, the comedians raise awareness for current misconceptions, usually outlining or at least implying possible alternative points of view in the process.

Regardless of the individual approach of the artist – be it Ceylan’s celebration of ethnic diversity

¹⁷² “Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience.”

¹⁷³ The alternative is simply that ethno-comedy really does escape the industry by providing a form of entertainment that neither Adorno nor Horkheimer believed possible within the industry they described.

¹⁷⁴ “The Kabarett artist operates not in reality itself but in the consciousness of the audience.”

¹⁷⁵ “My journey, which began on the road, slowly moves into the heads.”

or Somuncu's caustic exposure of latent racism – the laughter evoked in ethno-comedy affects the emotions of its audience, moves it, and in this moment of collective suggestibility allows for the artists to plant a seed of divergence, an emotional stimulus as guiding influence for future action. As Fischer-Lichte explains:

Wie die Forschung in jüngster Zeit nachgewiesen hat, sind es weniger unsere ruhigen Reflexionen oder prinzipielle Grundannahmen über die Beschaffenheit der Welt und andere Überzeugungen, aus denen sich unsere Handlungen ableiten lassen. Vielmehr sind es unsere Gefühle, welche die entscheidende Motivation für unsere Handlungen liefern. (267)

As recent studies proved, it is less our calm reflections, basic assumptions about the nature of the world, or other convictions that help to explain our actions. It is rather our emotions that provide the decisive stimulus for our actions.

Ethno-comedy is not only thought-inducing through its occasional critical commentary; its carnivalesque laughter also provides the necessary sense of community as a basis for peaceful pluralism.

As a genre centered on comparative humor the confrontation with the perceived unfamiliar is essential. The polycultural artist creates a space in which familiarity and strangeness are put to the test and the relation of alleged center and periphery may be renegotiated. Accordingly, ethno-comedy “must be conceptualized as a reciprocal process of familiarization and estrangement achieved in part through resistance to populist fear-mongering and cultural clichés” (Bower, “Reframing Integration” 210). In a sense, the artists perform a reality-check on majority conceptions and their accuracy of fit, usually resulting in an attempt to update musty but not yet superseded perceptions.

In their research, El-Tayeb, Mandel, and others provide an academic equivalent to these cultural political struggles when they highlight specific features of language that discriminate and project an inadequate image of inherent difference on minority groups. El-Tayeb detects racist tendencies in Europe's negative self-identification from people of color. According to her analysis, bearing certain visual markers leads the white majority to refer to them indiscriminately as "migrants" or "foreigners," i.e. as originating from outside the continent and not belonging to Europe. "Europeans possessing the (visual) markers of Otherness thus are eternal newcomers, forever suspended in time, forever 'just arriving,' defined by a static foreignness overriding both individual experience and historical facts" (El-Tayeb xxv). It is precisely this misreading of markers that drives ethno-comedians to expose latent Eurocentric racism in everyday practices and to publicly display and debate modes of identification in their programs.¹⁷⁶

Looking at specific language use, El-Tayeb goes on to criticize how "terms like 'third-generation migrant,' 'integration,' and 'xenophobia' suggest that these populations permanently remain 'aliens from elsewhere,' replacing the vocabulary and conceptual framework needed to adequately analyze processes of internal racialization" (xxii). While I doubt the supposed effect of the word "xenophobia" and outright reject the idea in the case of "integration,"¹⁷⁷ the label "third-generation migrant" is definitely misleading in the sense that close to none of this group ever actually left anywhere. Highlighting the foreign ancestry two generations up projects a level of difference utterly inadequate to justify using the term "migrant" for someone who almost certainly never personally migrated, may have never seen their ancestors' country nor speak their

¹⁷⁶ Cf., for instance, Ceylan's condemnation of the popular game "Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann," i.e. "*Who is afraid of the black man*" in 5.3.2.

¹⁷⁷ "Xenophobia" is just a word describing someone's feeling towards anything they identify as different. While that sentiment may be regrettable, naming a misguided fear by name doesn't seem to cause actual harm to anyone. "Integration," however, to me describes the process of everyone involved trying to establish a way of coexistence under a common ideological denominator. It is the collective effort, for instance, to divert attention from looks or origins and to focus on building a strong, value-based community for the time being. It is a concept that tries to eliminate obsolete factors of discrimination and thus works contrary to the way El-Tayeb described.

language. While many children of first-generation migrants emigrated themselves in the course of family reunifications, the third generation was usually born and raised in one and the same nation-state. To some extent, the level of identification with a nationality is certainly still up to the individual, but the probability that the grandchildren will still identify exclusively with their grandparents' country seems quite low.¹⁷⁸ Fighting thoughtless labels like these is a key element of ethno-comedy. By exposing these stereotyping patterns, the artists aim to provoke a reflection of these labels which requires an active effort, i.e. the cognitive self-assessment of everyone involved.

Next to inappropriate national labels, another form of counter-productive ethnicization questioned by ethno-comedy is religious stereotyping. Again on the level of language, El-Tayeb makes the following observation:

Over the last decade “Muslim” has replaced “Southerner” as the generic term allowing to police and permanently contain Europe’s internal Others – and at the same time providing an outside threat helping to create the coveted European identity. Islam at times appears as a signifier almost as empty as race, ascribing a combination of naturalized cultural attributes to “Muslims” that has little to do with religious beliefs or even with being a believer. Instead, the trope of the Muslim as Other offers an apparently easy and unambiguous means to divide Europeans and migrants. (xxx)

Somuncu, Ceylan, and others too, ridicule explicitly Muslim stereotypes. They reflect on various perspectives on the same phenomenon, attacking blind judgments by non-Muslims, deriding the

¹⁷⁸ As already outlined in 2.2.3, the negotiation of identifications also depends in part on external ascription. The analysis of Ceylan’s hybrid ethos in 5.3.1 exemplifies how the artists play with their polyculturality to enable the self-deprecating, culturally comparative humor typical of ethno-comedy.

fear-mongering of right-wing radicals, mocking fundamentalists, and constantly advocating individuality free of the impositions of others. At the same time, they separate national from religious identifications while simultaneously differentiating the concept of Muslim.

Acknowledging the various distinctions among believers of Islam is a crucial step towards the suspension of many generalizing stereotypes. In this regard, ethno-comedy pursues genuinely postcolonialist interests. The progress accomplished by both fields consists in differentiating self and other, increasing the complexity of perceptions, and raising the number of voices partaking in the discourse of cultural identifications.

Although the certain degree of individual complicity in the industry may remain debatable with each artist, these postcolonialist endeavors prove that well-executed ethno-comedy is neither mind-numbing nor a mere venting event.¹⁷⁹ While Ceylan's shows feature a comparatively tame degree of aggression in the first place, even Somuncu's passionately hateful stage alter ego follows a much more sophisticated purpose than simple anger management (see 6.1.2). However, both could still fall prey to the alleged choir situation. In order to maximize its chances to effect social change, ethno-comedy needs to reach as broad a public as possible and not just the elect few attending an actual live performance.¹⁸⁰ It is here that the capitalist interests of the industry outweigh its assumed insistence on the ever same productions when the obvious profitability of ethno-comedy trumps the potential risks posed to the system by its controversial content.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ "Badly executed ethno-comedy" could be both and would describe artists who sell out their polyculturality solely for financial gain, abandon the promotion of transnational humanism, and through their lack of subversive social critique merely perpetuate disadvantageous stereotypes. In all my research, I did not encounter any suchlike instance.

¹⁸⁰ "Elect few" is clearly an understatement considering the hundreds of thousands attending Ceylan's shows. In relation to the overall population, however, non-attendees still outweigh attendees.

¹⁸¹ The risks only exist to the extent that Adorno and Horkheimer assume a system afraid of change. Ethno-comedy certainly does not try to overthrow a system; but as a platform for social critique it seeks to promote open-mindedness in the name of transculturalism that is more in keeping with our increasingly globalized age.

Despite its serious topics, ethno-comedy remains primarily an act of entertainment and as such it enjoys enormous popularity. There is no need to attend a show to be confronted directly with the artists as distributors of new perspectives. The synchronicity of the industry keeps their ideas alive and visible in all areas of daily life: The comedians appear on TV, are invited to radio shows, portrayed in magazines – Ceylan even performed repeatedly at two heavy metal festivals (the Summerbreeze in 2010, the Wacken Open Air in 2011 and 2014). Through their ever-increasing presence, their ideas spread almost automatically, are repeated and re-inscribed frequently into the minds of the masses. The artists definitely preach to the choir of fans as well, but in the process they reach millions of others, too: people zapping through comedy shows, political debates or late night talk, others listening to the radio in their car, reading anything from tabloid to broadsheet or following suggestions online,¹⁸² even people attending a music festival.

Trying to please a mass audience may influence the content of a show, render it more mass-compatible through less demanding jokes. The degree of adjustment to a growing audience varies with each artist. There are performers like Somuncu who deliver on a higher intellectual level to smaller audiences and others like Ceylan who target a larger group and focus more on the entertaining than the educating potential of the genre. Collectively, the artists are likely to reach the actual majority of the population. At least in part, their envisioned changes are so radical and so significant that their presentations need to reach as many people as possible, and exploiting the capitalist drive through selling a popular brand of educating entertainment serves this purpose perfectly.

¹⁸² The internet constitutes a severe challenge to the culture industry with its low degree of censorship and financial independence of the other mass media. Anyone can publish on youtube, dailymotion, veoh, or vimeo (for Somuncu's legal troubles in this respect, see 6.1.2). One of the few female ethno-comedians to date, Idil Baydar, even has her own channel which was briefly also promoted by the *BILD* and is free for everyone.

Irrespective of the exact amount of change effected through active contemplation by the audience, the culture industry provides another indirect service to the benefit of Turkish Germans and a few other minorities as well. By amplifying the visibility of the Turkish-German artists, some of the visual markers once associated with foreignness become increasingly familiar. Through the continual stimulus and growing association of Turkish-German faces with the positive experience of amusement, many markers may lose their dividing effect described by El-Tayeb. Such a change would not only benefit Turkish Germans but everyone of a similar physiognomy like Syrians, Iraqis, Afghanis, Iranians, Arabs, Kurds, Lebanese, Egyptians, Jordanians, and others.

There are natural limitations to the immediacy and degree of cultural effects a comedy show can have. The specific combination of serious topics in a comedic frame makes this medium of cultural political involvement quite attractive to a broader public, however, and as such it should not be underestimated in its potential either. The cultural political agenda of transnational humanism fostering critical self-reflection, respect, and empathy is insinuated and transported in most performances in jokes, occasionally even made explicit, and provided in crude and sophisticated ways alike. The reservations originating from skepticism towards marketing-oriented cultural products have legitimate grounds, but the specific constellation and mechanisms of ethno-comedy leave no doubt about the genre's capacity to move.

The cultural labor of ethno-comedians then lies in their enactment of cultural politics. Even though Gilbert conducted her study of female comics and marginality from a gendered perspective, her findings hold true as well when extrapolated to marginality from an ethnic perspective and ethno-comedians: "Although they do not allocate resources or single-handedly transform existing social structures, by performing a subversive discourse they depict and exert pressure upon existing social conditions. Through humor, they call attention to cultural fissures

and fault lines” (Gilbert 177). While Gilbert asserts on the one hand that “humor ... will never be taken ‘seriously’,” she also believes that “like any powerful rhetoric, humor produces real social and psychological effects” (177). The verifiability of these effects then suspends the conventional premise of seriousness as a basis for cultural contributions of political relevance. The prime feat of jester-like subversion consists in its eerie power to exercise an undeniable influence despite not being taken seriously.

4.6 The Turkish-German Ethno-Jester – A Summary

On the outside, the once identifying gown and accessories of the jester may have vanished over the centuries, but three central characteristics of the medieval artificial fool remain clearly recognizable in today’s ethno-comedians: Their social position shifted from the disadvantaged periphery to the privileged center of attention; since they can be arraigned only for their words they use humor as both shield and weapon; and protected further by the particular conditions of the carnivalesque event, their stage even allows a symbolic act of empowerment where, at least for a moment, the elicited festive laughter may suspend all conventional notions of time, dominion, and difference.

Two main modifications to the jester figure consist in taking advantage of the polycultural background of the artists and a key variation in their comedic methods. Ethnic humor itself is ancient, but hybrid artists deriving their core material from their ambivalent cultural identification constitutes a radical change due to the increasingly personal relation between joke and joker. The resulting self-referentiality of most punchlines expands the conventional fool’s license and helps to safeguard the deliverers of socio-critical comedy by stealing much of their targets’ thunder.

The emphasized ethnic dimension of the event causes a significant increase in the level of intimacy regarding the artist/audience relationship. Traditional factors establishing a sense of

familiarity include the universal directionality of carnivalesque laughter, the grotesque degradation of oneself and everyone else, as well as the use of unofficial language. El Hissy points out that the jester, harlequin, and trickster were paradigmatic manifestations of Bhabha's figure of the mediator, whose primary purpose as a carrier of a continual dynamic was to expose differences (66). In light of the harmonizing effects targeted by ethno-comedians, this function as mediator surely applies. In contrast to asserting difference, however, the comedians mediate by mocking differences and highlighting similarities. Kaya Yanar, for instance, "will den Leuten vor allem zeigen, wie ähnlich wir uns alle sind;" (Pahlke-Grygier).¹⁸³ The goal is not to feign false homogeneity, but to facilitate an acceptance of diversity based on the shared values of transnational humanism.

A decidedly new factor adding to this condition is the value of ethnic representation associated with polycultural artists. Whereas all preceding jester manifestations performed as isolated individuals referring only to themselves and their kind, Turkish-German comedians represent other ethnicities, too. In addition to the highly personal nature of their material, their polyculturality enables them to connect with a much more diverse audience than all previous jester manifestations.

The unique psychological efficiency of self-deprecating humor and the temporary bond with the audience enable the viewers to perceive a similar emancipatory sensation in an emotionally and cognitively engaging manner, strongly reminiscent of Bakhtin's description of carnival:

¹⁸³ "mainly wants to show people how alike we all are."

Man experiences this flow of time in the festive marketplace, in the carnival crowd, as he comes into contact with other bodies of varying age and social caste. He is aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people. This is why festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 92)

Just like “the marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 81), the ethno-comedic event constitutes a break from everyday life and exploits this extraterritorial space of increased liberties to subvert the current state of affairs by exposing and appreciating the polyculturality of a long hybridized citizenry.

The audience’s sympathy for the entertainers paired with the particular conditions of the carnivalesque event allows them to confront everyone with exceptional directness and honesty, the classic privilege afforded only by the fool’s license. In his historical account on the jester tradition, Flögel quotes the following reflections from a letter of an actual jester living in the German Middle Ages:

Es war die Rede, daß die Geistlichen niemals so die Wahrheit sagen dürften, als wir. Das war von jederzeit her unser Privilegium, und ich habe solches gewiß auch nicht ungenutzt gelassen. Man lacht darüber, wenn es viel war, so setzte es ein Paar Ohrfeigen ab; indessen schrieb man sich doch meine Erinnerung hinter das Ohr, und schämte sich ein wenig. (28)

It is said that the clergy was never allowed to speak the truth the way we do. That has always been our privilege. They laughed, and when we went too far we got slapped in the face; meanwhile, however, they made sure to remember my reminder and felt a bit embarrassed.

Speaking the truth frankly and freely in a keen but amusing manner remains a central social function of ethno-jesters who fuse contemporary cultural concerns with comicality. They instigate and guide the communal release of social tensions and through their work both enlighten and entertain the masses.

The following case studies look at two current professionals of this genre: the most successful one, Bülent Ceylan, and the most controversial one, Serdar Somuncu, as representatives of the two extremes of the ethno-comedic spectrum as outlined earlier. While Somuncu probes his audience in a more sophisticated *Kabarett* approach to the genre, Ceylan's grand spectacle aims predominantly to please and impress. With ultimately similar intentions but vastly different methods they give ethno-comedy a certain variety in much the same way that Adorno and Horkheimer imagined for all cultural productions: As two sides of the same coin, the audience is almost bound to resonate at least with one or the other. Yet, in contrast to most other parts of the *industry*, the ethno-comedic currency always warrants the same subversive deal: First, its humor buys one's attention, and then the artists' transnational marketing sets in.

5 – Bülent Ceylan

Ahmet Ceylan (~1938 - 29.10.2012) emigrated in 1958 as one of the first Turkish guest workers to heed Germany's call, where he married the native German Hilde.¹⁸⁴ On January 4th, 1976, she gave birth to their fourth and final child Bülent. Born and raised in the city of Mannheim, Ceylan graduated from a local Gymnasium in 1995. After two internships for a radio station and a popular channel for music television (VIVA), he enrolled at university and began to study philosophy and political science in 1998. Only a few semesters later, he left academia in favor of an on-stage career.



Image 9: Bülent Ceylan. Tretikov, Lila, Exec. Dir. Wikimedia Foundation. Web. 28 September 2014. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1_Live_Krone_2013_B%C3%BClent_Ceylan_1.jpg>. (© Superbass via Wikimedia Commons)

Between 2001 and 2016, Ceylan's comedy has earned him fourteen prizes already. In 2001 he was awarded the "Bielefelder Kabarettpreis," followed by the "Kleinkunstpreis des Landes Baden-Württemberg" in 2002; two of his DVDs went gold in 2011; three times he won the "Deutscher Comedypreis" (Best Newcomer in 2009, Best Comic in 2011, and most successful Live-Act in 2012); he received several awards from the readers of the popular youth magazine *Bravo*; and a major radio station (WDR1) honored him in 2014. All of these awards testify to the popularity of Ceylan as a comedian.

In addition to these professional distinctions, he received two, for a comedian, rather exceptional accolades as well. In 2010, he obtained the CIVIS ("Europas Medienpreis für

¹⁸⁴ No sources provide a specific year of birth and only few mention his final age ("Bülent Ceylan trauert"). Bülent's mother's maiden name is unknown as well. For all of the following biographical information see "Bülent Ceylan."

Integration”) in the entertainment category, a prize conferred in Germany since 1987.¹⁸⁵ Two years later, the federal state of Baden-Württemberg awarded him its Order of Merit. The governor bestows this decoration on someone “für herausragende Verdienste um das Land Baden-Württemberg, insbesondere im sozialen, kulturellen, wirtschaftlichen und politischen Bereich” (“Verdienstorden des Landes Baden-Württemberg”).¹⁸⁶ Both the CIVIS and the Order of Merit testify to the social impact of Ceylan’s performances and recognize the serious sides to his humorous work.¹⁸⁷

Against the theoretical background of carnivalesque humor, this chapter examines the comedy of Germany’s most widely known ethno-jester today. Ceylan exemplifies the emotional, positively enthusiastic, albeit comparatively shallow approach to ethno-comedy. Although his main focus lies on entertaining his audience, by the same token his comedy exceeds simple amusement by promoting a cultural political agenda. His popularity affords him an unparalleled reach among televised ethno-comedians, which warrants special attention to the direct and indirect means in which he tries to influence the public mindset. This chapter tries to elaborate and supplement the points already outlined in Bower’s incisive essay “Made in Germany” (2014), provide a number of concrete examples, and highlight Ceylan’s ties to the jester tradition in order to better understand the mechanisms and possible effects of his cultural labor.

¹⁸⁵ “*Europe’s media prize for integration.*” The CIVIS website describes the winner like this: “Ein Deutschtürke mit kurpfälzischem Dialekt. Der Mannheimer Comedian und Kabarettist Bülent Ceylan ist ein Mann mit vielen Gesichtern und Stimmen. Seine Figuren reden Klartext, seine Zeitgeist-Analysen treffen. ... Bülent Ceylan nimmt in seiner Best-Of-Show türkische wie deutsche Landsleute auf den Arm. Gewitzt und charmant – ein intelligentes Spiel zum Thema Integration” (Radix, Michael and Müller, Annette, CEOs. *CIVIS Medienpreis für Integration und kulturelle Vielfalt in Europa*. Web. 26 April 2015. <<http://www.civismedia.eu/preistraeger>>.); “*A Turkish German with a Palatine dialect. The comedian and Kabarett artist Bülent Ceylan from Mannheim is a man of many faces and voices. His characters talk straight, his analyses of the zeitgeist are dead on. ... In his Best-Of-Show, Bülent Ceylan mocks Turkish as well as German fellow citizens. Funny and charming – a clever performance on the topic of integration.*”

¹⁸⁶ “*For exceptional services to the State of Baden-Württemberg, especially in social, cultural, economic, and political respects (Order of Merit of the State of Baden-Württemberg).*” The number of recipients is limited to 1,000 living dignitaries at all times.

¹⁸⁷ Ceylan also supports AIDS help Mannheim, a local hospice for children, and several campaigns against racism. Moreover, he is an ambassador to the “Stiftung Lesen” (“Bülent Ceylan”). It is unclear when these commitments began, but it seems reasonable to assume they were also considered when awarding his civic honors.

After providing a brief overview of his works to date (5.1), I will turn to basic structural elements setting the scene of a representative live performance (5.2). These include the central auditory and visual components of a venue but also Ceylan's standard repertoire of *dramatis personae*. Once the stage is set, the analysis proceeds to artist/audience relations and examines ways in which Ceylan generates and maintains a sense of community with and among his spectators (5.3). Once structural and interpersonal conditions established an extraterritorial space, the final section (5.4) shows how Ceylan's weaponized humor destroys and creates at the same time by breaking down prejudiced perceptions and celebrating the empowered community of the laughing diverse.

5.1 Material

After performing the programs *Produzier' mich net* (1998), *Nou Mässitsch* (1999), and a Best Of also entitled *Produzier' mich net* (2000) on small stages across Germany, Ceylan celebrated his major breakthrough with *Döner for one – mit alles* which premiered in November of 2002. Three years later followed *Halb getürkt* (2005) which aired on state TV (ZDF) in 2006, *Kebabbel net* in 2007 which was broadcast by the commercial channel RTL in 2009. That same year his next program *Ganz schön turbüent* began, followed by *Wilde Kreatürken* in 2011, and *Haardrock* in 2014, all three of which were released on DVD as well. His latest program *Kronk* premiered in February 2016.¹⁸⁸

With the sole exception of *Nou Mässitsch*, the titles of all of his routines reference at least one of the three main pillars of Ceylan's act, the last one of which is unique in Germany: his hybrid culturality which he shares with every Turkish-German ethno-comedian, his specific

¹⁸⁸ There is no official recording of this program yet. All references are based on my observations at the premiere performance on February 4, 2016 in Karlsruhe.

repertoire of *dramatis personae*,¹⁸⁹ and his characteristic passion for heavy metal music.

Together, they provide much of his material, a variety of perspectives, and a distinct way of presentation. The phrase “Produzier’ mich net” (“*Don’t produce me*”) is a cacography of the similar sounding “Provozier mich nicht” (“*Don’t provoke me*”), a statement commonly associated with uneducated, predominantly male youths, often of migrant background, looking for trouble. The connection with young people emphasizes the attribute of relative newness of the ethno-comedic format, while the dialectal negative “net” instead of “nicht” testifies to Ceylan’s roots in the Electoral Palatinate. The comedic juxtaposition of immigrant and regional sociolect reflects Ceylan’s polyculturality in linguistic terms as well as the humoristic nature of the event. The name “Döner for one” is a parody of the German classic *Dinner for one* (1963). The black and white sketch of roughly eighteen minutes length is broadcast every New Year’s Eve on numerous stations in Germany, a tradition reflected in the skit’s recurring line “The same procedure as every year” (“Dinner for One”). The appendix “mit alles” is a phrase familiar from many döner shops where non-native speakers of German often failed to use dative case when asking if a kebab was to be served “mit allem,” i.e. with all available condiments.

As outlined in 2.1.3, the term “getürkt” usually implies some sort of deception. Ceylan’s bisection “Halb getürkt” suggests a literal meaning, foregrounding once more his polyculturality. This particular pun keeps reoccurring in his programs, for instance when he talks about his culturally different parents. “Kebabbel net” is a nonsensical blending of Turkish fast food, kebab, and Palatine “babbeln,” meaning “*to chat*.” “Ganz schön turbüent” contains two simultaneous references in the last word. The more obvious one is Ceylan’s first name, Bülent. The subtler one plays with a German stereotype regarding the comparatively large number of visible and audible

¹⁸⁹ Kaya Yana already had a number of different characters on stage, each endowed with specific attire, mimics, and voice. Idil Baydar also has two alter egos. She switches between the two, but does not appear as herself on her video channel. To widen her repertoire, she integrates other actors who figure as her cousin, sister, or boyfriend.

“ü”s in the Turkish language. Adding the umlaut alienates the German “turbulent” and renders it pseudo-Turkish, irrespective of Ceylan’s first name.

Choosing “turbulent” as a title adjective launches a whole succession of titles that project an image of dynamic energy. “Wilde Kreatürken” continues along this trajectory with another adjective evoking almost fierce power, followed by a blending of “creature” and “Turk”. Because the former usually bears positive connotations in its allusion to a benevolent maker, the latter seems to taint this concept and therefore add a borderline racist implication to the word “Turk.” Only his partial self-identification with the Turkish renders this pun acceptable to the majority. The title “Haardrock” features yet another blending. One of Ceylan’s most prominent visible features is his long black hair. Paired with a musical genre symbolic of vigor unleashed, the term playfully undermines the cliché brutality of hard rock while still stylizing Ceylan as tougher than other current comedians. “Kronk,” finally, is a dialectal misspelling of “krank,” i.e. “sick,” and plays with the double reference of phenomena Ceylan considers sick and his frequent self-assessment as a “Schizo-Türke” in light of his various stage characters (cf. Janovsky). As will be explained in more detail in 5.4.1, Ceylan regularly refers to himself on stage as mentally impaired, which moves watching him in close relation to the voyeuristic spectacle of medieval bedlams and grants him a temporarily expanded fool’s license.

In comparison to these energetic titles both names of Ceylan’s TV shows come across rather tame, from the less inspired *Die Bülent Ceylan Show* (2011-13) to the deliberately chummy *Bülent und seine Freunde* (2014-present).¹⁹⁰ Each title already suggests the respective focus: Whereas the former centers on sketches and stand-up by its host and invites just one celebrity guest, the concept of the latter is to promote young talents alongside their popular colleagues every evening.

¹⁹⁰ In September 2014 and 2015, two seasons of “Bülent und seine Freunde” aired so far with six episodes each. With just two exceptions, every episode features at least one emergent ethno-comedian among other entertainers.

At present, Ceylan has not yet published anything in writing, but he released his first music CD *Nichts besonderes* (“*Nothing special*”) in 2014 with his own label Ceylan Records.¹⁹¹ All of the seven songs featured in his routines. The self-reflective title track “Nichts besonderes” was written and composed by Ceylan and frames the album: the studio version opens it and a live version closes it. The penultimate song “Geradeaus” (“*Straight on*”) is an equally contemplative piece also set to a pop rock melody. Track two, the only other song with music and lyrics by Ceylan, is a statement against right-wing radicalism and xenophobia. The three center pieces are humorous and performed by one of Ceylan’s stage characters.

Together, the routines, shows, and songs comprise the main body of Ceylan’s artistic work. The basis for my analysis is the *Live!*-DVD from 2009, a Best-Of performed in Mannheim in front of 10,000 people which combined the most elaborate versions of Ceylan’s earlier material into one single program.¹⁹² As a more chronological approach would demonstrate, the topical focus and comedic quality in his later performances changed gradually. Losing progressively in critical substance, Ceylan’s once trenchant ethno-comedy slowly degenerated, in Freud’s terms, from elaborate ethnic jokes to bland everyday jests about relationships. Of course, he never fully abandoned his hobby-horse of culturally comparative humor and especially through his reputation and hybrid perspective he still represents the ethno-comedic genre; but relying increasingly on charm and corny jokes instead of thematic advancement he failed to build on his former greatness as a critical comedian. Only in his latest program *Kronk* he reversed this trend and reverted to his comedic roots. Still, the content of his late routines, songs, and television shows only supplements my thematically structured study.

¹⁹¹ Up until (and including) *Ganz schön turbulent*, all of Ceylan’s routines appeared as audio CDs as well. Since 2014, Ceylan has written and performed new songs as well but not yet released a new album.

¹⁹² In contrast to releasing a Best-Of DVD that simply features a collage of clips from previous routines, Ceylan’s *Live!*-show put a recombination of largely familiar but honed material on stage as an independent production.

5.2 Setup of the Extraterritorial

Compared to Somuncu's intellectually more sophisticated and demanding *Kabarett* approach to ethno-comedy, Ceylan's performances are firmly rooted in the light entertainment variety of the genre. The central aim of its design is to appeal emotionally to a large audience and not to risk overtaxing it cognitively.

Cabaret is characterized by a satirical tone and frequently has a political agenda, whereas comedy largely steers clear of politics and privileges entertainment over critique. Comedy neither assumes nor requires politically informed spectators, whereas the cabaret audience is expected to have some knowledge of contemporary politics in order to follow the program. (Bower, "Made in Germany" 359)

Ceylan's comedic orientation entails several formal consequences regarding sonic and visual arrangements, a chummy demeanor with his audience (see 5.3), and a general prioritization of emotional well-being over potentially uncomfortable cognitive challenges (see 5.4).¹⁹³ Towards the end of his *Haardrock*-show, Ceylan makes his intentions explicit. He addresses his audience and answers the question lately asked repeatedly in fan mail of whether he would incorporate and comment on recent tragic events during his show:

¹⁹³ Somuncu, for instance, pursues the exact opposite approach: a sober stage setup, a frequently harsh demeanor towards spectators, and an overall dominance of thought-inducing criticism over feel-good gags.

Überall passiert Gewalt. In Afrika verhungern Kinder, da redet keiner mehr drüber. Das sind alles so Sachen, die man jeden Tag... Ich bin Komiker, ich bin Entertainer. Ich bin dafür da, euch einfach mal kurz abzulenken. Mal kurz auch mal hinzuweisen, aber nicht dazu... Ich bin kein Politiker. Ich möchte euch von dieser manchmal schlimmen Welt einfach mal ablenken. So wie wir jetzt zusammen kommen, einfach mal lachen, den Kopf freimachen und einfach mal genießen – dafür bin ich da. (*Haardrock* 131)

*Violence is everywhere. Children starve in Africa, no one talks about them anymore. All of these issues, every day... I'm a comedian, I'm an entertainer. I'm here to distract you a little. To point out a few things here and there as well, but not to... I'm not a politician. I just want to take your eyes off this sometimes horrible world for a while. The way we're gathered here right now, to laugh, to clear our heads, to enjoy – that's why I'm here.*¹⁹⁴

This self-identification confirms Ceylan's stance on the light-hearted comedy side of the entertainment spectrum while still maintaining loose links to harsh realities. He acknowledges his social obligation as a media figure "to point out a few things here and there," but at once emphasizes his overall priority to amuse his audience. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, his apolitical pretense sells himself short since he clearly occupies a politically relevant space and exercises considerable influence through his media-supported popularity.

Somuncu, by contrast, occasionally even highlights the political nature of his programs. Despite his completely different approach to the genre, he shows a great degree of thematic cohesion in the ethno-comedic landscape when he makes the exact same reference for almost the same reason but in his own cynical fashion:

¹⁹⁴ All translations are my own. The original snippets are my transcriptions from the respective DVDs.

Wir entdecken unsere Betroffenheit ja meistens nur dann, wenn sie nah genug ist und wir die Protagonisten kennen. Es wäre schön, wenn wir beispielsweise unsere Fahnen auf Halbmast hissen würden, nicht nur wenn jemand Amok läuft – in Winnenden, ja – sondern auch wenn 40.000 Kinder jeden Tag sterben in Afrika. (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 2-3)

Usually, we discover our dismay only when it comes close enough and we know the protagonists. It'd be nice if we didn't just hoist our flags to half-mast when someone runs amok – in Winnenden, yes – but also when 40,000 children die every day in Africa.

Compared to Ceylan's short, simple and yet often incomplete sentences and his happy-go-lucky attitude, Somuncu's syntax, his elaborate choice of words, the passive accusation in his matter-of-fact tone, and his frequently confrontational bearing clearly separate the light comedic approach from the heavier *Kabarett* approach to ethno-comedy. Both create their own distinctly different atmospheres which nonetheless each generate the carnivalesque feel of extraterritoriality. Looking at Ceylan's various shows, the following examines how he sets the auditory and visual parameters for his specific style of performance.

5.2.1 Auditory Elements

Since his earliest days on stage, Ceylan strove to establish himself as the metalhead in the entertainment business. Today, journalists and reviewers across Germany frequently refer to him as “the rock star among the comedians” or “the comedian with a rocker's heart,” Austria calls him “the rock'n'roller of comedy,” and Switzerland “the metal Turk.”¹⁹⁵ Adopting a more moderate tone, Ceylan often jokingly self-identifies as only a “chamomile-tea rocker” in

¹⁹⁵ “Der Rockstar unter den Comedians;” “Der Comedian mit Rockerherz;” “Bülent Ceylan: Rock'n'Roller der Comedy;” “Metal Türke.”

comparison to the hardcore enthusiast. While his energetic conduct on stage and some of his show elements certainly push the boundaries of a mainstream audience, this “chamomile-factor” sustains the mass-compatibility of his love for hard rock by rendering it benign.

Guided by his passion for heavy metal music, Ceylan turns stand-up comedy into a full-blown spectacle. Loud music plays a central role in his show, often in combination with pyro effects, fake wind, and smoke. The mere size of some venues reminds more of a rock festival than a comedy event with sold-out stadiums fitting tens of thousands of people. With his growing success, Ceylan increasingly turned to open air venues to host ever larger numbers. Among his fellow ethno-comedians this level of popularity certainly constitutes an exception, but it nonetheless testifies impressively to the grand social interest in this particular genre.

When Ceylan first enters the stage (typically as himself, not as one of his stage characters) he is usually dressed entirely in black, metal music blasts from gigantic speakers, pillars of smoke, sparks, and fire rise to the roof or into the sky. In his *Live!*-routine, a huge logo with his name looms up high in the center, illuminated in red and yellow, and framed by lines that shape wings on the sides as well as resemble devils’ horns on top. His long black hair waves in fake wind; his greeting gesture: the horns of metal; his first words: “Rock’n’Roll!” followed by a short but intense bit of head banging. Carefully orchestrated visual and audio elements of spectacle mark an obvious break from everyday normality, pseudo-satanic allusions and dark attire lend an exotic anarchic air to the artist – the carnivalesque extraterritoriality for the jester is set.

The opening sound atmosphere consists of three main parts: effects, audience cheers, and loud, invigorating music. Often, a quick countdown to Ceylan’s appearance will be initiated through an announcement followed by the according visuals on huge, stage-adjacent screens. Pyro-techniques trigger explosions in quick succession which contributes to the high volume of noise and further enralls the viewers. Their cheers, clapping, and whistling create a particular

kind of intoxicating group dynamic where the ecstasy of some tends to infect others, too. Finally, upbeat trailer music in combination with a matching light show still strengthens the sense of anticipation and exhilarates the audience even more.

The choice of music is particularly important. In her book *Heavy Metal. A Cultural Sociology* (1991), Deena Weinstein described potential effects of being exposed to loud metal music:

The essential sonic element in heavy metal is power, expressed as sheer volume. Loudness is meant to overwhelm, to sweep the listener into the sound, and then to lend the listener the sense of power that the sound provides. ... The kind of power that loudness gives is a shot of youthful vitality, a power to withstand the onslaught of sound and to expand one's own energy to respond to it with a physical and emotional thrust of one's own. (23)

In addition to its high volume, the sound gains yet greater impact through a strong bass, created by drums and bass guitar. "Due to the prominence of the heavy bottom sound, heavy metal has a tactile dimension. The music can be felt, not only metaphorically but, literally, particularly in the listener's chest" (Weinstein 25). Ceylan's choice of music goes beyond mere listening and involves body and mind to a much greater extent than other styles of background tunes.

Ceylan's relation to metal is holistic: He follows an implicit dress code, invites metal bands as openers for his shows, uses it as background music, and composes some of his own songs in this fashion. Although he is definitely not a rock star just yet, his continuous identification with the music on various levels provides him with similar qualities that immediately affect the atmosphere and audience relations at a show. Gilbert, for instance, references Mintz who "contends that the comic functions as a 'shaman' who leads the public 'in a

celebration of a community of shared culture, of homogenous understanding and expectation”” (18). These are precisely the ideal results of Ceylan’s comedy spectacle: to overcome obstacles of prejudice and celebrate the unity of the diverse.

In her study of metal music, Weinstein also uses the shaman image but goes even further:

Of the types of charismatic leaders, heavy metal stars come closest to the shaman. They are seen to have extraordinary gifts, which they cultivate, and to be able to achieve states of ecstasy. When they do so they are judged and felt to be “plugged into” the divine, mediating between the mundane and the sacred worlds. The experience of Dionysian ecstasy is the shamanistic state associated with the heavy metal concert performance. To achieve this state before a vast audience and then to communicate it to that audience is the pinnacle of success. (Weinstein 88)

By creating the same image for himself, projecting it on stage, and emulating the shared sensation reminiscent of rock concerts, Ceylan approximates this state of collective ecstasy that exhilarates the audience and makes it emotionally so susceptible for his cultural political message.

His shamanic position allows for a form of crowd control hugely beneficial to promoting his inclusive, humanist values because the communal sense of power he thus creates undergoes a double transition. First, it translates smoothly but forcefully into a feeling of group cohesion that immediately transcends ethnic diversity by connecting the audience on the universal grounds of empowering sounds, especially at his festival performances. Secondly, experiencing this sensation of unison at a memorable spectacle could create interpersonal links that might bridge potential distances and certainly impact if not suspend previous perceptions of difference. The power of music thus gained the community-building dimensions of social power, which in turn lends considerable support to the overall goals of ethno-comedy.

Especially during the opening moments of a show the atmosphere bears strong parallels to an actual rock concert. If the audience is not standing already when he finally enters the stage, Ceylan often tells it to get up. He addresses single blocks, welcomes all sections, and appreciates the accumulating noise, gratifying the audience by announcing it was louder than the capital of Berlin.¹⁹⁶ This physical involvement of the people creates a particular energy in the venue that fuels the comedian and excites the audience.

Ceylan's self-fashioning as the heavy metal comedian through his grandiose stages with huge lights and massive speakers and his implementation of special effects not only constitute his unique selling-point but moreover give a distinctly contemporary twist to the jester tradition.¹⁹⁷ For the carnivalesque fool, according to Bakhtin, any kind of excessive exhibition and dramatization of the individual was decidedly atypical since individualizing "footlights would destroy a carnival" (*Rabelais and His World* 7). Ceylan dispels Bakhtin's concerns. Aided by his particular setup, he creates a profoundly carnivalesque atmosphere through employing loud music, various forms of interaction with his audience, and a number of rhetorical devices, all of which contribute to establishing Bakhtin's advocated sense of experiencing extraterritoriality and carnivalesque togetherness.

¹⁹⁶ There is a three-step hierarchy to the compliment an audience can receive for the atmosphere it generates: louder than Berlin, louder than Mannheim, and louder than the world. Berlin as the capital symbolizes massive size, Mannheim as Ceylan's hometown stands for truly passionate fans, and using the world as reference point simply takes the edge off local rivalries.

¹⁹⁷ I use the term "self-fashioning" independent of Stephen Greenblatt's understanding in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980). Setting oneself apart from fellow artists fulfills his premise that "self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something" but certainly not "something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile" (9). In a larger context, I share Greenblatt's view that "the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one's own" (1). In contrast to him, despite the varying degrees of all ethno-comedians' submission to institutional determination I believe that these comedians may not possess complete artistic autonomy, but that their acts are at least not as "strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force" (256) as Greenblatt claims for Shakespeare, More, et al.

5.2.2 Visual Elements

The sense of power generated by the sound alone is further amplified by visual images. With each new program we find variations of key themes of power and strength encoded in the stage decoration, but also in his television shows and in the designs of his DVD covers. Where Greiner expanded his analytic frame of comedy from text to performance, this section expands the frame further yet and includes some of the paratextual amplifications of performative style as well.

At Ceylan's live performances, the size of the venue alone already requires a wide stage with large speakers and auxiliary monitors to the sides. These structurally impressive basics are supplemented by evocative imagery. In the *Live!*-show, for instance, a huge B engulfed in flames towers on top of blank steel scaffolding with two gigantic metal fans set symmetrically underneath the logo. *Ganz schön turbulent* shows his name in illuminated all-caps letters twice his size across the entire stage. *Wilde Kreatürken* featured a new logo with his initials, a B surrounded by a C with spikes on the outside. Metal studs are a common accessory in the heavy metal fashion culture and frequently used as an image of resistance, defense, or even aggression. Accordingly, the combination of his initials with studs or thorns is both a fashion choice as well as a statement of empowerment. Underneath this new logo we see large familiar flames across the stage. The logo and the flames reappear in *Haardrock*, this time supplemented by his name in bold all-caps letters and projected by a wall of enormous screens. These screens provide individual backgrounds to each of his stage characters and emphasize individual traits. In *Kronk*, Ceylan maintains this idea of character-specific on-screen animations but omits images of fire. Instead, he has one of his personae enter with a flame thrower. On top of the character screens another row of displays shows the program's name in bilious green all caps letters entwined with barbed wire, which emphasizes once more Ceylan's predilection for images of recalcitrance.

The studio interior of *Die Bülent Ceylan Show* as well as its DVD covers display similar semiotics. Designed for an audience of just a few hundred people, the studio is of palpably less epic dimensions than the stage setup. The sole background element is a single large screen on which the audience watches short clips inserted throughout the show. Between clips, we see a variation of Ceylan's name, flame graphics, and logos, predominantly in red on black background. Embedded in the central floor from which Ceylan hosts his show, we see his name printed in 3D all-caps letters which look like carved from rock. The first and the last letter of "Ceylan" melt into hooks in an obvious imitation of the famous stroke by Metallica.¹⁹⁸

The same paratextual feat decorates the show's DVD cover, except that here the letters appear to be hot molten steel. The same coloration adorns the writing of his very first *Live!-DVD*, the only one still spelled with regular capitalization and as such indicative of a quick progression towards marketing an image of solid power. On the *Ganz schön turbülent* cover, Ceylan's name – spelled with devils' horns for an umlaut – is kept entirely in bronze on a steel plate held by thick chains against a dark, raging sky with lightning. Each cover contains an image of him as well, always dressed in a black shirt or leather jacket and usually showing his signature hand gesture. *Haardrock*, for instance, portrays Ceylan against a wall of flames, looking serious into the camera, both hands showing the horns of metal with his fingernails painted black. All of these visual cues work towards evocating an image of wicked toughness. *Wilde Kreatürken* is the only exception. Despite the flame graphics for the program title, the main image shows Ceylan riding a rubber boat across a sea of fans – the one cover where we see the comedian actually laugh.

¹⁹⁸ The font of "Wilde Kreatürken" may have been inspired by another metal band, Iron Maiden, but here the parallels are far less obvious.

The combination of rock (both graphical and musical), fire, and steel all serve to establish an atmosphere of spectacle and strength.¹⁹⁹ As such, they provide a background befitting an untamed, carnivalesque celebration of freedom and community as displayed in Image 10: the shamanic ethno-jester engulfed in flames and engaged in his wicked dance to metal music. The stylized protagonist projects a paradox image of steadfast stability on the one hand, and the power to create typically carnivalesque chaos on the other. Ceylan's unparalleled emphasis on spectacle highlights his mass-compatible approach to comedy, spending much effort on the cultivation of an image that the public readily accepts as the signification of a carnivalesque time out.



Image 10: Ceylan's heavy metal spectacle. Yahoo! Inc. *flickr*. Web. 28 September 2015. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/oldigitaleye/5538963801/in/photolist-9rsCXT-9rvB3q-9rvB2o-9rvAYE-9rvAWQ-9rvAW3-9rsCMM-9rvAT1-9rsCKt-9rvAQy-9rvAPC-9rvAMf-9rvALb-9rvAJG-9rvAGq-9rvAEd-9rvABL-9rsCqk-9rsCoM-9rsCnn-9rvAsd-9rsCiH-9rsCh6-bF4bTJ-bTXW5v-bF4bSL-bTXW4R-bF4bRN-bF4bQQ-bTXW3M-bF4bPL-bF4bPJ-bTXW2t-bF4bNQ-bTXW1x-bF4bMG-bTXVZK-bF4bLW-bF4bKY-bTXVYD-bTXVXr-bTXVXp-bF4bJd-bF4bJf-bF4bGA-bTXVVX-bF4bG3-bF4bFN-bTXVTX-bTXVT8>>. (Courtesy of Peter Porikis).

5.2.3 *Dramatis Personae*

The feeling of extraterritoriality grows particularly in light of Ceylan's repertoire of stage characters. The core group contained five figures, four men and one woman, three Germans and two of Turkish origin. The quintet consists entirely of stock characters, loosely in the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*: the superficial rich wife, the Turkish prole, the salesman, the angry elderly handyman, and the town idiot. Accordingly, each one has a simple signature outfit,

¹⁹⁹ Undoubtedly, the design also caters to clichés of masculinity; but in terms of style any female fan of heavy metal would probably support the exact same fashion, décor, and effects as Ceylan without appearing particularly butch.

usually visibly and readily available on stage from the onset.²⁰⁰ Moreover, each character possesses individual voices, gestures, and mimics. Like Kaya Yanar's characters, Ceylan's personae are so well established by now, he only needs to provide a single facial expression, a specific laugh, or tone of voice and his audience will immediately recognize the referenced character.²⁰¹ Together, they take up roughly half the time of each performance.

Two of the male figures represent the German lower middle-class of Mannheim. The first is Manfred Bockenauer, the only one with a last name, who pronounces his given name "Mompfred" due to the local dialect. The choleric janitor wears a cap, a constantly mis-buttoned grey work coat, and he carries a pipe wrench. In a misguided fantasy of omnipotence resulting from watching a Star Wars movie, he changed the pronunciation of his profession as janitor from "Hausmeister" to "Hausmeeecccchhhter" in a megalomaniac emulation of Darth Vader's voice. The second male goes by the name of Harald, the village simpleton. Apart from his baseball hat, his indicative piece of clothing is a blue tracksuit, the successful zipping up of which is always his first main challenge. Like Mompfred he speaks only in Palatine dialect.

The other two men are of Turkish origin. On the one side, there is Hassan, the generic Turkish immigrant of little education but great physique. His exaggerated self-perception finds expression in his pompous posture and a massive golden chain around his neck. Tucked into his pants is a huge comb which he never uses but which still indicates his inflated sense of vanity. The prosody and grammar of the macho proletarian mirror the typical ethnolect of Turkish immigrants, although he uses significantly less Turkish or English phrases than Feridun

²⁰⁰ In 2014, *Haardrock* broke this pattern for the first time. The costumes remained the same but Ceylan chose to disappear briefly behind the screen wall to change.

²⁰¹ In *Ganz schön turbulent* and *Wilde Kreatürken* Ceylan performed a song sung by all of his characters, where he only changed his voice and posture to evoke the respective images.

Zaimoglu's term "Kanak Sprak" came to imply.²⁰² Compared to his open aggression, the other Turkish-German male, Aslan (whose name means "lion"), displays a more subtle inclination towards violence. Dressed in a plain coat but an embroidered hat, the owner of a supermarket always carries a wooden prayer chain. As the prototypical patriarch, he struggles occasionally with Western civilization, especially with respect to his daughter's East-German boyfriend whom he likes to threaten with physical abuse. Together, Hassan and Aslan tallied major Turkish stereotypes and afforded Ceylan the opportunity to comment through his performance.²⁰³

The one female figure is the German Anneliese. As the co-owner of a fur store in Mannheim she is the only financially prosperous character. She wears a black fur coat, tacky leopard-print glasses, and her hair down. As a self-important airhead with a silly high-pitched signature laugh, her selfish ignorance renders her an elitist and borderline racist. Analogous to Hassan's alleged sexual prowess, she personifies the promiscuous wife to an equally unfaithful husband.

In *Wilde Kreatürken* Ceylan tested another character, another citizen from Mannheim, Günther. Obscuring his face with his hair, Günther is the alleged child of his dad and a yeti. He wears blinking sunglasses (to hold his hair in place) and only talks in bad puns constructed from song quotes. He briefly reappeared in *Haardrock* but disappeared again in *Kronk*.

Bower claims that, using hyperbolic embodiments of ethnic stereotypes, Ceylan's and Kaya Yanar's "appeal is not to the intellect, but to the comic effects of masquerade and impersonation" (Bower, "Made in Germany" 362). While this is true on the surface level, Ceylan's core group supplies him with various possible approaches to a number of topics.

²⁰² Zaimoglu's book *Kanak Sprak – 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* was published in 1995. The title combines a pejorative term for Turkish people with a deliberate misspelling of the German "Sprache," i.e. "language," and refers to a sociolect common mainly among youths of migrant background that mixes mostly German and Turkish elements.

²⁰³ After his father died in 2012, Ceylan dropped the Aslan character for sentimental reasons based on their similar language and humor. A new "Turkish" character has not yet been introduced.

Through these characters, he can show different perspectives on different issues and through his interpretation and portrayals of clichés add a significant intellectual dimension to the comical masquerade.

The notion of impersonation becomes particularly interesting with Ceylan's stage self. His occasional falling out of character as well as various allegedly autobiographical parts of his routines pose a distinctly cognitive challenge to the audience to distinguish between the artist, his stage self, and his level of involvement with his other characters. Looking only at the personal and stage self of Turkish-German *Kabarett* artists, Terkessidis argues the following:

Dieses Durcheinanderwirbeln der Rollen schafft eine immense Verwirrung. Zum einen fällt der deutsch-türkische Kabarettist mit seiner „Rolle“ zusammen, womit er aufzeigt, daß der „Türke“ in der deutschen Gesellschaft von mannigfaltigen Zuschreibungen erfaßt ist und aus diesem Grund seine „Rollen“ nicht an- und ablegen kann wie der Einheimische. Dabei sieht sich auch der deutsch-türkische Kabarettist selbst vom autochthonen Publikum dauernd mit einer Authentizitätsunterstellung konfrontiert: In dessen Augen kann er den „Türken“ gar nicht spielen, weil er ja einer „ist“. Auf der anderen Seite jedoch entzieht er sich dieser Unterstellung, indem er ja gerade nicht er selbst „ist“ bzw. das Subjekt, das man unter einem bürgerlichen Namen kennt – denn dieses spielt er ja nur. So hebt das allochthone Kabarett den Unterschied zwischen Künstlichkeit (Rolle) und Echtheit (bürgerlicher Name, Ich) auf. Dabei werden nicht nur die üblichen Rollen des Kabarett [nach Jürgen Henningsen, TH] unterlaufen, sondern auch die immer noch verbreiteten Vorstellungen von Identität. (298)

This jumbling of roles creates tremendous confusion. On the one side, the Turkish-German artist conflates with his “role;” this enables him to show that the “Turk” in German society is subject to several attributions, which makes it impossible for him to play or discard his roles like the native. In the process, the Turkish-German artist finds himself in constant confrontation with a presumption of authenticity from the autochthonous audience: He cannot play a “Turk” because he “is” one. On the other side, however, he evades this conflict since it “is” not him, i.e. the subject known by a real name, in the first place – since he only acts like it. That way, allochthonous Kabarett suspends the difference between artificiality (role) and reality (real name, I). This not only subverts the conventional roles of Kabarett [by Jürgen Henningsen, TH] but also still prevalent perceptions of identity.

The deliberate confusion of roles not only serves humoristic purposes, but it carries an intellectually demanding element as well since the comical subversion of clichés necessitates a subsequent reevaluation of externally ascribed identifications. Ceylan picks single stereotypes, ridicules them, and delivers a humorous demonstration of their inaptitude as ethnic generalizations. The artist does not stage “the Turk” in the same way that his female character Anneliese does not stage “the woman” or the choleric Mompfired staged “the German” because none of these entities exists. The constant back and forth between roles casts significant doubts on the clear separability of identifications erroneously perceived as fixed. This blurring effect will be discussed further in 5.3.1.

In addition to the technique of role play and the resulting deconstruction of stereotypes, it is the moments when Ceylan deliberately inserts critical reflections on everyday life into this extraterritorial spectacle when his act finally exceeds mere amusement beyond a doubt. Before

these open breaks become an acceptable exception to his entertainment program, however, Ceylan has to employ diverse bonding strategies with his audience first.

5.3 Community Formation

Crossing boundaries and possibly risking the outrageous requires Ceylan to preemptively maximize the ambiguous safe-space of his comedy. In exchange for his fool's license as a comedian, certain audience expectations arise, such as the dominance of the comical over the critical and hence a good chance for laughter, but also the artist's pushing of boundaries and even the possibility of scandal. The resulting freedom of speech already exceeds its regular norms but its new limits remain a vague affair at best. In order to maintain the lowest probability of his audience feeling seriously offended despite occasionally critical content, Ceylan pursues a variety of tactics familiar from the jester tradition and sometimes lends his own twist to them.

Ultimately, two situational criteria must be fulfilled: Ceylan needs to establish himself credibly as both German and Turkish for the majority of his ethnic jokes to look self-deprecating; secondly, he needs to bond with his audience. The former is a question of ethos, the latter of carnivalesque rhetoric and interaction.

Based on Bakhtin's notion of speech genres, my study considers ethno-comedy to be a secondary, i.e. complex genre, in which "thematic content, style, and compositional structure are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 60 original emphasis). Ceylan's choice of topics, phrasing, ways of presentation, his cultural political agenda, audience interaction, even the entire world of epitextual marketing, merchandise, and combined online presence all influence each other in meaning and therefore constitute one complex manifestation of the genre of ethno-comedy that is united and guided by social,

comedic, and economic interests. Treating Ceylan's performances as multi-layered texts, the following analysis examines some of the formative tactics for ethos- and community-building typically underlying his act.

5.3.1 *A Hybrid Ethos*

As outlined in 4.3, a fundamental tactic in ethno-comedic humor is self-deprecation. Key to directing laughter is the identification of its target; so when the mockery of Turkish and German stereotypes is supposed to taunt the joker, too, the audience needs to be able to perceive the artists, i.e. their stage roles as opposed to potential characters, as authentically Turkish and German. In her description of *Kabarett* artists, Pschibl essentially echoes Bakhtin's postulate of carnival as a unifying feast when she emphasizes that they have to appear as an "equal among equals" (313) at all times. In a performative context, this notion of "equality" implies a relatable character only; assuming total equality was obviously absurd. Gilbert emphasizes, however, that "although the comic is clearly in the rhetorically powerful position, today more than ever before the comic is most likely 'of the people,' rather than part of the hegemonic culture" (61).

The tricky part in ethno-comedy is that the polycultural artists will switch their point of view continuously, from German to Turkish and back and forth, and yet at every moment they need to come across credibly as an equal of either one or the other. This make-believe exclusivity is certainly an illusion, given that polycultural artists identify with neither nationality completely and in themselves constitute the very embodiment of a hybrid third. So how do they accomplish the split between both nationalities while creating the appearance of belonging fully here or there? The solution to reconciling hybridity and equality is the creation of an appropriate ethos.

In his dialogue with Phaedrus, Plato defined rhetoric as the “universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments.” This is exactly what is expected from a professional comedian: to guide the audience’s collective attention and be accepted every step of the way. Aristotle later specified the means of rhetoric persuasion in three different categories: ethos, pathos, and logos.²⁰⁴ In the Aristotelian sense, “ethos” refers to a speaker’s authenticity based on character and status. A classic example is a doctor pointing out his or her professional background to assert the validity of their opinion regarding medical issues. The claim to credibility is based on the speaker’s self-identification either with a particular character trait or with a status that in all likelihood implies that trait for the listener. Accordingly, ethno-comedians frequently highlight seemingly disparate elements of their own polyculturality to convey ephemeral images of perceived authenticity.

The success or failure of this strategy thus depends entirely on the eye of the beholder. In Ceylan’s case, the question of a credible ethos relies on the respective judgment of the audience at a show. His standard audience consists of two main groups of people: one who self-identifies as German and another, considerably smaller one who identifies mainly as Turkish.²⁰⁵ When the hybrid artist chooses to speak from a Turkish perspective, it takes very little to persuade the German part of the audience to perceive him as Turkish.

Yet, even for the German section it is insufficient to just state being of Turkish origin. The status needs to be invoked in a slightly more elaborate way to actually convince the audience. A variety of options presents itself to accomplish this and usually the result would be a combination of visual and linguistic means. An obvious first choice is the exploitation of distinctly foreign visual features. Just like most doctors, priests, or CEOs would forfeit much of their credibility when exercising their profession in flip flops and sweatpants, drawing attention to commonly

²⁰⁴ “Logos” refers to a rational approach with sober analysis and logical deductions, whereas “pathos” describes its emotive, irrational opposite.

²⁰⁵ Everyone identifying as neither has no stakes in evaluating others as rather German or Turkish and so belongs to the more gullible part of the audience.

accepted markers of a particular status is an essential rhetorical tool. In the case of Turkish-German comedians, each one has a Turkish sounding name and often bears the visual markers typically associated with non-European foreignness identified by El-Tayeb. Accordingly, these markers are highlighted regularly in their routines, for example in anecdotes about German men having pronunciation problems regarding the name or – in Ceylan’s case – German women admiring the length and volume of the performer’s exotic black hair.

In addition to spoken references to visual cues, many artists employ genuinely verbal tactics of persuasion as well. Ceylan and others tend to elaborate their Turkish appearance by providing knowledgeable insights on cultural specifics. This demonstration of expertise substantiates the desired image of cultural genuineness that clearly ties them to the respective ethnicity. Adding a few Turkish words and phrases here and there completes the quick construction of credibility, although it has to be noted that most comedians – like Ceylan – are far from fluid in the Turkish language. Somuncu, by contrast, who does have native proficiency in Turkish, mentions this factor to distinguish himself from monolingual comedians. However, except for a couple of sentences to prove his capability this feat has little to no influence on the rest of his performance. The few words and phrases implemented by Ceylan and others typically suffice – even without the use of cliché Orientalist costumes – to fully convince the majority of self-identifying Germans of listening to an authentic Turk.

For the other assumed part of the audience, the self-identifying Turks, it may take more to accept the artist as “one of their own” and meet his ethnic mockery with in-group leniency, in particular since Ceylan usually admits quite upfront that he speaks little to no Turkish. Especially for the Turkish audience members, Ceylan deliberately adds explicit references to his Turkish

father.²⁰⁶ His dad used to attend some of his shows, particularly for live recordings. Each time, Ceylan made sure to capture him on camera and point him out to everyone, using the industry to document and distribute his proof. This combination of verbal and visual elements suffices to create the desired ethos as an authentic Turk. Once this is established, the Turks in the audience usually accept Ceylan's degree of identification with their culture and perceive his mockery of Turkish stereotypes as self-deprecation.

Of course, the level of acceptance cannot be measured precisely. However, the lack of overt protest during live shows or on Ceylan's facebook page indicate at least a broad tolerance of his depictions of Turks on stage.²⁰⁷ In *Live!* we witness a rare exception. Ceylan is prone to commenting on personal experiences seemingly spontaneously during his shows where, in this case, he quotes a few emails by outraged Turks who complain in broken German about his alleged lack of respect towards his father.²⁰⁸ After he cracked a joke about his Turkish dad being forced by his German mother to eat pork every now and then, he quotes the following reaction:

Seitdem schreiben mir so Türken – [*to Turks in the audience*] ihr seid ja integriert, ihr lacht noch – aber mir schreiben mittlerweile auch so Türken so Emails, so Drohungen:
„[*incomprehensible syllables*]“ Ich verstehs ja selber nicht, ehrlich! Wirklich, Mannheim!
Ich muss mir mittlerweile einen Ghetto-Türken holen aus Mannheim, der mir das übersetzt.
Und das heißt dann übersetzt sowas ähnliches wie: „Wie kannst du dich über deinen Vater lustig machen? Ehreschande!“ In einem Wort! „Ehreschande“. Ja, was jetzt? Ganz kurz, nur mal aus Sicherheitsgründen, falls doch irgendwelche Schläfer im Publikum sitzen, es ist

²⁰⁶ By the time of Ahmet Ceylan's passing in 2012, Ceylan was firmly established as a celebrity, so that this explicit tactic of authentication became less necessary, particularly in light of the extensive earlier documentation.

²⁰⁷ Of course, there most certainly is negative criticism, but the hard time locating it speaks to its scarcity.

²⁰⁸ As part of a largely scripted show any allegedly personal anecdote can be called into doubt whether or not it actually took place and, if so, to what extent it may have been exaggerated for humoristic purposes. The issue of family honor, however, is a frequent topic of debate and quite likely to affect Ceylan as well in this context.

so: Ich hab mit meinem Vater drüber gesprochen. Und ich sag: „Du, ist das ok, hier bei RTL mach ich dich fertig?“ Und da hat mein Vater gesagt: „Solang du damit Geld verdienst!“ Also – es ist ok! (*Live!* 6-8)

Since then Turks have been writing to me – [to Turks in the audience] you're integrated, you're still laughing – but now I also get these emails from Turks, these threats:

“[incomprehensible syllables]” I don't get it either, honestly! Seriously, Mannheim. I've got to get a Ghetto-Turk from Mannheim to translate for me. Translated, it means something like: “How can you mock your father? Honorshame!” One word!

“Honorshame.” What now? So, just for safety reasons in case there are any sleepers in the audience, it's like this: I talked to my dad about this. I said: “Are you ok with me mocking you on TV?” And my father said: “As long as it earns you a living!” So – it's cool!

Including and discrediting opposing positions serves to establish Ceylan all the firmer as a believable voice. He charms those he would like to accept him by complimenting them on being integrated and able to laugh at themselves. At the same time, he frames the complaining ones as uneducated when he mocks their inability to express themselves adequately. Splitting the community into the superior laughing ones and the inferior blusterers, he sways his audience to identify with the more likable former. To reassure the entire Turkish-identifying community, Ceylan finally settles the dispute by reassuring everybody of his father's consent. As a consequence, he not only strengthens a positive relationship to his Turkish audience members; his anecdote also gives evidence of Turks viewing him as a fellow Turk. After all, the complaint only makes sense when based on a prior acceptance of Ceylan as Turkish, otherwise the culturally specific rationale behind it could not apply. Together, all of these tactics form a

strategy that establishes Ceylan's appearance of authenticity for the critical Turkish part of his audience.

Conversely, when Ceylan assumes a German point of view, the Turkish part is now easily convinced when they hear him speak the German language without a trace of an accent, when he displays the same level of expertise on aspects of German culture, and when he references his German-Catholic mom. What Ceylan accomplishes here, is to communicate the exact opposite, so to speak, of what was established before. Like Ceylan's father, his mother would also attend the occasional performance of her son, and again Ceylan would highlight her presence for all to see. All the attention is now on the German half of his ancestry, the very reason for his hybridity, but for the moment the living testimony to his genuine Germanness only.

Given that the question of "What is German?" already troubles many natives, it is understandably an even bigger question for people of migrant background, especially when trying to appear German in front of a German audience. In order to create the desired, credible German ethos in light of these circumstances, Ceylan needs to perform almost a magic trick and pull out a rabbit. He needs to find something that beyond all reasonable and unreasonable doubt clearly identifies him as German. His rabbit is the cliché provincial which seems to embody something like the cultural roots, a fixed set of down to earth values and habits. Compared to the maelstrom of big city life such as in Cologne or Berlin, the German provinces are often considered calm little refuges of national heritage, of stability, and of a time-honored cultural authenticity.

Ceylan grew up in Mannheim. During his shows, he regularly emphasizes these roots and identifies explicitly with the hoi polloi of the Electoral-Palatinate. Accordingly, he founds his German ethos on simple localism. He contrasts regional differences, taunts adjacent towns, and picks up on local rivalries of all sorts: sports-related, rumors, institutions, dialectal variances or anything else particular to any one area. For instance, Ceylan mocks the rivalry with

Ludwigshafen, a city just across the Rhine River from Mannheim, or the district of Schönau, the inhabitants of which apparently speak a slightly different dialect (*Live!* 75). Supporting the soccer club of Waldhof Mannheim while simultaneously discrediting the national top team of Bayern München gains him further sympathies with many soccer enthusiasts in the area.²⁰⁹

In Mannheim itself, the mere naming of a neighborhood would already suffice to establish him as an equal, which Ceylan once commented on by saying: “In Mannheim brauchst du keine Gags, da sagste die Stadtteile – reicht” (*Ganz schön turbüilent* 16-17).²¹⁰ However, the presentation of these micro-cultural features changes depending on the specific location of a performance. In almost concentric circles the degree of respective detail decreases. The further Ceylan gets away from his hometown, the fewer people will still be familiar with the regional specifics, so bit by bit his localism turns into a regionalism representing all of South-West Germany.

His main marker of identification tying him to the South-West is verbal. He usually speaks in the respective local dialect of Palatine, especially when talking about Mannheim, or *Monnem*.²¹¹ Since visual markers tend to have much stronger effects than auditory ones, the latter need to be emphasized all the more prominently. Accordingly, Ceylan not only employs dialect but addresses it as a topic, too. Zooming out from a local to a national point of view, suddenly the minor variances fade into the background and a pan-German perspective reveals larger oppositions within the whole of Germany. Taking up the cudgels for dialects in general, Ceylan now attacks German standard pronunciation or what he typically refers to as the “Oxford-

²⁰⁹ The support for Waldhof Mannheim occurred as one of Ceylan’s stage characters, an alleged local. After several problems emanated from fans, Roland Junghans, one of Ceylan’s co-authors, made it clear that once a promotional contract had expired, Ceylan no longer had any connections with the club (“Bülent Ceylan”, discussion section).

²¹⁰ “*In Mannheim, you don’t need jokes, you just name districts – that’s enough!*”

²¹¹ Palatine dialect for “Mannheim.” Ceylan received the highest civic honors from his hometown Mannheim, the Bloomaulorden, in 2012. Established in 1970, this particular medal is given annually to an individual who represents the city authentically (“Bloomaulorden”). In addition to his popularization of the local dialect, his various civic commitments within the city of Mannheim may have been taken into account here as well, just like when he received the Order of Merit in Baden-Württemberg in the same year.

German” from Hannover. Simultaneously, he will ridicule the sounds of Bavaria, Swabia, or Saxony as well. Through his flawless Palatine dialect, Ceylan engages convincingly in this macro-cultural banter which identifies him clearly as a cultural insider.

This coloration of language has a twofold effect. First, its mere performance already supports Ceylan’s identification with a specific German territory; secondly, its distinctly unspoiled nature possesses a power of resistance through inversion, favoring a low dialect over official high-German. As a unifying moment, defending dialects forms an even stronger bond between him and any other proponent of a German dialect, allying Ceylan with this collective majority in opposition to the official norms of speech.²¹² Moreover, this act of resistance holds a symbolic quality typical of a carnivalesque event. If we consider dialects to resemble almost separate languages, Bakhtin already hinted at this effect:

Such an active plurality of languages and the ability to see one’s own media from the outside, that is, through the eyes of other idioms, led to exceptional linguistic freedom. Even formal grammatical construction became extremely plastic. The artistic and ideological plane demanded first of all an unwonted freedom of images and of their combination, a freedom from all speech norms. (*Rabelais and His World* 471)

To own up to one’s dialect becomes an act of emancipation from heteronormative rules of articulation, grammar, and vocabulary. By transferring a private form of speech to a public sphere, Ceylan deliberately breaks a minor convention but in the process stylizes himself as a man of the people, if not a folk hero. In the guise of his choleric stage character Mompfred, he

²¹² Obviously, high-German is just the standard variation and a dialect in itself.

phrases it as drastically as “Dieses Oxford-Deutsch, dieses Hochdeutsch soll verrecken! Der Dialekt lebe hoch!” (*Live!* 105).²¹³

As his stage self he takes a more moderate approach to dialects but gives it the typical twist of ethno-comedy: “Das ist so geil, unser Dialekt. Ich bin so froh, dass endlich RTL sagt: ‚Wir wagens! Jetzt verstehen wir dich nach 10 Jahren!‘ Da bin ich ganz stolz drauf, weil, dass ein Türk auf die Bühne muss um den Deutschen deutschen Dialekt beizubringen, oder? Integration!” (*Live!* 31).²¹⁴ The obvious reversal of traditional roles creates a humorous effect, while the factual reality of the situation identifies “the Turk” Ceylan as more German than other natives.

For the German part of his audience, Ceylan’s identification with the provincial and its dialect clearly demarcates him as German. His sound participation in the discourses connected with the provincial establishes him as an authentic part of it. The rabbit he thus created is one of redirection. Through the successful appropriation of the provincial, the original question of nationality has been suspended. The audience no longer ponders the problem of whether Ceylan is more German or rather Turkish. Instead, the polycultural artist reframed the question and guided the audience’s attention towards other binaries: the provincial vs. the urban, Northern Germany vs. Southern, West vs. East. His trick consists in substituting national options by regional ones: While the national level still includes the temporarily unwanted Turkish identification, the regional always already presupposes the desired German one. Fraternizing with the perceived epitome of authentic Germanness through dialect and shared knowledge establishes the ethos necessary to render Ceylan German and enable the respective self-mockery.

²¹³ “*This Oxford-German, this high-German shall die! Long live dialects!*”

²¹⁴ “*This dialect of ours is so awesome. I’m so happy RTL finally said: ‘We’ll dare it! After 10 years we understand you!’ I’m really proud of this, that a Turk has to enter the stage to teach Germans a German dialect, right? Integration!*”

Other performers use similar strategies, each in their own variation. Idil Baydar and Murat Topal highlight their ties to the districts of Neu-Kölln and Kreuzberg in Berlin, Django Asül mirrors the distinct dialect and attitudes of Lower Bavaria.²¹⁵ In each case, siding with the local shifts the audience's focus of attention from a national to a local level and all the small-town subjects that come with it. Once the connection between artist and province is established, the ensuing emotive mockery of neighboring towns and villages as well as other parts of Germany serve to create a credible ethos of authentic Germanness. Ironically, the steadfast authenticity of a traditional provincial life that Ceylan and others call upon is undermined by their very existence as fully integrated cultural hybrids: not because they were unauthentic parts of the provincial, but because they are.

El-Tayeb and Straub outlined metropolitan areas as typical places of increased multicultural contact and higher transition; Baumann gave a great example of a multiethnic society in a suburb of London; Ceylan finally demonstrates the increasing change occurring on the provincial level. Much of ethno-comedy serves to break up patterns of habitual perception and create an updated point of view that is understandable for everyone. By accepting the hybrid's identification with the archetypal provincial, the audience admits the partly foreign into the perceived inner circles of German culture. The supposed epitome of Germanness thus evolved from its primordial beginning and now includes elements of what once was its cultural Other. The appropriation of the traditional provincial by Ceylan and others is an act of supersession, and its demonstration on stage a subtle, transcultural correction of popular perception.

²¹⁵ "Idil Baydar," "Murat Topal," "Django Asül."

Due to Ceylan's rhetorical tactics, the constant switching of identifications appears plausible for quite a while. Over the course of a show, however, his multiplicity of identities conflates and so undermines the respective categorizations in public perception. At first, he seems to adhere to common binary distinctions only to wear down and cross their conceptual boundaries over the course of a show. When Ceylan uses his hybridity to portray a Turkish identity in one moment only to switch to a German one in the next, the once assumed line supposedly separating these national identities becomes increasingly blurred with every turn. Passport, dialects, and visual markers all seemingly contradict and therefore confuse his external identification based on conventional criteria. As a hybrid, he can embody a credible German and an authentic Turk, be convincingly both or neither, and thus ultimately abandon the classification altogether.²¹⁶ Ceylan's fluid shifts in identification display the insistence of transnational humanism to assess people independently and not based on vague if not quite overcome concepts like nationality. As an individual among other individuals he is always one among equals, can identify with different groups, and thus successfully deploy his self-deprecating humor.²¹⁷

5.3.2 Bonding Mechanisms

In addition to enabling easy identifications with groups of spectators, Ceylan employs a multitude of other tactics to bond with his audience: Complementary to deriding unwanted character traits, he openly praises desirable behavior; on a subtler plain, he frequently employs foul language and collective personal pronouns to generate an air of familiarity; through grotesque profanation he

²¹⁶ Ceylan never specifies his exact position on the value of national identities. He accepts a certain validity to this level of identification but likewise seems to be wary of overrating it, which, coming from a polycultural hybrid, suggests a transnational perspective that appreciates the gradual blending of naturally permeable identifications.

²¹⁷ The feeling of equality becomes particularly obvious in one of Ceylan's songs called "Gleicher als gleiche." He performs it, for instance, at the end of *Ganz schön turbulent* and the chorus highlights: "Wir sind gleicher als gleiche... wir sind alle so wie Bülent und Freunde sowieso" (124–126); "*We are more equal than equals..., we're all like Bülent, and friends, of course, too.*"

equalizes his audience explicitly; finally, he humbles himself, and of course he interacts with various audience members – all the while keeping sight of his overall social and comedic intentions.

Among the more obvious of these tools is targeted praise. Half-way through his *Live!*-show, Ceylan implements a short caesura in his program to make the following announcement:

Ich muss jetzt auch mal was Ernstes loswerden. Es gibt ja so Leute, die können oft nicht über sich selber lachen. Ich sag immer, auch Türken, die mir manchmal schreiben [*mumbles incoherently*]. Ich versteh sie wie gesagt nicht. Und es sind so viele Gott sei Dank auch Türken da, die über sich selber lachen können. Und ich sag immer: „Wer nicht über sich selber lachen kann, der ist nicht integriert! Der ist nicht integriert!“ Verstehste? Und deswegen einen großen Applaus an die türkischen Zuschauer, die so gut über, vor allem über den Hassan! Das ist so geil! Das fand ich geil. Wisst ihr? Das ist wichtig! Man muss über sich lachen können. (*Live!* 87-88)

I have to get serious for a moment. There are people who are unable to laugh at themselves. I always say, also [to] Turks who sometimes write to me [mumbles incoherently]. As I said, I don't understand a word. And thank God there are so many Turks here as well who are able to laugh at themselves. I always say: "Those unable to laugh at themselves are not integrated! They are not integrated!" Get it? And for that reason, a big hand for the Turkish in the audience who laugh so much, especially at Hassan! That's so awesome. I really enjoyed that, you know? That's important. You have to be able to laugh at yourself.

Comments like these are essential for Ceylan's entire act and featured in each show: plain words, highly redundant, and with a positive reinforcement of his desired attitude. While the first two features ensure the comprehensibility of his message for a culturally heterogeneous mass audience, the latter is downright behavioristic in its subliminal tactic to publicly reward desired behavior with applause.

Of course, no one in the audience will identify fully with Hassan, the satirical epitome of the uneducated Anatolian immigrant; but despite the grotesque exaggeration of his characteristics the respective templates from reality remain sufficiently identifiable for some Turkish-German viewers to create isolated, individual parallels. Their reaction to this particular moment, when they recognize parts of themselves in their comically distorted mirror image on stage, – for instance in the macho behavior, the grammar problems, the frequent obsession with designer clothes – decides the success or failure of the entire performance. Bower describes this ability to differentiate individual parallels from general parody as a key premise of ethno-comedy:

The cultural stereotypes are evident and the breadth and inclusivity of the groups being parodied creates an environment where everyone sees humor in how they are perceived by others. They recognize themselves in the performances, yet are also able to distinguish themselves from the performed. ("Made in Germany" 365)

Ceylan's message makes her observation explicit: When one recognizes a part of oneself in the figure on stage, a figure which bears possibly provocative features but is obviously a parody, and one is able to laugh at parts of oneself through laughing at that figure, then one has accomplished something. It is a sign of successful ethno-comedy to facilitate these moments of personal growth, where an attack is absorbed and suspended by the laughter of a mature character.

Occasionally, Ceylan also applauds his entire audience. Comments vary from “Ihr seid so geil! Was müsst ihr so ausrasten!” or “Ich liebe euch, liebt ihr mich auch?” to the generic “Ich liebe Deutschland!” (*Wilde Kreatürken* 44, 68, 231).²¹⁸ His explicit affection for the viewers is exaggerated, but the audience usually appreciates the sentiment. Likewise, it approves greatly of an even more extravagant gesture in which Ceylan, in a bizarre imitation of a soldier’s ultimate sacrifice, regularly dedicates his life to his audience and TV broadcaster: “Für euch und für RTL verreck ich!” (*Live!* 120).²¹⁹

In relation to this plain form of praise, we find the subliminal bonding powers of Bakhtin’s ambivalent praise-abuse “which abuses while praising and praises while abusing. This is why in familiar billingsgate talk abusive words, especially indecent ones, are used in the affectionate and complimentary sense” (*Rabelais and His World* 165). For example, after telling a lengthy joke at the expense of East-Germans Ceylan turns to the audience and anticipates their question: “Macht er diese Nummer auch im Osten? Jaaa! Und soll ich Ihnen was sagen? Wie soll ich Ihnen das sagen: Die lachen an der Stelle noch mehr wie Sie! Das ist ja das Kranke! Dem Ossi kannst ja in die Fresse hauen und er wird sagen [*fakes Saxon dialect*] ,Mach weiter!’” (*Live!* 109).²²⁰ While portraying East-Germans as dull masochists seems to cast a negative light on them, Ceylan’s open approval of self-mockery turns this ambivalent statement into praise rather than abuse. What he refers to as “the sick part” is actually the admirable quality he thus highlights. Using “Ossi” for East-German and the derogatory term “Fresse” for “face” instead of “Gesicht” concurs precisely with Bakhtin’s comment on indecent abusive words in billingsgate

²¹⁸ “You’re so awesome! How are you freaking out like this?”; “I love you! Do you love me, too?”; “I love Germany!”

²¹⁹ “For you and RTL I’ll die!”

²²⁰ “Does he also tell this one in East-Germany? Yesss! And let me tell you something, how should I put this: They laugh more at this one than you do! That’s the sick part! You can punch those guys in the face and they’ll say [*fakes East-German dialect*] ‘Keep it coming!’”

speech.²²¹ The statement as a whole is a compliment to East-Germans, using expletives affectionately.

With evident overlap, the notion of praise-abuse already heralds the third main tactic for strengthening the artist/audience bond which consists in the deliberate use of foul language. As Bakhtin pointed out, the transferal of unofficial language into public speech generates a particular kind of familiarity which simultaneously suggests a sense of speaking with uninhibited honesty (*Rabelais and His World* 187-188). When Ceylan says “Für euch... verreck ich,” the use of the crude word “verrecken” for “dying” creates an air of brutal truth and raw honesty. Ceylan pretends to push his performance to the utmost with a sink or swim attitude he asks of his audience as well: “Ihr wolltet Zugabe – jetzt verreckt da dran!” (*Live!* 117).²²² Putting the same standard to his audience as to himself creates a sense of equality which intensifies even further through Ceylan’s use of the same verb.

To a similar effect, he employs embarrassing remarks on human unity in bodily functions. Following the grotesque focus on phalli and physical openings, Ceylan discusses flatulence and morning erections and comments regularly on urination. Occasionally, he even verbalizes the harmonizing generality of these common denominators. For instance, after he (seems to have) passed wind, he notes: “Ob ihr Professor seid oder Depp – unter uns: Der eigene riecht am besten!” (*Live!* 53).²²³ Explicitly leveling the culturally high and low, the corporeal reference unites classes, ages, genders, and of course all ethnicities alike. Moreover, Ceylan’s comment contains a pretense of familiarity and privacy, “unter uns” (“between us”).

²²¹ “Ossi” from “Ost-Deutscher” for East-German is not necessarily a negative term, but when used by someone from West-Germany it may adopt such a connotation.

²²² “You asked for an encore, now you’ll die of it!”

²²³ “Whether you’re a professor or a simpleton – between us: Your own smell best!”

Addressing intimate matters in an allegedly confidential manner certainly threatens to offend a few sensitivities. The self-deprecating presentation of the joke as well as Ceylan's overall fool's license allow for this transgression, although neither completely suspends these emotional boundaries. Some may complain about a violation of good taste, but its degree remains tolerable within these extended limits and accordingly the joke mainly supports artist/audience bonding.

Ceylan uses the same collective terminology in a different context, when he recalls the story of how his nightly desire to void was complicated by an erection. Out of consideration for children in the audience, he pointedly refrains from overly vulgar diction, tries to communicate the essentials through gestures, and ultimately turns to a euphemistic Anglicism: "Ich wach nachts auf, ich muss prunzen, wach aber auf mit... [*indicates erection with a gesture*] Ihr Männer, ihr wisst doch... Das passiert jedem, ob ihr Professor seid oder Depp. Also, ich wach auf mit ... standing ovation" (*Wilde Kreatürken* 25).²²⁴ The tale continues by describing his struggle on the bowl, when Ceylan mentions how he had to slide all the way to the back of the seat to even stand a chance. Phallic content paired with grotesque exaggeration is a classic humoristic device which serves once more to equalize artist and (male) audience and to create laughter as well as an intimate atmosphere.

When looking at the grotesque, Bakhtin furthermore found a high potential for profanation. Ceylan taps into this source, too, for example when he degrades right-wing radicals. Talking about pubic hair, he admits to his audience that he is completely shaved: "Man könnt auch sagen, ich bin unten Nazi – Glatze!" (*Wilde Kreatürken* 78).²²⁵ Shifting the usually threatening image of right-wing radicals into close proximity of polycultural male genitalia, his

²²⁴ "I wake up at night, I need to pee, but I wake up with... [*indicates erection*] You men know what... That happens to everyone whether you're a professor or a simpleton. So, I wake up to... standing ovations."

²²⁵ "You could also say I'm a nether Nazi – bald!"

comparison of heads creates a comic effect and allows the communal laughter of a diverse audience to drain some of the social tension associated with this political minority. Highlighting their unison in attitude binds everyone yet another step closer together.

Sporadically, Ceylan disregards the presence of minors in the audience and returns to foul language. Examples include not only the above use of the derogatory “Fresse” for face or the occasional use of cusswords, but also explicitly violent threats. In the guises of the Turkish macho Hassan (catch phrase: “Uffpasse!”)²²⁶ or the choleric German janitor, Ceylan frequently threatens his audience, for instance by having Mompfred say: “Jetzt lasst mich mal ausreden, jetzt! Ich schlag euch zusammen, ist mir scheißegal!” (*Live!* 108).²²⁷ In addition to the unofficial language at the end, threats like these equally serve to break down the structural barrier between artist and audience. Through their ridiculous nature, however, (especially with an audience of several thousand people) the supposed violence remains humorous banter and as such develops its own bonding effect.

This aggressive behavior is complemented by grand gestures of humility. At the end of his *Wilde Kreatürken*-show (2012), Ceylan draws comparisons between his recent performance in front of 80,000 people at the Wacken Open Air festival (2011) and the 40,000 filling the Commerzbank Arena in Frankfurt, and résumés: “Du kannst 80 oder 40.000 Leute rocken, du kannst dich fühlen wie der Super-Rockstar. Aber im Herzen bist du und bleibst du – euer professioneller Depp” (*Wilde Kreatürken* 125).²²⁸ Of course wealth, fame, and spotlight still clearly separate this professional fool from his audience in some ways, despite his best efforts to establish himself as one among equals; but gestures like this still render him an approachable, grounded person who puts himself and his work at the feet of those who paved his way to

²²⁶ “Uffpasse” is Mannheim dialect for “aufpassen,” i.e. to watch out or to be careful.

²²⁷ “*Let me finish! I’ll beat the hell out of you, I don’t give a shit!*”

²²⁸ “*You can rock 80 or 40,000 people, feel like a Rock Superstar. But in your heart, you are and will always be – your professional fool.*” Naturally, Ceylan makes the same announcement to smaller audiences as well.

success. By choosing the colloquial “Depp” over euphemistic circumscriptions, Ceylan’s straight-forward self-diminishment gains particular credibility through its air of crude but candid honesty. His overt admission of dependency is often complemented by a corresponding expression of humble gratitude, which substantiates this image further.²²⁹

To date, the *Haardrock*-show of 2014 contains Ceylan’s pinnacle of this humility trope. Two thirds into the performance he pauses, and in the middle of all his puns and jokes suddenly turns serious for a moment: “Das mein ich jetzt ganz ernst! Als Komiker was Ernstes zu sagen ist auch komisch, ne. ... Um euch was ganz Ernstes zu sagen heut Abend: Ich weiß, wer ich bin, ne. Und das ist: nichts besonderes” (*Haardrock* 133).²³⁰ Although this statement also functions as a bridge announcing the song by the same name “Nichts besonderes,” the stark contrast to all the preceding bravado and spectacle lends a very personal and honest feeling to this statement. This attribution may in part be due to the fact that, compared to other songs that are written by someone else and possibly performed as one of his characters, the lyrics and melody to this one were composed by Ceylan and that he performs this slow pop song as his stage self. The second stanza and part of the chorus are particularly revealing regarding Ceylan’s self-perception as an artist and private person.

Ich lieb das Leben und bleib beständig,

Freu mich immer auf den nächsten Tag.

Ich bin ja sicher länger tot als lebendig,

Hab keine Lust, dass ich dem Ruhm nachjag.

²²⁹ Of course, these demonstrative statements could be nothing but a marketing scheme; but Ceylan seems to perform these expressions convincingly enough to create this particular impression in his audience, given that respective evidence to the contrary (negative audience reactions, for instance) is extremely difficult to find.

²³⁰ “I’m totally serious right now! To say something serious as a comedian is also comical, isn’t it? ... To tell you something serious tonight: I know who I am, right. And that is: nothing special.”

So wie ich bin, sind so viele andre,
Bin nur ein Teil dieser wilden Welt.
Bin nichts Besondres, bin nur gern bei euch,
Weil mir das Menschsein unter Menschen gefällt.

*I love life and stay consistent,
Always looking forward to tomorrow.
I'm surely dead much longer than alive,
Don't feel like chasing fame.*

*Many are the way I am,
Am just one part of this wild world.
I'm nothing special, just love being with you
Because I enjoy being human among humans.*

Compromising style for content, Ceylan's words may not bespeak poetic brilliance but in their charming simplicity seem to come straight from the heart. Again, the artist asserts his emotional attachment towards his followers, emphasizing once more their common ground as human individuals. With all due reservations, we also find one of his very few statements positioning him in the spectrum between creative original and fully commercialized sellout. Rejecting its "chase," fame in Ceylan's career turned out to be the fortunate result of a concerted effort to promote his comedy, but not with profit margins as the dominant driving force.²³¹

²³¹ Ceylan's constantly growing array of merchandize may seem to indicate otherwise; but he seems to meet demands rather than create them, and much of his profits go towards charitable causes, as mentioned earlier.

The final bonding mechanism is audience interaction. In addition to Fischer-Lichte's feedback loop of action–response–reaction by means of laughter and applause, the absence of either, or the interjection by heckling, Ceylan always practices deliberate interactions in the shapes of casual conversation interlaced in his routines or leaving the stage to walk among his audience. At each show, he picks out a few audience members at random, strikes up short conversations and frequently returns to these individuals throughout the act. Establishing these personal albeit temporal relationships not only proves Ceylan's talent for improvisation but adds yet another technique of leveling between artist and audience to the mix. Towards the end of each performance, he walks through the ranks of his audience, reaches out to them, compliments some and mocks others. Bonding with the audience is an infinite process dependent on constant reminders and renewals, yet the frequency and intensity of which also increases the chances of its outlasting the ephemeral event.

Despite his mingling, Ceylan remains aware of his privileged position at all times. During one of his walkabouts in which he harassed one person a little, walked on, and then returned to that person, he provides a running meta-commentary on his actions. He points out how his presence sometimes makes audience members uncomfortable and how they are glad when he passes them by, or, in cases where he addressed individuals (like that one person) they were happy when their moment of insecurity in the spotlight ended, which is why it was all the more evil of him to then return to this exact person. Just when this deliberate provocation seems to grow excessive, Ceylan refrains and remarks: "Es ist wunderbar, wenn man die Macht übers Publikum hat. Aber man darf sie nur nicht ausnutzen" (*Live!* 119).²³² Apart from exposing yet another sympathetic character trait, this action and reflection give testimony to the ambivalent sense of equality depending on the point of view: As a jester, Ceylan will always be different

²³² "It's wonderful to have power over the audience. But you mustn't take advantage of it."

from his audience in terms of social status, but at once be one with it as a fellow human individual.²³³

While the extraterritorial setup provides favorable terrain for Ceylan's act, the various bonding mechanisms help to establish and maintain the respective morale. Both are intrinsically connected, and on these grounds Ceylan creates his temporary community of the laughing which is indispensable even in light entertainment. As Gilbert points out, "in a public forum, humor often becomes overtly combative. ... A comic tells jokes with 'punchlines' and aspires to 'kill' an audience or 'die' trying" (13) just the way Ceylan announced earlier. Accordingly, the spectators need to know the parameters of the location as well as possess an appropriate state of mind to enjoy but also withstand the multi-directional laughter of ethno-comedic humor.

5.4 Weaponized Humor

Most manifestations of the jester tradition were of the entertaining kind and today's ethno-comedians subscribe to this focus as well. In addition to the mere amusement of their audiences, however, we find two significant alterations in this late variety. For one, the Turkish-German artists have a much more prominent representative value for ethnic groups, considering that their act mediates between the majority society and marginalized minorities. For another, through this widely broadcast act of mediation their shows possess the potential to actively influence the minds of many. Whereas life in the Middle Ages returned to the *status quo* at the end of carnival, ethno-comedians try to instill thoughts, feelings, or realizations that last beyond the single event and accompany the individual in a more sustained manner.

Exploiting their carnivalesque freedoms, the artists pursue a simple double strategy: They attack aspects contrary to their position; and complementarily, they propagate positive

²³³ I further believe that the comment refers only to a momentary "power over the audience." Ceylan's concession of professional dependency on a sympathetic audience locates the main power indubitably in the hands of his viewers.

alternatives. Although there is considerable overlap between both, since the rejection of something habitually implies the approval of its opposite and *vice versa*, the following tries to look at each tactic individually, starting with the metal comedian's symphony of deconstruction before the final section of this first case study examines the creative counterpart.

5.4.1 Deconstructing the Present

One of the most promising paths to abating social tensions and facilitating mutual understanding leads through the breaking of stereotypes. These have grown over centuries of mutual historical entanglement and range from ignorant superficialities to skepticism and blind racism. On the Turkish side, Ceylan focuses on three groups of central themes – fear and violence, illiteracy and sexual exoticism, and faith and patriarchy – while he targets less controversial commonalities regarding Germans. In his shows, he offers “a style of comedy that renders the ‘other’ or the ‘stranger’ comical and ordinary and thus unthreatening while also incorporating the strangeness of the familiar by showcasing the comic foibles and diversity of the indigenous population” (Bower, “Made in Germany” 361). Shaking the Germans’ postcolonial pedestal while simultaneously humanizing their perceived cultural Other is thus at the center of Ceylan’s subversion of stereotypes.

In terms of their humorous deconstruction, it is crucial at this point to separate implicit mockery from its explicit variety. While the implicit depends to a much larger extent on individual interpretation, there is hardly any mistaking the explicit one.²³⁴ Implicit mockery consists of verbal and non-verbal elements of communication that deride discernable aspects of the joke’s target by means of exaggerated mimicry and includes posture, linguistic features, facial expressions and gestures as well as attitudes and values exposed by the content of speech. This

²³⁴ Irony may complicate the latter as well, but Ceylan, always aiming at a mass audience, is usually fairly clear about his intentions.

variety comes to the fore particularly in Ceylan's stage characters. Explicit mockery on the other hand means a literal utterance of ridicule, an overt verbalized attack that names its target directly.

In Ceylan's case, it so happens that his implicit mockery targets everyone whereas the explicit only aims at Germans. Considering the level of aggression inherent in each one, the explicit variety as the more direct attack is more challenging for the receiver. The Turkish part of the audience appears deliberately spared from this more demanding kind of humor. Keeping in mind the leveling and bonding functions of tendentious jokes – the more familiar a relationship is, the larger the spectrum of acceptable jokes becomes – the fact that Ceylan reserves this stronger form of verbal assault for self-identifying Germans could be viewed as a subtle hint of his stronger identification with the German audience or culture. Furthermore, this distinction affords those of migrant background an opportunity to sound out private positions: The individual emotional response to a joke and the underlying degree of self-recognition could give some indication of changing personal identifications. Realizing cultural ties by observing the level of offense taken by ethnic jokes then functioned as a technique to find oneself.

Beginning the analysis with Turkish ridicule in general and the theme of fear and violence in particular, this slight bias in treatment becomes obvious very early on in Ceylan's *Live!*-show. As usual, right at the outset Ceylan familiarizes himself a little with his audience and asks where "the Turks" are seated. In *Live!*, he added the following opening announcement:

Für die Türken ist ne ganz große Verantwortung heut Abend. Weil die Deutschen, die wissen jetzt, „Ah, da sitzen sie!“ Und wenn dann so ne türkische Nummer kommt, dann gucken die Deutschen: „Lachen sie, die Türken?“ Und wenn ihr dann nicht lacht, dann lachen die auch nicht, weil sie Angst haben. Deswegen: im Zweifel immer für den Türken.

(5)

The Turks have a pretty huge responsibility tonight. Because now the Germans know, “Ah, there they are!” And when I do a Turkish skit they’ll check: “Are they laughing, the Turks?” And in case you’re not laughing, they won’t either because they’re scared. Hence, when in doubt always in favor of the Turk.

Although spoken in jest, a similar treatment *vice versa* was completely unthinkable, provided that the driving force was still fear and not, say, respect. To ask an allegedly scared ethnic minority to check with the majority society whether or not it was acceptable to laugh would be deemed highly inappropriate in its assimilatory attitude of cultural dictatorship.

Addressing a subliminal fear of “the Turk” references an ancient sentiment persistent for a thousand years and reinvigorated particularly in the decades immediately following the first guest worker contracts in 1961. In a comparative survey of various crime statistics and studies, Walburg was able to show that crime rates among natives and people of migrant background are mostly similar and lately even decreased to equal degrees. However, two distinct differences emerged. In critical situations, youths of a migrant background tend to be reported to the police more often, thus running a higher risk of criminalization. Secondly, the number of violent crimes was lower among natives. According to Walburg, more recent studies show these numbers to be declining as well, especially among the offspring of guest workers (19). Crime rates and violent crimes tend to catch much media attention, however, which reinvigorated and substantiated old fears and doubts by suggesting to an unreflecting, often sensationalist native audience a dubious confirmation of seemingly familiar, stable character traits in its cultural Other.

The stereotype of Turkish aggressors is one of the main images Ceylan attempts to undermine in his shows. For instance, he references the Siege of Vienna but chooses a Turkish

perspective to revive an old joke. Supposedly quoting a melancholy moment of his Turkish father, Ceylan describes how he reflects on the Ottoman Empire's former glory when he asks: "Früher standen wir Türken vor Wien! Und wo sind wir jetzt?" To which his German mother replies: "Überall!"²³⁵ Problematizing the notion of cultural progress, the joke addresses a common feature of retrospective regret among those with closer ties to their ancestral home and contrasts it with a different interpretation of cultural accomplishment. Instead of providing answers to possible grievances, Ceylan's humor only suggests alternative perspectives.

In addition to quick one-liners, Ceylan also offers more elaborate scenarios to take the edge off violent images vis-à-vis Turks. In an episode on the power of dialects, he paints the following picture about the emasculating effect of the affectionate Swabian diminutive suffix "-le:"

Im Schwabenländle sagen sie noch „Türkle“. Da kannste doch wie son Deutscher sich das so vorstellt, dass son Türke aggressiv wird mit nem Messer und so, dass kannste doch gar nicht werden wenn son Schwabe sagt „Ah, da kommt ja das Türkke mit dem Messerle!“ Ist doch Scheiße! Da kannste doch gar nicht aggressiv werden! Nach som Schwab bin ich automatisch integriert, da wird das Messer automatisch Uri Geller [*bent spoon gesture*].
(*Live!* 74)

*In Swabia they say "Türkle." Now you can't, like a German imagines how a Turk gets aggressive with a knife and everything, you just can't do it when a Swab says: "Ah, here he comes, the 'Türkle' with the 'Messerle'!" That's not fair! You can't get aggressive this way! After confronting a Swabian I'm automatically integrated, my knife immediately goes Uri Geller [*bent spoon gesture*].²³⁶*

²³⁵ "Once we Turks stood at the gates of Vienna! And where are we now?" – "Everywhere!"

²³⁶ The Israeli Uri Geller (1946) believes in possessing paranormal powers and is most widely known in Germany for his auto-kinesis performances in the 1970s where he reactivated stopped clocks and bent spoons.

Associating physical violence with sexual prowess and deflating both through belittlement creates laughter which in turn weakens the frightening image. This grotesque profanation reframes a powerful idea and overcomes its scariness through tension-relief in hilarity.²³⁷ The communal laughter allows the vulnerable to laugh at their fear and the Turkish-identifying ones to distance themselves from their aggressive stereotype.²³⁸ Ceylan's mockery of migrants' violence belongs to the implicit category of ridicule, uses Turks as prototypical placeholders for perpetrators, but aims the underlying criticism at indeterminate individuals only.²³⁹

Deriding unwanted character traits or behavior seems to suggest laughter as a social "corrective... intended to humiliate" as outlined by Henri Bergson (187). A group publicly shames individual actions, distances itself from the culprits, and in the process outlines desired attitudes. Although the misdemeanants remain anonymous, Ceylan's description possesses a distinct recognition value for likeminded individuals. Portraying certain acts of physical aggression as superficial, unstable, and essentially pathetic, and at once collecting public support for their condemnation could contribute to a very limited extent to rendering such behavior less appealing to people willing to resort to violence.

He operates on a similar level of indirectness when he enters the stage as the overly masculine Hassan. There is a slight initial ambiguity to this character: Although the context suggests a caricature, his accentuated physical fitness and apparent sense of self-confidence might actually support audience members of a similar style. As soon as he starts talking, however, all ambiguity evaporates and elements of parody clearly dominate. Comical

²³⁷ Ceylan achieves the same result when he discusses the effects of being called a "Wuschelhasitürk" by his female hairdresser, i.e. a "tousle-bunny-Turk" (*Live!* 74-75), due to her affection for his thick hair. The signifier's cute composition and effeminate connotations again emasculate the signified, this time by reducing it to its soft hair instead of exposing its violent machismo as being based on a fragile phallic symbol.

²³⁸ Bakhtin observes a similar process in carnival: "The medieval and Renaissance folk culture was familiar with the element of terror only as represented by comic monsters, who were defeated by laughter. Terror was turned into something gay and comic" (*Rabelais and His World* 39).

²³⁹ Ceylan addresses physical violence on the German side only in association with the political far right.

mispronunciations, grammar problems, and constant confusions mock the poor language skills prevalent among many immigrants. At the same time, the content of his speech reveals his limited intellectual capacity, albeit with an occasional twist of charming street smartness.²⁴⁰

What sets Hassan apart from Ceylan's former other Turkish stage character, is his clear identification as the exotic sexual seducer. For many years, his opening line was a variation of "Ich bin der Hassan, und ich kann Paranüsse knacken mit die Arschbacken!" ("I'm the Hassan, and I can crack Brazilian nuts with the butt cheeks!").²⁴¹ After too many audience members had brought various types of nuts to live shows and thrown them on stage, Ceylan eventually dropped the line and feigned a newly developed nut allergy, yet the character's focus on bodily aspects remained.²⁴² On entering the stage, he usually performs a brief dance which, in accordance with cross-genre music played in the background, consists in part of hip hop figures and in part of belly dancing.²⁴³ While performing the latter, Hassan would foreground the physical even further and ask the audience explicitly to look at his butt in cheap exploitation of his sex appeal.²⁴⁴

Whereas these sequences still coquet with ancient charms of the exotic, others openly demystify it. In one scene, Hassan admits to being less well endowed, thus shattering the image of a stereotypical sexual predator. He attempts to explain his shortcoming to a minor in the audience by drawing a peculiar analogy in characteristically broken German: "Ist wie

²⁴⁰ Once more, the question of corrective powers in comedy arises when considering the incentive of possibly feeling better about oneself in comparison to a negative exaggeration, or *vice versa* when the caricature bears striking resemblance to oneself.

²⁴¹ The common mistake among non-natives of substituting a dative declination for the easier nominative case is a standard feature in each variation. It exposes Hassan's poor command of German grammar but is untranslatable.

²⁴² The audience's frequent provocation by bringing props testifies to the unique character of each show. They challenge Ceylan to improvise, for instance when he weasels out of a nut-cracking demonstration by pointing out how the thrower had brought a walnut instead of a Brazilian nut (*Live!* 51–53).

²⁴³ In *Die Bülent Ceylan Show*, Ceylan creates a more personal mix of dancing styles. As an outspoken fan of metal music, he opens the show to a brand of loud rock music that includes stereotypical sounds of Eastern music to which he first performs a bit of belly dance followed by some head banging.

²⁴⁴ "Guck dir meinen Arsch an!" (Ceylan, *Live!* 49).

Radiergummi – viel benutze... [*shrinking hand gesture*]” (*Live!* 55-56).²⁴⁵ Revealing the alleged downside to sexual hyperactivity ridicules cliché attributions of sexual fervor and suspends another anxiety, particularly of insecure German men: the primordial fear to succumb to a sexual superior by falling short on passion or performance as core criteria of an imagined ideal masculinity.

The third main area of Turkish ridicule targets aspects of traditional patriarchy and faith as embodied predominantly by the former character of Aslan, the male owner of a grocery. This figure possessed a particularly high potential for controversy, but Ceylan observed at least some proprieties and refrained from excessive provocation. Aslan’s subscription to misogynist attitudes or his performances as an overly protective father with a quick temper all remained within almost placable boundaries. Raising these unwanted behavioral tendencies in a comedic frame and exposing these relics of a patriarchal civilization to carnivalesque laughter, nonetheless indicated a progressive stand and lent non-dogmatic support to opposite practices, i.e. the emancipation of woman and a more liberal upbringing of children.

In his programs *Ganz schön turbulent* and *Wilde Kreatürken*, Ceylan put his only overtly religious character in direct dialog with his God. Aslan typically showed an inclination to boast or deceive, both of which God reprimanded by appearing as thunder and lightning and then communicating silently with the grocer. The audience neither heard nor saw the deity, but could only infer from context that Aslan’s eventual admission of an apparent truth was only due to the immediate interference of some divine presence. Whereas God in both routines unmasked Aslan, neither Aslan nor anyone else on stage ever bickered, quarreled, or joked with God. In an interview in late 2011, Ceylan stated: “Über Mohammed, Kopftücher oder die türkische Flagge mache ich keine Scherze, weil mir das zu gefährlich ist. Ich möchte zwar sticheln, aber ich will

²⁴⁵ “*Is like eraser – use often... [shrinking hand gesture].*”

nicht mit Polizeischutz auf die Bühne. Die Frage ist, was kann ich bewirken und was nicht” (Janovsky).²⁴⁶ Understandably, even the extended liberties of contemporary jesters still have limits.

In his mockery of Germans, Ceylan employs both direct and indirect humor where the former targets trivialities and the latter pillories more substantial nuisances. His explicit attacks bear a more intimate nature due to the use of personal pronouns but remain acceptable to the targets because of their often mundane content. Apart from ticking off standard German clichés like the obsession with punctuality, driving fast or orderly bustle, especially Ceylan’s early material exploits his polyculturality to leave behind the old humor of one-sided stereotyping and proffer more constructive comedy of cross-cultural comparisons. This approach allows him to reuse familiar comedic material but portray it through the fresh perspective of the ethno-comedian.

For example, according to him the national attitudes towards hiking are vastly different between Turks and Germans. Preferring a laid-back leisure time, Ceylan marvels at the German fascination with hiking: “Wandern, da seid ihr Deutsche ja total krank. ... Die reden dann so: [*aggressive voice*] ,Ich geh wandern!‘ ...,Wandern bis die Füße bluten!‘ Ist doch krank! Also ihr seid doch nicht normal” (*Live!* 11).²⁴⁷ Another instance of praise-abuse, the fanatical element in this obsession is clearly ridiculed, but at the same time there is also no denying a subliminal admiration for the feats of strength and discipline. While the subject matter as such is certainly trivial, it is symbolic, however, of an often ascribed, profound cultural difference, less between East and West but North and South: Ceylan casts an empathetic look on industriousness versus

²⁴⁶ “I don’t joke about Mohammed, headscarves, or the Turkish flag because I think it’s too dangerous. I want to tease but I don’t want police protection to go on stage. The question is what I can or can’t accomplish.”

²⁴⁷ “Hiking, in this respect you Germans really are sick. ... They talk like this: [*aggressive voice*] ‘I’m going hiking!’ ... ‘Hiking till our feet bleed!’ That’s sick! You’re weird!”

savoir vivre or *la dolce far niente*, legitimizing either but advocating neither.²⁴⁸ Promoting the equal validity of different perspectives and personal preferences is a key feature of ethno-comedy.

As soon as Ceylan tackles the more delicate matter of right-wing radicalism in Germany, he resorts to implicit mockery. In addition to an ironic newscast in *Die Büllent Ceylan Show* by the derogatory name of “Glatzenglotze” (“*dometube*”), Ceylan and his colleague Dave Davis created the fascist duo “Adölfchen und Bdölfchen.” The name seems inspired by the two chipmunks that first appeared in Disney’s Donald Duck cartoon *Private Pluto* (1943): Chip and Dale, in German called “A-Hörnchen und B-Hörnchen,” i.e. A-squirrel and B-squirrel (“Chip ‘N’ Dale”). Ceylan plays Adölfchen, a diminutive spoof of Hitler’s first name, while the native Ugandan Davis plays the blind Bdölfchen in obvious reference to his namesake Dave Chapelle’s most controversial figure, Clayton Bigsby, the likewise black and blind White Supremacist in the United States (“Chappelle’s Show”). The association with the chipmunks already undermines the seriousness inherent in the Nazi subject by projecting an image of adorable rascals onto the extremists. Just like Chapelle’s model, the introduction of a black man to German Aryan circles puts an additional comical spin on the idea of literally blind racism and exposes its underlying ignorance all the more drastically.

Like other bits of implicit humor, the skits about Adölfchen and Bdölfchen target no one in particular but only exaggerate common stereotypes of a group for a comical effect. Unlike other jokes, however, these ones never aim to undermine the stereotypes. The decisive moment here is the directionality of laughter: In contrast to the subversive humor witnessed in other sketches, the audience laughs exclusively at Adölfchen and Bdölfchen and never with them nor at itself. Ceylan uses the protection of the comedic frame to attack a political minority and

²⁴⁸ It is telling that the Northern languages of German and English had to borrow these terms from the Southern French and Italian to express a lifestyle or sentiment unknown to this extent at home.

destabilize its frightening public image. Exploiting his artistic freedom, the clichés portrayed remain completely unquestioned and serve solely to campaign against Nazis.

In *Kronk* (2016), Ceylan's critical side became more pronounced again. His cultural political battle against rightwing ideas intensified due to the continual protests by the "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident" (Pegida) on the one hand and the persistent influx of refugees on the other. Accordingly, Ceylan mocks the former and backs the latter. To him, Pegida equals a character test: If he takes someone to Dresden and they join Pegida – they failed! His support of the refugees consists mostly in relativizing the historical moment by pointing out, for instance, that even East Germans were immigrants, too, at one point. More importantly, he deconstructs the notion of the allegedly threatening strange when he recalls how an Austrian asked him whether he was a refugee or Turkish. In light of the mass migration from Syria, this question already implies how Germany's former Other from Turkey has become the more familiar if not preferred stranger by comparison. Ceylan carries this shift in perspectives to extremes when he answers to the Austrian that he was from Mannheim, and as a "Monnemer" citizen he was a stranger in his own country.

Bit by bit, Ceylan subverts the concept of national identities. In *Kronk* his message of transnational humanism is made explicit right from the start. Despite his image as the heavy metal comedian, he allowed a polycultural rapper in his crew to open for him. In one of his songs the chorus ran "Wir sind nicht Bürger eines Landes, wir sind Bürger dieser Welt."²⁴⁹ Sung by a German child of a Congolese father and a Polish mother, the stage for celebrating ethnic diversity was set.

²⁴⁹ "We're not citizens of a nation, we're the citizens of earth."

Whereas, in all likelihood, Ceylan's derision of Pegida or Nazism targets no one in the immediate audience, other jokes fire closer to the sentimentalities of those present. When he tackles delicate subjects that have a higher probability of offending his audience, he often takes an additional double precaution. Ceylan usually articulates his most controversial viewpoints and frequently oversteps the boundaries of good taste disguised as the choleric janitor Mompfred. In order to expand his already increased liberties just a little more, this character is designed to be constantly on the brink of insanity – which Mompfred himself mentions repeatedly – and has to take pills to moderate his temper. When a fit of rage nonetheless takes momentary control of him, his voice turns into a Hitler-voice typically expressing outrageous claims in a mix of megalomania and violent fantasies.²⁵⁰ The pretense of a mental illness allows for quick indiscretions of a higher caliber which create a sensation for the audience similar to the spectacle of witnessing the reality of life on the edge when watching the insane once showcased in the bedlams of early modern times.

In *Wilde Kreatürken* and *Kronk*, Ceylan's coquetry with the insane even determines much of the stage setup. The former features several cages, which contain behind bars the costumes of his characters waiting metaphorically to break free. Similarly, screens in the latter indicate four metal jail doors in the background with brief dialectal descriptions of each prisoner, for instance: "Uffpasse, hoarig (Anneliese)" or "Uffpasse, brudaal (Mompfred)."²⁵¹ Once a character has appeared on stage, the door remains open as if the inmate had escaped, and we see parts of this character's individual imagery instead. Right from the beginning, Ceylan renders his stage-self of unsound mind, too. An asylum doctor with crazy hair leads him on stage in a straightjacket which he has to discard to start the show.

²⁵⁰ Every now and then, something very similar happens to Ceylan as himself where his voice would change etc., in which case he would blame his inappropriate behavior on the abating effects of his "integration pills."

²⁵¹ "Watch out, hairy (Anneliese)" or "Watch out, brutal (Mompfred)." At some performances, the metal doors were replaced by flames again, although these were kept mostly in green to match the bilious green of the tour title.

In addition to speaking with the voice of a madman, modifying the shock value median constitutes the second level of the extra precaution. Statements expressed on stage under the extended protection of comedy and insanity recalibrate the general frame and perception of what is acceptable. In contrast to their extreme level, otherwise offensively straight-forward utterances suddenly seem tolerable by comparison.

In his *Live!*-show, Ceylan, disguised as Mompfred, exploits this shift in sensitivity to say:

Wissen Sie, mich kotzt es an, dass der Deutsche nach '45 so übervorsichtig geworden ist was Ausländer angeht. Oder? Ist doch so! [*in a wise-guy voice*] „Moment, Moment, vielleicht ist es ja gar kein Chinese! Vielleicht ist er ja ein Koreaner? Nee, nee, nee, nee, vielleicht Vietnamese?“ Schlitzauge! Chinese isses! Was haben wir noch? ... Schwarze! [*gestures to black guy in audience*] Da isser! Ob der solariumgebräunt ist oder nicht – ein Schwarzer isses! Was haben wir noch? Türke! [*back to the wise-guy voice*] „Aho!“ Vielleicht isses gar kein Türke, Moment! Warten Sie mal, warten Sie mal! Vielleicht ist er gar kein Türke. Vielleicht isser Aserbaidchaner. Ne? Oder Iraki. Ähm, Araber?“ Kopftuch, Schnurrbart! Und wenns ein Deutscher ist mit nem Schnurrbart – ein Türk isser! Also haben wir Türken, Schwarze, Chinesen, Mompfred – fertig! (*Live!* 154-155)

You know, it makes me sick that the German after '45 has become so overcautious when it comes to foreigners. Right? It's true! [in a wise-guy voice] "Wait, wait, maybe he is not Chinese! Maybe he is Korean? No, no, no, no, maybe Vietnamese?" Chinky eyes – It's a Chinaman! What else have we got? ... Blacks! [points to a black man in the audience] There he is! Doesn't matter if it's a fake tan or not – he's black! What else do we have? Turks! [back to the wise-guy voice] "Aho, maybe he's not Turkish! Wait a second, wait!

Maybe he is not Turkish, maybe he is Azerbaijani! No? Or Iraqi? Um, Arab?" Headscarf, moustache – and even if it's a German with a moustache – it's a Turk!! So we've got Turks, blacks, Chinamen, Mompfred – done!

This statement consists of three parts. Ceylan opens by stating an observation of a general sentiment. Although its accuracy is certainly debatable, its target of political correctness tied to the worst sore spot in German history is guaranteed to be met at least with some concealed approval despite its arguable nature. Secondly, the observation is followed mostly by exaggerated exemplifications which provide comic relief to the tension established by the provocative opening.²⁵² The blatant racism apparent in the displayed attitude as well as the specific phrasing of these examples is exposed immediately as caricature by the absurd rationale underlying the janitor's categorization. The third element is Mompfred's self-reference in the final sentence which not only carries his ludicrous taxonomy to extremes but also reveals the absolute subjectivity at its core. Once more, Ceylan merely hints at a complex topic through a veil of disguises and distorting humor. However, the sketch still possesses the potential to trigger the need to evaluate one's own stand towards the parodied attitudes – possibly by means of observing private reactions to them – and thus affords the German-identifying audience an opportunity for critical self-assessment.

Compared to *Kabarett*, this proportion of real-life references to humorous distortions as outlined in this statement seems representative of Ceylan's comedic approach to the genre. In his role as jester, he dares articulate sentiments others would be shy or even scared to mention in public. The focus of his act still lies on amusing his audience, but his inspiration stems mainly from everyday observations that also include serious aspects of life. Accordingly, he exploits his

²⁵² The simplicity of Mompfred's classification is undermined further by Ceylan's constant highlighting of his ethnically diverse team of helpers like his Polish lead technician or his Lebanese head of security.

privileged position to intersperse his program with potentially uncomfortable remarks on contemporary issues and thus exposes the initial denial of his on-stage politics as an understatement.²⁵³ Gilbert refers to humor as “an ‘antirhetoric’, always disavowing its own subversive potential” (177). Ceylan endorses this idea and confirms it *in actu*.

5.4.2 *Shaping the Future*

Much of the direct and indirect ridicule requires the audience to infer desirable character traits as the opposites of targeted behavior. Occasionally, Ceylan makes his message very explicit, predominantly when envisioning a possible communal life to come. His suggestions are closely connected to his deconstruction of present stereotypes but the perspective is slightly different. Here, we find an emphasis on realizing the evanescence of anything temporal, the illusion of cultural consistency, and the possibilities inherent in social flux. Having observed Ceylan’s freedoms and his approximation of truth obscured by clichés as the first two of three carnivalesque pillars, we now turn to his imagination of social transformation.

Before he targets bigger topics, Ceylan often starts with mocking banalities which already hint at a far-seeing perspective. For example, he would poke fun at trivial phenomena such as the initial appeal of piercings and tattoos changing with age. Imagining in gross detail its decrease over time, Ceylan finally reacts to the apparently growing discomfort spreading on individual faces by saying: “Das will nicht jeder hören, weils die Wahrheit ist!” (*Live!* 13).²⁵⁴ During his performance in the Frankfurt soccer stadium he acted in an equally provocative manner, rubbing

²⁵³ From a postwar German perspective, the public expression of opinions about foreigners in a less than positive way makes any German native immediately suspicious of being racist. Regardless of whether Mompfred’s opening sentence is met with enthusiasm or embarrassment – the mere topic as such already puts any politically correct German in an awkward position.

²⁵⁴ “*Not everybody wants to hear this because it’s the truth!*” The liberty to candor is an old and essential feature of most jester-like performances as preserved in the proverb “Children and fools tell the truth.” The German version sometimes adds drunks to this privileged circle.

his success into the locals' faces: "Wer hat denn dieses Stadion gefüllt? Ein Türke! Und nicht Eintracht Frankfurt" (*Wilde Kreatürken* 106).²⁵⁵ In both instances, Ceylan draws attention to perspectives beyond the conventional, each time accompanied by a heightened sense of temporality when observing symptoms of time like tattoos now and later or the present and the past in the case of his historical success as a Turkish-German hybrid.

Whereas Ceylan's earlier critique of misguided political correctness focused more on historical developments shaping the present, his act also includes temporal projections into the future:

Obama, das gibt mir ja Hoffnung: Schwarzer in Amerika, Türke vielleicht in Deutschland.
[pauses] Ja, jetzt lacht ihr noch über mich! Aber man merkt schon an der Reaktion beim Deutschen [*uncomfortably*]: „Hmmm, so weit darf er nicht gehen...“ Leute, macht euch locker! Macht euch locker, ich bleib Depp. Ich bleib professioneller Depp. Das geht besser.
(*Live!* 88-89)

Obama gives me hope: A black guy in the States, maybe a Turk in Germany. [pauses] What, now you're still laughing at me! But you can already tell by the reaction of the Germans [uncomfortably]: "Hmmm, he shouldn't go this far..." Guys, relax! Relax, I'll stay a fool. I'll remain a professional fool. That's better.

Again, Ceylan creates tension through a realistic but still slightly provocative speculation which, after a dramatic pause, he quickly dissolves by typical self-deprecating humor. The fact that

²⁵⁵ "Who sold out this stadium? A Turk! Not Eintracht Frankfurt [major local soccer club]." Ceylan said this in 2012. In the seasons 2011/12 and 2012/13 the third goalkeeper on the team was the only man of Turkish origin playing for Eintracht Frankfurt ("Eintracht Frankfurt"). Accordingly, Ceylan was probably correct in both senses.

Ceylan can convincingly pretend to observe disquieted faces and elicit embarrassed laughter here and there suggests that his statement did indeed catch parts of his audience by surprise. Exposing the implicit, mental negation of the possibility of a chancellor of Turkish background reveals a potentially involuntary but nonetheless ignorant if not borderline racist conception of national identity among the majority society. It is moments like these which Terkessidis characterizes as “immens unangenehm für das Publikum, da es nicht nur mit seinen ‚Vorurteilen‘, seinen rassistischen Wissensbeständen, konfrontiert wird, sondern auch dem ‚Objekt‘ dieses Wissens direkt gegenübersteht” (299).²⁵⁶ In this case, the audience benefits from the comedic frame as it can laugh away the moment of awkwardness as just a joke, but at the same time Ceylan’s image constitutes another forceful instigation to reassess private attitudes.

Furthermore, verbalizing the idea of a chancellor of Turkish background in public creates an effect similar to the shift accomplished through Mompfred’s blurts of insanity. Putting this image into people’s heads, however briefly and despite all subsequent backpedaling, crosses a boundary and the idea is literally no longer unheard of. On the surface, Ceylan’s speculation is a joke, a pointed remark not to be taken seriously; but effectively, it modifies ever so slightly public perceptions. The association of someone of migrant background in the position of Chancellor is deliberately farfetched, but by comparison many other positions of authority occupied by non-natives slowly appear in a different light. Over time, establishing conceptual links between people of a particular ethnicity and positively connoted positions can contribute to improving the public image of that group. In line with Walburg’s crime statistics, Terkessidis goes on to say how it is “vor allem die als homogen betrachtete Gruppe der ‚Türken‘, die häufig

²⁵⁶ “These situations are also particularly uncomfortable for the audience because it is not only confronted with its ‘prejudices,’ its racist knowledge, but also with the immediate ‘object’ of this knowledge.”

mit Straffälligkeit, Misogynie oder Fundamentalismus identifiziert wird” (299).²⁵⁷ To the same effect that television began casting non-natives for roles other than criminals and thus promoting positive images as well, Ceylan’s symbolic joke outlines a possible result of the continuation of current integration efforts and thus contributes to the modification of the majority society’s perceived normality.

In *Die Bülent Ceylan Show*, he tones down the image by proposing himself as future Chancellor. The decrease in likelihood accentuates the comical, while his representative value of marginalized ethnicities still maintains the original suggestion. In a way, Ceylan’s act in general and this fantasy in particular echo Bakhtin’s description of carnival’s symbolic centerpiece:

The ... entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties presented this essential relation to time and to social and historical transformation. One of the indispensable elements of the folk festival was travesty, that is, the renewal of clothes and of the social image. Another essential element was a reversal of the hierarchic levels: the jester was proclaimed king. (*Rabelais and His World* 81)

In contrast to the medieval coronation, which merely inverts current conditions, Ceylan’s performance takes the imagined transformation yet another step further. At the outset, he identifies as part Turkish and represents an ethnic minority still located predominantly at the periphery of German society. Through his chosen profession as jester, he manages to establish himself as a public figure and enter society’s center. Elevated on stage, he seems to enjoy a superior position, once more different from his audience but now an empowered individual endowed with the freedom to judge and ridicule his environment. Having accomplished this

²⁵⁷ “Especially the supposedly homogenous group of ‘Turks’ is often identified as criminal, misogynistic, and fundamentalist.”

switch, he puts himself at the feet of his audience and symbolically undoes his privileging – significantly, however, on his own account. Finally, Ceylan emphasizes the idea of being an equal among equals through articulating his perceived and desired state of general human equality regardless of status or origin. Of course, neither Ceylan’s imaginations of empowerment nor the jester’s symbolic coronation have immediate effects on life outside the carnivalesque frame; but instead of enacting just a simple inversion, the contemporary jester aims yet further and strives for social harmonization in the long run.

This intention becomes particularly obvious in an episode of *Die Büllent Ceylan Show* where the comedian attacks racist idiocy. Emulating the standard packaging of ratiopharm, a major German pharmaceutical corporation, Ceylan’s fictional mock-company “rational” offers a placebo product to accomplish a respectful and tolerant state of mind, thus curing the patient of idiotic attitudes. Firing rhetorical bullets at racists while simultaneously propagating the core values of transnational humanism in an ideal pluralist society constitutes a powerful combination that ensures audience comprehension regardless of the comedic presentation. Attempts like this to deliberately exercise influence over one’s audience exemplify the cultural political force characteristic of ethno-comedy.

At the same time, Ceylan’s shows contain elements that demonstrate societal change as already long in progress. Pondering the implications of the social label “migrant,” El-Tayeb observes the following:

Historiography ascribes “the migrant” (including succeeding generations to the nth level) a flat, one-dimensional existence in which she or he always has just arrived, thus existing only in the present, but like a time traveller simultaneously hailing from a culture that is

centuries (or in the case of Africa, millennia) behind, thus making him or her the representative of a past without connection to or influence on the host society's history. (4)

Highlighting the year his father arrived in Germany (1958) or repeating the joke in almost every one of his routines that Turks belonged to German society long before East-Germans did, all serve the same purpose of telling a counter-narrative that eliminates the misrepresenting elements of ephemerality or even novelty from the picture of Turkish people in Germany. In earlier routines, particularly "Aslan's jokes about reunification and East Germans point to social conflicts in a humorous way that does not resolve them but makes them seem less threatening" (Bower, "Made in Germany" 371).

In *Die Bülent Ceylan Show*, Ceylan pursues the same goal on a visual level when he makes a point of implementing a childhood picture of himself in every episode. These mostly family photographs range between early infancy and high school graduation and have a twofold effect. Together, they go directly against the misconception outlined by El-Tayeb by testifying to a permanent residency. Secondly, they humanize the former Other and their offspring, giving overt insights into family life, home, and history.

A grotesque equivalent to this humanizing effort finally consists in Ceylan's frequently uttered mock assumption that parts of his audience only attended his shows to figure out "Wie riecht der Türk?" ("What's a Turk smell like?"), the same reason, he believes, why so many fans insisted on hugging him during signing sessions after each event. The ironic overtone in both instances seems to be that physical immediacy eliminates perceptions of distance and discloses the assumed Other as an equal.

Complementarily, Ceylan attacks German cultural relics that run contrary to his humanizing efforts to nip future racial bias in the bud. Recounting a personal high school

experience in *Haardrock*, he tells the story of how he had to partake in a game of “Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann.”²⁵⁸ The blatant but often disregarded racism in the game’s procedure was rivaled only by a song also performed at Ceylan’s school, “C-A-F-F-E-E,” a canon from the early 19th century by Carl Gottlieb Hering:

C-A-F-F-E-E, trink nicht so viel Kaffee!

Nicht für Kinder ist der Türkentrunk,

Schwächt die Nerven, macht dich blaß und krank.

Sei doch kein Muselman, der ihn nicht lassen kann.²⁵⁹

C-A-F-F-E-E, don't have too much coffee!

The Turkish drink is not for children,

Dulls your nerves, makes you pasty and frail.

Don't be a Mussulman who can't do without!

Ceylan pillories both the game and the song as remnants handed down from an openly racist European past to an indifferent present that pretends to know better. Demanding a reconsideration of such unreflecting continuations raises awareness for social and cultural shortcomings and possibly even contributes to the containment of discriminatory content in the education system.

²⁵⁸ “Who is afraid of the black man” is a round-based game of catch in which one person embodies the black man who has to catch everyone else and turn them into fellow catchers by touching them. The “black man” stands on one side of the playing field opposite everyone else and initiates a routine dialogue: “Who is afraid of the black man?” – “No one!” – “And when he comes (for you)?” – “Then we run!” Having shouted the final reply, the “black man” and the rest switch sides, who gets touched by him turns into an additional catcher for the next round.

²⁵⁹ The song starts with an old spelling of “coffee” which also indicates the opening chords.

A quarter century ago, Zafer Şenocak and his co-author Bülent Tulay stated that “among the young Turks in Germany there still prevails that spirit that only bemoans a split identity, that is to say, speechlessness” (3). Through their continual attempts at renegotiating identities, artists like Yanar, Somuncu, and Ceylan testify to a certain consistency and development in Turkish-German cultural endeavors and keep trying to turn this perception of an exclusive neither-nor split into an inclusive as-well-as state. Tulay and Şenocak already pointed out that “there are paths that must be explored to overcome latent as well as blatant fears of contact, to break out of the ghetto, and to create the atmosphere that will allow the strange and the intimate to be in constant touch, in order to allow something new to grow” (4). Ethno-comedy is one such path.

Based on the sweeping atmosphere of spectacle, Ceylan’s ethno-comedy rests largely on an emotional foundation. His casual but energetic Rock’n’Roll attitude projects an infectious euphoria that seems to spell “All that harmonious co-existence really takes is for us to be willing.” Over the course of a show, his jokes and comments gradually channel this optimism towards an enthusiastic celebration of community in diversity. Simple, redundant language, a slow pace in punchlines, a straightforward portrayal of cultural values, and a clear priority of amusement over critical thought characterize the mass-compatible comedy of Germany’s most popular ethno-jester. Despite his apolitical pretense, Ceylan’s weaponized humor clearly promotes a cultural political agenda of transnational humanism in a mix of rhetorical assault and multi-ethnic propaganda. His comedy contributes to the decimation of racist sentiments by targeting stereotypical hotspots of cross-cultural tension on the one hand, while explicitly advocating respect, self-critical empathy, and tolerance on the other.

In stark contrast to this light variety, we find the mordant style of Serdar Somuncu. Like Ceylan, he also attacks clichés in a comedic frame, orchestrates the multi-directionality of carnivalesque laughter, and pursues similar overall goals. Unlike his chummy colleague,

however, Somuncu foregrounds the obscene fig-leaf of all-encompassing hate to engage his audience in occasionally painful reflection. Compared to Ceylan's pragmatic reservations regarding the question of what he can and cannot accomplish, Somuncu displays a passionate dedication to his cause of caustic scrutiny along the lines of "no risk, no resistance." In his darker, more aggressive, but also more differentiated act, Somuncu offers a *Kabarett* approach to the genre that is significantly less compromising and puts the punch back into punchline.

6 – Serdar Somuncu

Born 1968 in Istanbul, Serdar Somuncu came to Germany as a toddler. His father had been a guest worker who applied for family reunification. Somuncu studied music, drama, and directing at the Acting Academy of Maastricht (1984-86) and the Academy of Music in Wuppertal (1986-92). Having worked at the theater since the age of seventeen, his lead performance in Kafka's *A Report to an Academy* earned him the "Deutscher Literatur-Theater-Preis" in 1990; three years later in Vienna he received the "Europäischer Nachwuchsförderpreis" ("*European Advancement Award for the Up-and-Coming*") for his direction of the *Bukowski-Blues*. After directing over a hundred plays, he subsequently turned to *Kabarett* which resulted in the "Prix Pantheon" in 2004 and the "Kulturnews-Award" for Best Entertainer in 2007. The latest addition was the "Gache-Wurzn-Preis für Toleranz und Zivilcourage" in 2008.²⁶⁰

Somuncu is probably the most controversial of all contemporary ethno-comedians and also among the most wide-ranging. By his late forties, the multi-talented Somuncu proved to be a highly versatile artist, expressing himself through various media and across different genres – ethno-comedy being just one of them – thus creating a remarkably diverse oeuvre as an actor, author, director, *Kabarett* artist, and musician. He published nine books between 2002 and 2015, a number of music and other audio CDs, ran his own internet show, and toured with sundry kinds of *Kabarett* programs. The many layers of his artistic production, their temporal and contentual interweaving and overlapping severely complicate the task of finding appropriate but non-restrictive labels, which is why Somuncu so often seems to escape conventional classification. Of course, not all of his works are equally relevant in the context of this dissertation. Most of them,

²⁶⁰ According to the host, the Bavarian "gache Wurzn" means "etwas ungestüm und widerständig nach oben Drängendes," something vehement and resistive pushing to the top (Bauer). All biographical information is accessible on Somuncu's homepage, <www.somuncu.de>, and his Wikipedia entry supervised by his management.

however, revolve – at least in part – around similar themes: individual and collective identities, fears, a related search for meaning and understanding, for orientation and cultural values, but also questions of self-determination, respect, and reasonable, peaceful coexistence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the elements of humorous reflection and commentary, the desire to broaden the horizons of his recipients, and a distinct tendency to cross boundaries in the process feature in most and dominate in many of his works. Evidently, Somuncu’s main interests also happen to be core topics of ethno-comedy.

In comparison to Ceylan’s casualness, Somuncu’s distinctly different approach to the genre warrants a brief introduction to his *Kabarett* style of ethno-comedy. As outlined in chapter three, the hybrid genre of ethno-comedy emerged from a combination of stand-up and *Kabarett* with the individual configuration and execution left at the discretion of each respective artist. While Ceylan follows a style of heady spectacle and light entertainment interspersed with critical remarks, Somuncu generally pursues the reverse approach of a simplistic environment and critical entertainment interspersed with jokes. His constant transgressions of decency and good taste as well as his trenchant social criticism almost require intermittent comical relief among the onslaught of obscenities, provocations, and ruthless expositions of social injustices taking their toll on the audience’s comfort level. Although the limits are certainly fluid, Somuncu’s eloquence, complexity of thought, his modest stage-setup, and the politically well informed, often caustic humor all testify to a *Kabarett* approach to the genre. Due to this approach, I often refer to him as a *Kabarett* artist in order to remind the reader of the fundamental differences between his style and Ceylan’s comedic approach.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ I am aware that there are heated discussions about the nature and categorical delimitations of the *Kabarett* genre. Instead of indulging in the trench warfares of constrictive definitions only to expose ways in which artists diverge from these terminological corsets, I merely want to outline basic tendencies to illustrate core differences in performative styles on both ends of the ethno-comedic spectrum.

Compared to the easily comprehensible diction of Ceylan – regardless of which stage character he embodies at the moment – Somuncu exhausts the full linguistic spectrum with playful ease, shifting his expression constantly from structurally intricate sentences with sophisticated formulations to common parlance, broken German, and crude profanities all the way down to primitive grunts and back. His play with different registers elevates the complexity of his performance on a purely verbal level which creates a curious contrast: For Ceylan, an overly complicated sentence in Standard German can constitute a joke in itself; for Somuncu, the abundant demonstration of his linguistic proficiency renders his occasional excursions into the lower registers funny. This inverse effect confirms once more the complimentary nature of the *Kabarett* approach as the flipside to mainstream ethno-comedy.

Instead of aiming to please the masses at all costs, Somuncu steers a more independent course and thus asks more cooperation and brainpower of his audience. This change in orientation is reflected in his stage setup as well (see Image 11). His venues are usually smaller, particularly in comparison to Ceylan’s stadium tours, just like the whole setting differs



Image 11: Cover of “Diary of a Mass Murderer.” Somuncu, Serdar. *Serdar Somuncu*. Web. 1 July 2015. <<http://somuncu.de/?i=40>>. (Courtesy of Serdar Somuncu)

dramatically from the attention-grabbing setup of his slightly younger colleague. Whereas the grandiose décor, sound, and special effects of Ceylan’s shows serve to create an exuberant atmosphere, the simplistic background and complete absence of visual or audio effects direct the attention of Somuncu’s audience solely to the artist’s words, his voice, gestures, and facial expressions. In preference to emotional spectacle Somuncu’s emphasis lies more on intellectual stimulation.

In the end, the planes of affection and cognition are probably not entirely separable and Somuncu definitely uses the evocation of emotions as basis to trigger intellectual reflection. Yet, as a general tendency Ceylan's shows are designed to sweep his spectators away in a wave of celebrated enthusiasm for the multicultural, whereas Somuncu aims to accomplish a similar change in perspective mostly the highbrow way. As will be demonstrated shortly, his half-crazed stage-self produces its own spectacle in displaying the captivating qualities of a raging lunatic (like Ceylan's choleric janitor perhaps comparable to the inmates once exhibited in medieval bedlams); but the constant ambiguity to his act clearly demands higher intellectual effort.

The divergence from a crowd-pleasing comedy approach to the more sophisticated, critically inclined *Kabarett* approach also finds its expression in the habitually scathing humor. Despite his ultimate (financial) dependency on the audience's overall approval, Somuncu's punchlines are far more aggressive, even hostile in their challenging ambivalence between brutal truth and carnivalesque exaggeration. He raises the level of provocation equally on all sides, which alters the tone but not the mechanisms of his humor. Although he is harder on his audience and other targets than most entertainers, his degree of self-deprecation remains balanced as well.

Of course, the radicalized humor also changes the configuration of the artist/audience relationship, but only regarding the extent of one's ability to take blows. His level of abuse and celebrated intolerance might create the false impression that central aspects of the carnivalesque event were no longer provided. However, Somuncu still bonds with his audience through the collective experience of enduring uncompromising criticism of self and others, the use of foul language, and sporadic artist/audience interaction. These elements afford the possibility of personal growth, generate a feeling of candor and intimacy, and maintain the conditional premise of the artist as an equal. Finally, even the commercial aspect remains in place. Although the mass appeal and corresponding financial success of comedians like Ceylan seem to be of smaller

priority to *Kabarett* artists like Somuncu, even he offers some paraphernalia in addition to copies of his artistic work such as a few shirts, a hat, or a mug.

As a carnivalesque event, the three main pillars of freedom, truth, and transformation remain at the forefront of features characteristic for Somuncu's ethno-comedy. Like Ceylan, he pursues a jester-like strategy of self-staging that creates over-average freedoms; in his critical rants he articulates truths others may conceal or deny; and in spite of the comprehensive insulting a few positive core values clearly shine through and give us an idea of a new and improved society as envisioned by this wise fool. In expansion of the works by Bower, Boran, and El Hissy, the first part of the following examines the origins and development of Somuncu's artistic concept (6.1), before the second part looks at its application in his ethno-comedy (6.2).

6.1 The Radical Jester

At first sight, Somuncu's stage character of the *Hassprediger*, i.e. the preacher of hate, looks a lot like a paradox of extremes, much like the idea of fighting fire with fire: He avails himself of the most negative of emotions and exercises it in carnivalesque exaggeration in the hopes of diminishing attitudes of ignorance on the one hand, and facilitating a collective mindset characterized by empathy, self-reflection, and respect on the other. The carnivalesque event has been described as a place of increased freedoms, challenged boundaries, and the ensuing possibility to renegotiate perspectives on the world around it. However, where others mostly enjoy the liberties specific to this position but take care to remain within its albeit expanded confines, Somuncu developed a stage character that frequently hazards the consequence of an actually unhappy audience – and yet all in good cause. The *Hassprediger* figure is a manifestation of the jester that takes carnivalesque ideas to the limit, sometimes beyond, and in the process re-evaluates even itself as a social and artistic phenomenon.

Three key characteristics in particular tie Somuncu to the jester tradition: In his ethno-comedy routines he plays a specific social and artistic role, he entertains his audience, and he exploits the resulting situational freedoms in service of social criticism and multi-ethnic enlightenment. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the cornerstone of Somuncu's programs is the unusual concept of productive hate. Before we proceed to its ethnic component in 6.2, the following tries to illustrate the artistic concept behind Somuncu's work, its potential benefits but also its pitfalls, and the way it adds new facets to the tradition of the jester figure.

6.1.1 *The Preacher of Hate: Origins*

Somuncu's stage alter ego as the *Hassprediger* has been years in the coming before it became his epithet as an artist. Its first roots can be detected in his early days of literary *Kabarett* on tour with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1925).²⁶² While the groundbreaking combination of a polycultural artist reading an indicated book earned Somuncu much appreciation for his courageous involvement with cultural politics, it also exposed him not only to Hitler's fears and hate in the text but to the hate and fears expressed in some people's responses to his reading as well. Through his professional self-identification as an actor, Somuncu's long-term on-stage embodiment of a hate figure gained him valuable insights into the artistic potential and difficulties of representing a target that can absorb and manipulate public aggression, and even cast a whole new light on how to deal with the once forbidden book itself.

²⁶² Focusing more on underlying intentions than the object of ridicule, Boran subsumes this period "unter die Rubrik des politischen Lehrtheaters, da es das Anliegen des Künstlers ist, zur politischen Meinungsbildung seines Publikums beizutragen" ("Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarett" 268); "*under the category of politically educating theater, since it is the intention of the artist to contribute to his audience forming a political opinion.*"

Initially, Somuncu had started out at the theater, acting in plays based on the works of Kafka, Woody Allen, E. A. Poe, Ken Campbell, and others and has maintained his self-conception as a thespian ever since. Following in the footsteps of the Austrian Helmut Qualtinger, he gained first fame, however, with his dramatic readings of *Mein Kampf* which initiated his *Kabarett* career in 1996. Like Somuncu, Qualtinger (1928-86) was an actor, a *Kabarett* artist, and a musician, but he performed passages of *Mein Kampf* already in the 1970s. Reflecting on his paragon, Somuncu states: “Der größte Unterschied zu Qualtinger ist folgender: Ich erzähle zwischendurch von meinen Erfahrungen und unterbreche die eigentliche Lesung so an verschiedenen Stellen. Dadurch wird dem Ganzen der akademische Touch genommen, und das Publikum kann besser unterscheiden zwischen mir und meiner Rolle” (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 26).²⁶³ In 1996, German law allowed Somuncu only to cite passages and only in combination with extensive commentary to prevent any rightwing propaganda. Accordingly, the breaks he describes were less of a creative choice but a legal necessity – which Somuncu turned into an artistic virtue.

Over five years and 1428 performances later, Somuncu took a two-month break before he began his next tour in 2002 with the *Sportpalast-Rede* (1943) by Joseph Goebbels. His theater years had firmly established Somuncu’s Shakespearean understanding of the world as a stage and everyone as playing characters. Accordingly, irrespective of the ever-changing commentary and intermittent comical relief, Somuncu perceived these readings as presentations and self-identified as an actor throughout.²⁶⁴ His extensive experience with *Mein Kampf* contributes significantly to his conceptual development of the later *Hassprediger* character.

²⁶³ “The biggest difference to Qualtinger is this: Here and there I talk about my experiences and thereby interrupt the reading as such. That way, the whole thing loses its academic touch and it becomes easier for the audience to differentiate between me and my role on stage.”

²⁶⁴ Mainly the commentary changed with respect to the recounted experiences, not necessarily the textual basis.

From a sociological perspective, the biggest difference to Qualtinger is Somuncu's polyculturality and the deliberate appropriation and processing of German history by someone of migrant background. Noticing the novelty factor in this specific constellation of a Turkish-German presenting Hitler's diatribe of all things, Somuncu recognizes an unprecedented facet to his theatrical work: "Es geht plötzlich ... auch um das Spektakuläre, das sich aus der Tatsache ergibt, dass *ich* mich dazu hergebe, als eine Art Zielscheibe für den Hass linker oder rechter Gruppierungen herzuhalten" (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 36 my emphasis).²⁶⁵ His polyculturality renders the reading even more volatile as it is not only about a still forbidden book but also performed by someone mainly perceived as a cultural outsider.²⁶⁶ This cultural component adds yet another level of debate to the potential for dialogue resulting from the project. Moreover, it also seems to provoke significantly stronger emotions than mere curiosity which bears both positive and negative consequences.

The occasional feeling of hate thus triggered not only signals attention but also constitutes an identifiable response that proves the efficacy of the artistic stimulus. More importantly, this initial reaction usually fades and converts into appreciation once the material and its presentation have been processed and considered a little more rationally. In contrast to the political right, the vast majority of people ultimately finds itself agreeing with Somuncu's positions, leaving the rightwing radicals the predominant group of people still feeling offended in the long run. Their continued rejection proves the validity – and general comprehensibility in spite of much sarcasm – of Somuncu's work.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ "Suddenly, ... it's also about the sensation resulting from the fact that I lend myself to being a target for the hate of right- and leftwing groups."

²⁶⁶ Notice that the benefits of polycultural hybridity, which typically work to the advantage of an ethno-comedian, are not in place here since the artist is not performing as a self-deprecating insider of two cultures but as an actor. It is this categorical perception as a foreigner that ethno-comedians ridicule in their programs. Somuncu's readings of *Mein Kampf*, however, are not ethno-comedic performances and hence work differently.

²⁶⁷ Before a reading in Trier, someone once issued a bomb threat via telephone in case Somuncu was allowed to perform. Somuncu read anyway and nothing happened. Emphasizing the anti-fascist component in his code of ethics,

Turning himself deliberately into a target sets Somuncu apart from other entertainers who typically locate their objects of aggression outside the venue, e.g. the government, the media, or negative side effects of capitalism. Somuncu, by contrast, approaches *Kabarett* primarily as an actor and tries to physically embody his targets, penetrate and temporarily appropriate their form and appearance to destroy them from within through his subversive performance. Even in his early days of literary *Kabarett* he almost metamorphoses into Hitler on stage and thus offers his audience a much more intimate experience than anyone just talking about him. Image 12 exemplifies how his artistic metamorphosis creates the provocative image of a hybrid Hitler with migrant background.

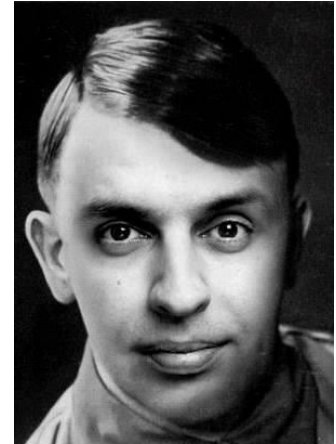


Image 12: Serdar Somuncu. Somuncu, Serdar. *Serdar Somuncu*. Web. 1 July 2015. <<http://somuncu.de/?i=40>>. (Courtesy of Serdar Somuncu)

Somuncu’s visual appropriation of a key figure in Germany’s troubled past not only underscores his conviction that everyone of migrant background has a social obligation to engage with the autochthonous’ history (see 4.3); it also testifies to his courage as an artist to confront his German audience directly with a particularly uncomfortable sore spot. On the one side, the audacity he reveals in this act of cultural appropriation proves the power tied to his privileged position as jester; on the other, this deliberate display of power also possesses a symbolic dimension through Somuncu’s representation of a minority gaining continuously in strength.

Ideally, such a stimulating performance increases the rate as well as the emotional and intellectual intensity with which his viewers engage with the material. The consequential potential to feed the audience specific impulses and function as a reflective projection space for

he later wrote about the anonymous caller: “Er hat sowohl das Publikum als auch mich derart für unsere Vorstellung sensibilisiert, dass wir noch lange an diese kollektive Angstbewältigung denken werden. Dem Antifaschismus konnte an diesem Abend kein größerer Dienst erwiesen werden” (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 219); “*He sensitized the audience and me to such an extent for our event that we will remember this collective defeat of fear for quite some time. No one could have done a greater service to antifascism that night.*”

their reactions allows to some extent for a jester-like exertion of influence through the choice of material and way of presentation, but more significantly through triggering a thought process in the individual who sees itself confronted directly with an artistic incarnation of an idea it opposes or finds itself opposing after having processed the stimulus.

This figurative conflation of an artist and a detestable idea bears its risks, too, as already outlined in 1919 by Kurt Tucholsky in his essay on satire: “Vor allem macht der Deutsche einen Fehler: er verwechselt das Dargestellte mit dem Darstellenden” (Tucholsky).²⁶⁸ Accordingly, Somuncu frequently falls out of character to comment on his role and the content of his performance. Despite obvious artistic exaggerations, these interruptions were still mandated by German law to ensure the critical value of a *Mein Kampf* reading (Somuncu, *Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 50-51).

Tucholsky notes: “Übertreibt die Satire? Die Satire muß übertreiben ... Sie bläst die Wahrheit auf, damit sie deutlicher wird” (Tucholsky).²⁶⁹ Describing a common practice of actors in preparation for their performance, Somuncu reveals a fundamental parallel between theater and Tucholsky’s vision of *Kabarett*:

Wenn man Schauspieler ist, sucht man mit der Lupe nach kleinsten Gemeinsamkeiten, die eine Identifikation mit der Rolle ermöglichen. Findet man einen entsprechenden Hinweis, dann vergrößert man das Ganze, bis es schließlich für einen selbst uninteressant, für den Betrachter aber überdimensional sichtbar wird. So sehr, dass im Optimalfall die Rolle und die eigene Person nicht mehr auseinander zu halten sind, obwohl man sich mittlerweile wieder von der Rolle entfernt hat. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 61)

²⁶⁸ “Germans make one big mistake: They keep confusing the impersonated with the impersonator.”

²⁶⁹ “Does satire exaggerate? It has to exaggerate and it is profoundly unfair by nature. It blows up the truth to make it clearer.”

As an actor, you use a loupe to look for the tiniest of commonalities that allow you to identify with a role. Once you found a respective hint you magnify it until, ultimately, it becomes irrelevant to yourself but tremendously visible to the spectator. So much so, that ideally it becomes impossible to distinguish between self and role even though one has already distanced oneself from that role again.

Working with *Mein Kampf*, Somuncu finds this indispensable parallel in the feeling of hate: “Ein Misanthrop par excellence war dieser Hitler. Und ich kenne dieses Gefühl, alles und jeden zu hassen” (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 60).²⁷⁰ Recognizing the huge artistic potential inherent in hate and finding a personal experience to tap into for an authentic performance, the foundations for the *Hassprediger* character are set. So is the innate ambiguity, however, which sometimes results from an “ideal” theatrical act and makes it so difficult for the audience in performances following the Hitler impersonations to tell act and actor, Somuncu and his alter ego of the *Hassprediger* apart. Even today, after this stage persona has been established for the better part of a decade, the separation of self and role occasionally still poses a problem at least for parts of Somuncu’s audience and a few easily frightened program directors. Bower, too, draws attention to this risk:

The question arises whether the audience can discern his position if he rails against everything and anything. But perhaps that is precisely his point: to confront his audiences with the task of winnowing real concerns from vulgar bluster in the hopes of sharpening or awakening their critical faculties in the process. Instead of looking to him for a position on a variety of issues, viewers must determine their own. (“Reframing Integration” 208)

²⁷⁰ “Hitler was a misanthrope par excellence. And I know this feeling of hating everyone and everything.”

Not only the need to determine one's own position but also the public revelation of this position and its exposure to the reactions of others turn these challenges into possibilities for the open, communal negotiation of social and individual values.

The personal response to a public provocation is a form of self-disclosure that makes the otherwise implicit explicit. After each reading of *Mein Kampf*, Somuncu invited the audience to a discussion, for instance in Sachsenhausen, where he received the following feedback:

Eine jüdische Zuschauerin – sie ist ungefähr siebzig Jahre alt – sagt, es sei ihr lieber, wenn sie mit Deutschen in einem Raum sitzen und gemeinsam über Adolf Hitler lachen könne, als sich umgeben zu fühlen von einer schweigenden Masse, von der sie nicht weiß, ob sie aus Ehrfurcht oder Beschämung oder sogar Begeisterung schweigt. ... Viele Menschen in Isreal würden auch heute noch nicht dem staatlich verordneten Schuldbekenntnis der Deutschen trauen und seien daher sehr dankbar, dass man überhaupt Stellung beziehe. Das sei schließlich das größte Problem, dass auch heute noch so viele Menschen durch ihre Berührungsangst zeigen würden, wie sehr sie wegen ihrer historischen Vorbelastung in Bewegungslosigkeit erstarren. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 122)

A Jewish spectator – she is about seventy years of age – says she prefers sitting in a room with Germans laughing about Adolf Hitler to the feeling of being surrounded by a silent mass of people where she cannot tell whether the silence is rooted in awe or embarrassment or even enthusiasm. ... Even today, many people in Israel were still skeptical of the state-imposed admission of guilt and hence appreciated it a lot when someone took a stance at all. After all, the biggest problem was that the reserve displayed even today by so many showed how much they ossified in light of their historical burden.

This exemplary statement validates a key purpose of Somuncu's *Kabarett* by enabling people to find themselves and others through the collective digestion of his food for thought. His routines have never been simple entertainment but always contain a plethora of serious issues that provoke people to recognize and engage with their own attitudes on a personal and collective level. Contrary to the often criticized problem of *Kabarett* artists "preaching to the choir" (see 4.5), the immediate communication of these revaluations, for instance in the forms of individual laughter, anger, or uncomfortable silence, exposes different positions on a group level and therefore the heterogeneity of each audience. The spectators come to see themselves more clearly through processing the act of the artist and hone their individual and mutual awareness for various topics. *Mein Kampf*, for example, contains Hitler's views on theories of race, demagoguery, and national identity, all of which Somuncu easily connects to contemporary politics in his commentary. With its supposedly dangerous contents, even the book itself is worth debating when it comes to estimating its illuminating or corrupting potential today.

On December 31st, 2015, the Bavarian copyright to *Mein Kampf* expired. The debates about a possible re-publication testified to the immediate relevance of Somuncu's reflections: Should the book be re-published as is, or only in combination with detailed commentary, or not at all? On his journey, Somuncu performed deliberately in controversial locations of contemporary or historical significance such as sites of recent xenophobic attacks (Mölln) or places close to former concentration camps like Oranienburg or the above-mentioned Sachsenhausen. In a way, his tour through Germany, parts of Austria, Italy, and Liechtenstein was an extensive study twenty years ahead of time on public reactions to a confrontation with *Mein Kampf* which produced predominantly positive results.²⁷¹ Commenting on the perceived outcome of Somuncu's

²⁷¹ The original tour plan included Bern as well, but the Swiss bailed in the last minute on grounds of doubts regarding the nature of the effects generated by Somuncu's act (Somuncu, *Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 244–246). Their unexpected withdrawal is one of many instances where diffuse fear trumped rational confrontation.

readings, the *Tageszeitung Berlin* echoed the effects described by Rappoport for ethno-comedy,²⁷² saying: “Somuncu lässt die absurde Sprachgewalt Hitlers wieder auferstehen und nimmt ihre demagogische Wirkung, indem er die Zuschauer zum Lachen bringt. Jedwede Überhöhung, eben auch die negative, zerstört er damit” (Somuncu, *Nachlass eines Massenmörders*).²⁷³ After a visit to Israel, however, the Bavarian Prime Minister opposed the expected publication of a critical edition (Scherf), a genuine exhibition of political fear.

Somuncu’s experience points clearly in the direction of informed involvement. His literary debut, *Nachlass eines Massenmörders* (“*Diary of a Mass Murderer*”), is a travel journal describing precisely these experiences on tour with *Mein Kampf*.²⁷⁴ His reflections include remarks on his self-conception as an artist as well as his respective ambitions and limitations, but also a key realization regarding the emotion of hate. It therefore deserves some attention even though the book itself is not part of Somuncu’s ethno-comedic body of work.²⁷⁵



Image 13: Somuncu as the preacher of hate. Somuncu, Serdar. *Serdar Somuncu*. Web. 1 July 2015. <<http://somuncu.de/?i=40>>. (Courtesy of Serdar Somuncu)

Almost twenty years after his readings began he underlined this position again in his latest book *Der Adolf in mir. Die Karriere einer verbotenen Idee* (2015). Using his experiences on tour once more as his narrative point of departure, he takes stock of related cultural developments over the past two decades: He reveals striking parallels between Nazi propaganda and the diction

²⁷² “By openly confronting and ridiculing stereotypes and slurs rather than denying them, Lenny [Bruce, TH] and Richard [Pryor, TH] were deflating them, draining the emotional poison out of them, and allowing laughter to enter where before there had only been aggression or anger” (Rappoport 80).

²⁷³ “Somuncu revives Hitler’s absurd power of speech and defeats its demagogic effect by making the audience laugh. Thereby, he destroys each and any exaltation, the positive as well as the negative.”

²⁷⁴ In 2009, *Auf Lesereise mit Adolf* (“*On Reading Tour with Adolf*”) updated his first book.

²⁷⁵ It is certainly debatable to what extent the hybrid gaze of a Turkish-German comedian automatically ethnicizes any material based solely on this particular perspective. While the background can add a specific sociocultural layer of meaning to an artistic utterance, there is a distinct risk of over-amplifying this layer.

of contemporary politicians like Bernd Lucke (former founder of the AfD), Thilo Sarrazin (SPD), or Heinz Buschkowsky (SPD); he comments on the National Socialist Underground which committed several assaults and murders between 2000 and 2006; he relates his professional experience with this subject on various TV and *Kabarett* shows; and ultimately, he pleads once more in favor of releasing *Mein Kampf* to the general public. On January 8th, 2016, a historical-critical edition was finally published (“Hitler, Mein Kampf. Eine kritische Edition”), which in the interim has become a bestseller in Germany.

In light of Somuncu’s experiences, the fear of propagating rightwing ideas, belittling or even stultifying the Holocaust that accompany this re-release appear unfounded, even debilitating in a progressive sense of Enlightenment.²⁷⁶ After multiple close-readings for artistic gain and extensive struggle with the book’s logical shortcomings and overabundance of unsubstantiated platitudes Somuncu concludes: “Ich würde am liebsten auf den Tisch springen und schreien: ‘Dieser Text ist doch wohl die letzte Scheiße!’” (129).²⁷⁷ His shows, the subsequent discussions with the audience, the travel log, and its reflections in *Der Adolf in mir* all lead the vast majority of people to share this unequivocal view. Where a continued censorship would have prevented the broader public from gaining this valuable insight and maintained an unwarranted myth about

²⁷⁶ Over 50 years after the Second World War, Somuncu was among the first German artists who dared to expose Hitler to laughter and in the process exposed themselves to severe criticism. In 1997, the magazine *Titanic* published Walter Moers’ comic *Adolf. Äch bin wieder da!!* (“*Adolf. I’m back!!*”) which had Hitler time travel into the present and fail at life due to the incompatibility of his rage and racism with a changed German society. The single comic was turned into a whole book in 1998 and is one of the best-selling comic books to date, with two less successful sequels in 1999 and 2006 (“*Adolf, die Nazi-Sau*”). In 2012, Timur Vermes provided the belletristic equivalent to Walter Moers’ comic with his novel *Er ist wieder da* (English title: *Look Who’s Back*) which became a national bestseller (“*Er ist wieder da*”). In between, Dani Levy’s movie *Mein Führer – Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* (English title: *My Führer*) of 2007 also pursued a comical approach to the subject of the Third Reich (Levy). All of these works provoked the same criticism of humanizing Hitler and stultifying the horrors of Nazi Germany, regardless of their commercial success or their potential to provide new perspectives in an ongoing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In 2015, almost twenty years after Somuncu’s dramatic readings, people still asked him whether or not it was acceptable to laugh at Hitler, causing him to highlight once more the difference between laughing at Hitler and mocking victims of the Holocaust (*Der Adolf in mir. Die Karriere einer verbotenen Idee* 15).

²⁷⁷ “*If only I could I would jump onto the table and scream: This text is a total piece of shit!*”

its contents, the critical edition provides everyone the opportunity to judge for themselves.²⁷⁸ The way to fight racism and further social harmony leads not around the book but through it. This deliberately confrontational approach initiated the notion of constructive antagonism, i.e. productive hate as the central pattern of the whole *Hassprediger* scheme.

6.1.2 “Hate” as Artistic Method

Following his tours with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and Goebbel’s *Sportpalast-Rede*, Somuncu produced his first *Kabarett* program by the name of *Hitler Kebab* (2003-5), where he “developed a more aggressive performance style, weaving together insults to the audience, violent rhetoric, and vulgarity into a variety of *Aggro-Comedy* that appears to sacrifice substance for spectacle” (Bower, “Reframing Integration” 208 original emphasis). His last text-based project, *Der Hassprediger liest BILD*, maintained this level of aggression but raised the intellectual standard again. It was a hybrid program by design which, starting in early 2006, marked the final transition from a rather literary to a more independent form of political *Kabarett*: The first half of each show consisted of socio-critical stand-up; in the second half he subjected the daily issue of the *BILD-Zeitung* to serious but entertaining scrutiny and largely improvised commentary.²⁷⁹ In this program, Somuncu developed the notion of constructive antagonism into the theoretical foundation for his future stage persona.

During a typical bonding moment where the artist fraternizes with the audience and aims to establish a sense of unity, Somuncu introduces a new catchphrase which henceforth becomes his comedic core concept, the idea of “immanent deconstruction:”

²⁷⁸ Additionally, Somuncu emphasized repeatedly the ridiculousness inherent in a debate on the prohibition of a book that was legally available anyway in almost every other country as well as the internet, irrespective of its German copyright status.

²⁷⁹ It was an integral part of each show that Somuncu had not yet seen the issue before entering the stage.

Ich hab nämlich was vor mit Ihnen. Ich möchte eine Weltrevolution starten. Ja, gegen die Boulevardisierung, gegen die Fetischisierung dieser Gesellschaft, ja. Indem wir uns zusammenrotten zu einem Haufen Bonner oder zugereister Kölner, ja, und das Gegenteil von dem tun, was man erwartet. Immanente Dekonstruktion, ja. Wir werden CDU-Mitglied und stimmen für den Beitritt der Türkei in die EU. (43-44)

I have plans with you. I want to start a global revolution. Yes, against the sensationalizing, the fetishizing of this society, yes. By flocking together as a bunch of Bonn people or newcomers from Cologne, yes, and doing the opposite of what's expected. Immanent deconstruction, yes. We'll join the CDU and vote for Turkey's accession to the EU.

Completely in line with the keynote of his Hitler performances, the basic principle of “immanent deconstruction” requires the artist to appropriate someone else’s appearance, their language, behavior, and ideology but also their social position and perception by society in order to make it more tangible and thus better conquerable. To embody an idea as an act of subversion is a clear continuation of the anarchic element of the jester as outlined in chapter three. Incarnating the enemy offers two courses of action: In the Hitler performances, mimicry and commentary sufficed to evoke the desired mindset in the audience; in the CDU example that undermines conservative politics, Somuncu suggests going one step further by taking action as someone else and so undermining a group or institution. In both instances, the overall strategy and effect are the same as each one manages to manipulate its opponent from the inside.

The guile of this perfidious impersonation becomes even clearer in Somuncu's novel *Zwischen den Gleisen* (2013) where he tells a fictional story about two historical people, the RAF terrorists Wolfgang Grams and Birgit Hogefeld. When Wolfgang explains his theory of terrorism to Birgit, the author creates a peculiar parallel between the mechanics of intelligent sabotage and his own key tactic in *Kabarett*:

“Das nennt man immanente Dekonstruktion”, ergänzte Wolfgang. “Um den Kreislauf zu durchbrechen, musst du zunächst ein Teil von ihm werden. Oder einfacher gesagt, wir besiegen den Imperialismus mit seinen eigenen Waffen.” (*Zwischen den Gleisen* 79)

“It’s called immanent deconstruction”, Wolfgang added. “In order to break the cycle you have to become a part of it first. Or put more simply, we’re defeating imperialism at its own game.”

Of course, it would go much too far to put leftist *Kabarett* and extremist left-wing terrorism on the same level of ways to influence the public. However, Somuncu's specific choice of words in *Zwischen den Gleisen* confirms the manipulative premeditation to his on-stage provocation and casts a light of rigor and determination on his self-conception as a professional entertainer.²⁸⁰ Analogously, it sharpens our understanding of his on-stage hating as clearly separate from blind rage, namely extreme but calculated hostility.

During the final months of his *BILD*-routine, Somuncu starts to explore the internet as an allegedly free space of artistic articulation and launches his own weekly online show in June

²⁸⁰ At the same time, Somuncu remains quite realistic, even humble about his artistic reach (see below).

2008 by the name of *Hatenight*.²⁸¹ Here, he not only integrates the creative capital of hate with the stratagem of immanent deconstruction but also drastically expands his target area. Compared to Ceylan's weaponized humor with its occasionally tantalizing punchlines, Somuncu's show comes closer to figurative curtain fire when he carries the antagonistic aspect of critical entertainment to new extremes.

In general, the notion of conceptualized opposition is nothing new and a fundamental feature of many jester manifestations along the tradition, including the *Kabarett* artists as outlined by Henningsen: "Diese eigentümliche Rolle fordert 'gegen' irgend etwas zu sein" (20).²⁸² Somuncu maximizes this idea as already indicated by the title "*Hatenight*," using hate as an artistic pretense, a role-specific lens through which he examines, portrays, and evaluates life around him. During his readings of *Mein Kampf*, he already came to the conclusion that "Hass und Krieg, Gewalt und Grausamkeit sind die Realität; und nur dann wenn wir uns diesen Gefahren stellen, sind wir in der Lage, sie zu bewältigen" (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 25).²⁸³ In *Hatenight*, Somuncu broadens the scope of his scorn accordingly.

He also recognized the compatibility of hate and comedy during his performances as Hitler, where he noticed the capacity of hate as a powerful, natural catalyst for the professional bearing typical of all *Kabarett* artists, regarding both form and content of their shows.²⁸⁴ It is an

²⁸¹ Recorded late at night, the title mocked the American format of "late-night." Youtube banned the show a year later and deleted all footage. The show continued on the social video network Sevenload (shut down on April 4th, 2014). After further legal complications in 2010, *Hatenight* was allowed to be broadcast only in a severely censored way. In 2011, youth protection shut down that website anyway. All content was moved to <www.brokencomedy.de>, the homepage of a comedy show (2009-11) where Somuncu performed regularly as a guest (curiously in a role with striking similarities to his *Hassprediger* character). Today, most video clips resurfaced on youtube and dailymotion, testifying to the defiant nature of both show and audience. In 2013, Somuncu also published a transcript of the first 126 episodes (2008-13) as a book (see below).

²⁸² "This peculiar role demands to be 'against' something."

²⁸³ "Hate and war, violence and cruelty define our reality; and only our confrontation of these threats enables us to overcome them."

²⁸⁴ Inspired by the American *Daily Show*, Hans-Joachim Heist noticed the same thing a few years later and created his stage alter ego Gernot Hassknecht, the "hateful servant" Gernot, as whom he toured Germany between 2013 and 2015 ("Hans-Joachim Heist"). Today, he and Somuncu feature regularly in the *heute-show*, the German copy of the *Daily Show*, where they provide spiteful commentaries on current topics.

emotion almost impossible to increase in terms of its intensity and as such it rubs off on everything:²⁸⁵ the performative energy on stage, the levels of exaggeration and criticism as well as the humor's causticity. Hate as comedic method can elicit *Kabarett*'s most basic constituents in their purity and Somuncu embraces its full potential.

The resulting controversy often associated with his performances stems from his regularly purported conviction that every minority has the same right to be discriminated against ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 2) with the mischievous hook that one way or other everyone belongs to some sort of minority.²⁸⁶ In its all-encompassing nature, this almost poetic afflatus finally gives rise to Somuncu's ultimate stage alter ego, the perfect embodiment of his indiscriminate discrimination and aptly named the preacher of hate. In character, Somuncu excoriates all parts of society and thus, paradoxically, does everyone justice (in injustice).²⁸⁷

As already indicated, there is a distinct method to this mayhem and Somuncu even announces his means and ends right up front: "Ich werde natürlich dazu beitragen, dass man sich positionieren muss, denn: Es wird flächendeckend beleidigt" ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 1).²⁸⁸ This desired effect reveals the productive intention behind his work and constitutes the crucial difference to the often falsely assumed provocation for provocation's sake. From Somuncu's point of view, *Kabarett* needs to be intense to the point of physical discomfort in order to actually stir something in its viewership:

²⁸⁵ This is not to say that other emotions were always less intense, but it perceives hate as superior to anger as superior to a minor grudge and as such almost impossible to intensify further.

²⁸⁶ "Jede Minderheit hat das Recht auf Diskriminierung." In the following, I reference among other material two different versions of Somuncu's *Hassprediger* routine which differ formally only in their subtitle. The first one is a recording from a 2009 show in Munich, available only online and listed here as "Ein demagogischer Blindtest," the official tour subtitle. The other one is a recording from a show in Dortmund in 2011 which was published on DVD as "hardcore live!" and will be cited as such.

²⁸⁷ In Dortmund, Somuncu emphasizes the element of justice, saying: "Ich beleidige flächendeckend. Erst wenn es alle trifft, ist es gerecht verteilt" (*hardcore live!* 38). "I insult everyone. It's not fair unless it hits all."

²⁸⁸ "Of course, I'll do my share to make you position yourselves, as I'll be offensive across the board." Cf. Tucholsky: "Satire ist eine durchaus positive Sache. Nirgends verrät sich der Charakterlose schneller als hier"; "Satire is a thoroughly positive thing. Nothing debunks the spineless faster" (Tucholsky).

Kabarett muss ein Pickel am Arsch des Zuschauers sein. Es muss ein Schlag in die Fresse sein! Es muss weh tun! Es muss zumindest vulgärer, brutaler, [*emphatically*] ehrlicher sein als all das was uns umgibt, was wir tagtäglich im Fernsehen sehen und hören. (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 5)

Kabarett needs to be a pimple on the viewer’s ass. It needs to be a blow to the face! It needs to hurt! At the very least, it needs to be more vulgar, more brutal, and more [emphatically] honest than everything around us, what we hear and see each day on TV.

The intensity of his excess often crosses the ontological line between verbal aggression and physical violence, a clear radicalization of entertainment in its conventional sense of predominant amusement. This deliberate creation of corporeal uneasiness by means of words is the basis for Somuncu’s work, and consequently he does his best to accomplish it: “Ich werde alles mögliche tun um Sie an die Grenze zu bringen, die Grenze Ihrer Toleranz, indem ich nämlich versuche ein wenig Intoleranz zu üben” (*Der Hassprediger liest BILD 4*).²⁸⁹ By offending people either directly through attacks directed at individuals or a group they identify with, or indirectly through a savage display of blatant intolerance towards others, he generates feelings of resistance in his spectators that demand to be resolved and thereby forces them to engage more deeply with the subject matter.

Ideally, the result entails not only self-realization but also a corresponding change in social conduct, which is why Somuncu, just like Henningsen, considers his profession as a *Kabarett* artist to pursue classic enlightening purposes:

²⁸⁹ “I’ll do all sorts of things to push you to the limit, the limit of your tolerance, by trying to exercise a little intolerance.”

Das Kabarett ist ein Instrument der Aufklärung im klassischen Sinn: durch Mündigkeit soll Freiheit realisiert werden, wobei geistige und politische Freiheit als Einheit verstanden werden. Dieses gerade in Deutschland immer wieder suspendierte Programm scheint heute trotz aller reaktionären Tendenzen eine echte Chance zu haben, zumindest bei einer aktiven Minorität. (Henningsen 77)

Kabarett is an instrument of enlightenment in the classical sense: to realize freedom through maturity, where intellectual and political freedoms are considered one. This especially in Germany continually suspended program seems to have a real chance today despite all reactionary tendencies, at least for an active minority.

The Turkish-German minority with its numerous comedians is quite obviously active in this respect and eager to exploit the potential to alter people's perceptions of social realities on stage. Of course, a successful presentation also needs humorous elements, wherefore Somuncu aims for a performance "die sowohl für mich als auch das Publikum interessant, aufklärend und witzig ist" (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 17).²⁹⁰

To facilitate this moment of personal growth, Somuncu often uses the hybrid body of the grotesque. Its typical amalgamation of usually distinct entities lends it often disquieting qualities that can cause a temporary destabilization in the spectators' understanding of the world. This sensation of discomfiture from hybridity Somuncu already found in *Mein Kampf*: "Die Psyche der breiten Masse ist nicht empfänglich für alles Halbe und Schwache" (Hitler 44).²⁹¹ Whereas Hitler used this observation to foster public belief in strength through purity, Somuncu uses it as a

²⁹⁰ "that is interesting, enlightening, and funny for both myself and the audience."

²⁹¹ "The psyche of the general public is ill-disposed towards everything incomplete and weak."

rhetorical tool to empower his audience. Considering various contemptuous expressions used by Somuncu, Damon Roberts observes the following pattern to his provocation:

„So arbeitslose Halb-Ossis... Übergangs-Polen... Grenzdebile. Was ist das für ne halb konditionierte ... halb-eheliche Schwester” In considering what all these elements have in common, one comes to the realization that they all address an underlying animosity present in German society towards mixture and, by implication, towards integration. (46)²⁹²

There is indeed something odd and disturbing about these motley images, although this vague feeling is rooted less in a general animosity towards mixture but insecurity in light of the grotesque. Robert’s inference, however, is crucial: If these images, despite their potentially ludicrous literal meaning, can truly be perceived as insults based solely on their hybridity, the laughter thus elicited really could bear traces of the belief in superiority through cultural purity familiar from *Mein Kampf* and therefore disclose a mindset directly opposed to integration.

While such a reading may seem extreme, there is an alarming dissonance between the possibility of hybrid images as insults in art and the need to accommodate hybrid bodies in real life. After all, through the frequently recurring theme of hybrid identifications in ethno-comedy, these images immediately prompt associations not only with Somuncu’s own hybridity but indeed anyone of a culturally diverse background. This part of performing his own marginality – to borrow Gilbert’s phrase – raises vital questions regarding public opinions on hybridity and as such lends these humorous abuses their cultural political significance. Somuncu’s deliberate creation of grotesque uneasiness is a provocative means to an enlightening end: He tries to

²⁹² “*These unemployed Half-Ossis... Transitional Poles... Borderline retards. What kind of half-conditioned... half-conjugal sister*” As indicated earlier, the word “Ossi” is short for someone from East Germany, and often implies links to the former socialist German Democratic Republic.

unsettle his audience to challenge it because in overcoming these challenges lays the potential for individual and communal growth through newly accomplished clarity. In this sense, Somuncu offers grotesque images as a possible means to find oneself as a person and, by extension, as a society through art.²⁹³

Henningsen draws a substantial parallel here between *Kabarett* and pedagogy, arguing that both aim for the “Aktivierung der geistigen Selbsttätigkeit durch Darbieten eines in bestimmter Weise zubereiteten Materials, in dem die zu entnehmende Information in halbfertigem Zustand so vorgegeben ist, daß es einer bestimmten Leistung des Adressaten bedarf, sie ganz zu erlangen, wobei die zu leistenden Denkprozesse kanalisiert werden durch eingebaute kontrollierende und dirigierende Instanzen” (16).²⁹⁴ For the classroom scenario, the controlling instance is the teacher, whereas the *Kabarett* audience relies on the rhetorical finesse of the artist for interpretative guidance. The main difference, Henningsen claims, is that students learned with their teacher whereas a *Kabarett* audience had to display maturity and learn “against” the artist to establish a new sense of mental and emotional stability by themselves, following the artist’s challenge of their boundaries (70).²⁹⁵ Although this distinction ignores the previous statement of the artist as a controlling and directing instance (a cooperative moment which clearly limits the degree of independent processing), the general difference in tone remains true: Both teachers and *Kabarett* artists strive to instill ideas in the minds of others, but where the former offer a positive approach the latter employ a negative strategy to create a particular effect.

²⁹³ The emphasis lies on “offer:” Clearly, there is no guarantee that everyone will be equally inclined to question everything with the same results.

²⁹⁴ “*initiation of mental self-activity by presenting specifically prepared material where the deducible information is made available in a half-finished way only so that it requires a specific effort from the addressee in order to be completed while the necessary thought processes are channeled through implemented controlling and directing instances.*”

²⁹⁵ In the *Kabarett* context, learning seems to refer primarily to the insights gained about oneself after having processed a stimulus, which is why Henningsen puts the term in quotation marks: “Es ist deutlich, daß die kabarettistische Weise des ‘Lehrens’, indem sie das Subjekt auf sich selbst zurückwirft und zwingt, für sich als Patienten selbst Arzt zu sein, Mündigkeit voraussetzt.” (“*Evidently, the Kabarett way of teaching requires maturity as it refers the subject back to itself and forces it to be its own cure.*”)

A supreme version of this negative variety is Somuncu's didactic act/ing of hate. He anticipates this course already on tour with *Mein Kampf* when he notices: "Ich ... versuche, die Mischung zwischen Erschrecken, Erheitern und Ernüchterung zu treffen. Später soll sich herausstellen, dass gerade dieses zur schauspielerischen Hauptaufgabe werden wird" (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 48).²⁹⁶ Subsuming all three affective responses as belonging to the entertainment part (*delectare*), the overall goal remains public education in the sense of eliciting realizations, i.e. enlightenment (*prodesse*). Somuncu's pedagogic path, however, is not direct instruction but indirect facilitation which confirms another observation by Henningsen: "Kanzel und Katheder, pastoraler und schulmeisterlicher Ton sind tabuiert ... Der Kabarettist ist Prediger ex negativo" (20).²⁹⁷

Without the audience's contribution of intellectual effort all artistic work remains in vain. Very early on, Somuncu seeks inspiration once more from Helmut Qualtinger's readings of *Mein Kampf* to determine a way that makes serious contemplations accessible to a broader public. Here he notices the pedagogic value in the combination of humor and terror:

Er bringt die Zuschauer zum Lachen. Und im nächsten Moment quält er sie, weil sie sich dafür schämen, über ein Thema gelacht zu haben, über das man nicht lachen darf, kann oder will. Der Witz ist die Falle. Und tappt der Zuschauer einmal in diese Falle, dann bleibt ihm gar nichts anderes mehr übrig, als sich zu ergeben. Erst nachher setzt die Reflexion ein, und er versucht, die Schuld für sein Lachen dem Witzemacher in die Schuhe zu schieben, aber dann ist es schon zu spät. Dann hat er nämlich schon gelacht, und der Denkprozess, der dadurch angestoßen wurde, ist unumkehrbar geworden. (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 18)

²⁹⁶ "I aim for a mix of scaring, amusing, and disillusioning. Later, exactly that will turn out to be my main task as an actor."

²⁹⁷ "Pulpit and lectern, pastoral and schoolmasterly tone are taboo ... The Kabarett artist is a preacher ex negativo."

He makes his audience laugh. And immediately after, he tortures them because they are ashamed to have laughed about something that you may not, cannot, or do not want to laugh about. The joke is a trap. Once the viewer goes into this trap he has no choice but to surrender. Only afterwards contemplation sets in and he tries to blame the joker for his laughter, but by then it is already too late. By then, he already did laugh and the thought process thus triggered has become irreversible.

Through the character of the *Hassprediger*, Somuncu devises a convenient way to produce these traps by the dozen and push his audience to its limits. Time and again, the spectators' laughter sticks in their throat, where the denied release of tension creates a particularly potent moment for active introspection and the revaluation of oneself (cf. 4.4).

Somuncu considers his online show *Hatenight* explicitly to be a medium of exposure which holds true for his *Kabarett* programs as well:

Indem sie [*Hatenight*] vor allem eine meist oberflächliche Empörung der Betroffenen hervorruft, zeigt sie zugleich in der Differenz und Variabilität der wechselnden Ansichten und Angriffe die unmittelbare Vergänglichkeit der Haltung, die nur solange zu existieren scheint, wie das Gesagte den eigenen Lebensbereich betrifft. Vor allem aber entlarvt sie auch die Ignoranz der nicht Betroffenen. (*Hasstament* 12)

By evoking the mostly superficial indignation of the affected people, it [Hatenight] exposes through the difference and variability of its changing positions and attacks the immediate ephemerality of attitudes, which seem to exist only as long as what was said concerns one's own sphere of life. Most notably, however, it exposes the ignorance of those who are not directly affected.

Somuncu admits openly to the necessarily contradictory nature of his all-encompassing tirade of hate.²⁹⁸ By laughing at some statements but being offended by others, Somuncu's audience often finds itself trapped in the sudden palpability of its own hypocrisy.

From the very outset, Somuncu provides almost total transparency to his program, his approach, and goals. As if in preemptive self-defense, he explains to his audience how this approximation and possible transgression of their limits is not an end in itself: "Ich kann versuchen Sie zu irritieren, damit sie wenigstens einen fruchtbaren Gedanken in sich tragen, vielleicht sogar hier raus. Ist ein hehrer Anspruch, meistens gelingt das nicht" ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 12).²⁹⁹ His usually sober tone of voice at this moment suggests a self-critical point of view, ascribing the assumed regular failure to shortcomings in his own approach rather than the intellectual capacity of his audience, and so fulfilling the humility trope despite his principally hostile stage persona.³⁰⁰

The contrast he creates by oscillating between a calm contemplator and the irascible hatemonger reveals his guise as a professional choleric to be nothing but an artistic tactic.³⁰¹ Where Ceylan claims to be insane or out of sedative pills in order to further increase his spectrum of the speakable, Somuncu creates the Janus-faced *Hassprediger* whose naturally excessive side permits the utterance of more daring statements. The linguistic freedom resulting from this radicalization accomplishes a significant broadening of the ethno-comedic speech genre.

²⁹⁸ If hating something indicates approval of the opposite, then sooner or later opposing everything necessarily leads to a self-contradictory position.

²⁹⁹ "I can try to unsettle you so that you might carry a single productive thought within you, possibly even out of here. It's a keen aspiration, usually it doesn't happen."

³⁰⁰ This impression grows when Somuncu recalls a dialogue he once had with a voice in his head, openly debating the point to his profession and thereby revealing a considerable amount of self-doubt: "Das ist nicht mein Job, ich bin kein Weltverbesserer! – 'DOCH!', hat die Stimme gesagt! (*hardcore live!* 64); "This is not my job, I can't change the world for the better! – 'YOU CAN!', the voice said."

³⁰¹ While the respective characteristics are tendencies only, the number of profanities, for instance, rises drastically in his hate speech compared to increasingly complicated terminology in more contemplative moments.

The supplementation of rational analysis with raging antagonism allows Somuncu to access topics in two complimentary ways that, together, offer a wide range of rhetorical strategies and therefore appeal to the common spectator on several levels.³⁰² Each one of the *Hassprediger's* two faces is endowed with its own linguistic register which, in turn, is endowed with specific tones of voice and even a recognizable set of facial expressions. The main channel of communication remains language. Once more, Somuncu tries to sensitize his audience for his act and provides an immediate illustration as well:

Sprache ist ein Mittel, das man einsetzen kann so wie man möchte. Vor allen Dingen muss man Sprache einsetzen wenn man – und das ist ein Hinweis für Sie, den ich nur [*emphatically*] einmal am Anfang gebe, falls Sie sensibel sind und dazu neigen beleidigt zu sein – wenn man eine [*emphatically*] Rolle spielt. Ja. Ich spiele nämlich eine Rolle. Ich meine nicht ernst was ich sage. Manchmal schon, aber Sie müssen herausfinden was ich ernst meine und nicht. Manchmal mein ich es auch gar nicht und Sie nehmen es viel ernster als ich. Manchmal haben Sie stellvertretend ein schlechtes Gewissen, wenn ich Witze über Leute mache, die darüber herzhafter lachen können als Sie. [*pause*] Sind Juden anwesend? [*pause*] Warum diese Lacher? Ich hab nur gesagt „Sind Juden anwesend?“ Sie haben gehört [*threateningly in voice and gesture with distorted facial expression*] „Sind Juden anwesend?!“ Auch das ist ein Teil des Deals: Ich kann mich nicht für Ihre schmutzigen Gedanken schämen, ja? Ich hab ja nicht gesagt, „Sind Drecksjuden anwesend, die wir vergessen haben könnten?“ – das haben Sie gehört. (*Der Hassprediger liest BILD 11-13*)

³⁰² This range is not limited to just sober and angry but more along the lines of the good cop/bad cop paradigm where each side includes adjacent attitudes and tactics, too. The calm side also has an empathetic element, a tender or a yearning element, just like the angry side also includes frustration, despair, or contempt.

Language is a resource that we can use the way we see fit. Most importantly, one needs to use language when – and this is a pointer for you that I’ll give you just [emphatically] once at the beginning in case you’re sensitive and easily offended – when playing a [emphatically] role. Yes. I’m playing a role. I don’t really mean what I say. Sometimes I do but it’s up to you to figure out what I do and don’t mean. Sometimes I don’t mean it and you’re taking it much more seriously than me. Sometimes you feel bad when I ridicule people who can laugh more heartily about it than you. [Pause] Are there any Jews here? [Pause] Why the laughter? All I said was, “Are there any Jews here?” You heard [threateningly in voice and gesture with distorted facial expression]: “Are there any Jews here?!” That, too, is part of our deal: I cannot feel sorry for your filthy thoughts, ok? After all, I didn’t say, “Are there any stinking Jews here we may have forgotten?” – that’s what you heard.

Continuing his approximation of total transparency, Somuncu reverts once again to the meta-level by commenting on his show as part of his show. In Brechtian style, he not only steps out of character highlighting the artificiality of his stage alter ego;³⁰³ he also gives a clear warning regarding the characteristic ambivalence of many of his statements, i.e. the use of irony which averts reaching the ultimate level of possible transparency.³⁰⁴ Finally, he provides an eye-opening

³⁰³ Cf. Boran, “*Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarett*” 269.

³⁰⁴ Somuncu’s personal struggle with the incapability of some audience members to recognize let alone appreciate irony despite announcements like the one above occasioned him to become even more explicit on his facebook-page: “Liebe Facebook ‚Freunde‘. Eure Befindlichkeiten und Kritik in allen Ehren. Ich treffe sicher nicht mit allem was ich sage und mache ins Schwarze und jeder hat ein Recht sich dazu zu äussern [*sic*], so wie ich das Recht habe zu tun und zu lassen was ich will. Aber das, was sich hier manche im Schutz der Anonymität erlauben, ist unter aller Sau und widert mich nur noch an. Vor allem: Bevor man sich zu jedem Scheiss [*sic*] eine Meinung anmasst [*sic*] und direkt loskotzt, sollte man erstmal Ironie von Ernst unterscheiden können. Also lest die Posts entweder richtig oder haltet einfach die Schnauze. Entweder wir nutzen die Chance uns hier konstruktiv auszutauschen oder wir verpassen sie. Auf Drohungen und Beleidigungen kann ich gerne verzichten. Peace, Helau und Alaaf!” (facebook, 14.2.15); “Dear Facebook ‘friends’. With all due respect to your sensibilities and criticism. I certainly don’t hit the mark with everything I say and everyone has a right to comment on that, same as I have the right to do whatever I want. But the

example of Henningsen's fundamental observation, as quoted above: "Der Kabarettist agiert nicht in der Wirklichkeit selbst, sondern im Bewußtsein des Publikums" (34).³⁰⁵ His words trigger automatic reactions in the forms of emotions or conclusions, laughter or confusion, all of which expose the sensitivities and opinions of his viewers. By means of deliberate provocation, Somuncu explores the moods of his audience, makes them visible and tangible, and throws them right back at it for reconsideration when they turn out queer. This is the dialectic of Somuncu's hate, the artistic method of constructive antagonism which the *Hassprediger* uses in his ethno-comedy routines to facilitate intercultural understanding, empathy, and respect.

6.2 Ethno-Comedy, Hardcore

Due to the ethnic motivation to most of his material in the *Hassprediger* routines, the polyculturality of the artist, and the enlightening intention behind his entertainment Somuncu's performances count as ethno-comedy. On stage, he explores typical postcolonialist questions of identity, engages critically with the German past, differentiates the notion of tolerance, and exposes a variety of everyday hypocrisies in the process. In the end, his signature composition of raw attacks and calm contemplations leads to an intellectual and emotional rollercoaster ride in an almost cathartic carnival of free speech. Following the carnivalesque event's three pillars of freedom, truth, and transformation, the subsequent sections reconstruct how Somuncu establishes and expands his jester-like freedoms (6.2.1), observe what his humor aims at (6.2.2), and finally what it aims for (6.2.3).

things some people venture to say under the protection of anonymity are beneath contempt and simply disgust me. Especially: Before you assume the right to an opinion about everything and start griping about right away, you should learn to distinguish irony from severity. So, either read the posts right or just shut up. Either we use our chance for constructive exchange or we miss it. But I can certainly pass on your threats and insults. Peace, Helau, and Alaaf!"

³⁰⁵ "The Kabarett artist does not operate on the level of reality but in the mind of the audience."

6.2.1 Freedoms through Self-Dramatization

Like Ceylan's shows, the space of Somuncu's performance is governed by the same four main criteria that help generate the artistic freedoms specific to this carnivalesque event: Somuncu's social function as jester, his polycultural appearance, his alias including the underlying artistic concept of constructive antagonism, and, of course, the extraterritorial atmosphere. While the role as comedian procures the common fool's license, his repeatedly accentuated hybridity provides even further extended liberties with regard to the main material.³⁰⁶ Occasionally, these often self-deprecating references are quite explicit and Somuncu plays immediately on people's respective insecurities: "Ich bin weder Fleisch noch Fisch. Sie merkens, ich rede mit Ihnen in einer Sprache, die Sie verstehen, ich sehe aber fremd aus. Irgendwie ists verdächtig [*growls*]" ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 33).³⁰⁷ Much like the medieval illustration of the fish-man hybrid in *The Voyage of Brendan* (see 4.2.4), Somuncu emphasizes his visual difference but, also like the strange creature, communicates in a common language. His play with ambiguous appearances between familiarity and alienation is a perennial technique Somuncu uses to unsettle his audience and destabilize preconceived notions of binary identifications.

Foregrounding his individuality, he also distances himself from his colleagues with a similar background and approach:

³⁰⁶ Although the alias *Hassprediger* carries a literal emphasis on the blasphemous, the show's contentual focus remains on ethnic ridicule. Somuncu also exploits the religious field, in particular for sophisticating his image as professional provocateur. For instance, considering the cathartic potential of his performances he propagates hate as a means to salvation. Consequentially, he refers to himself as "the prophet" whom he dubbed "Hassias," a blend of the German words for hate and messiah, and to his fans as "Hassisten" who follow his concept of "Hassismus." Together, he claims, they formed a religious community as outlined in the published transcription to the *Hatenight* show which bears the title "Hasstament" (*Hasstament* 14–17). On his website, the forum is called the "wailing wall;" the registration fee, i.e. the "Abhassgebühr", references the medieval "Ablassgebühr" ("indulgence").

³⁰⁷ "I'm neither fish nor fowl. As you can see, I'm talking to you in a language you understand, but I look strange. There's something suspicious about that [*growls*]."

Bülent Ceylan, Kaya Yanar, Django Asül... das sind Pseudo-Türken. Kaya Yanar kann kein Wort Türkisch. Bülent Ceylan kann kein Wort Türkisch. Django Asül kann so la la Türkisch aber auch nur so la la Deutsch. Die spielen Türken so wie sie glauben, dass sie Türken spielen müssen, damit Menschen, die nicht wissen wie Türken sind, denken, dass Türken so sind wie sie gespielt werden von Türken, die gar nicht wissen wie sie eigentlich sein müssten, damit sie so sind wie sie wären, wenn sie etwas wären. ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 57-58)

Bülent Ceylan, Kaya Yanar, Django Asül... they're all pseudo-Turks. Kaya Yanar doesn't speak a single word of Turkish. Bülent Ceylan doesn't speak a single word of Turkish. Django Asül speaks second-rate Turkish but also just second-rate German. They portray Turks the way they think they have to play them, so that people who don't know what Turks are like believe that Turks really are the way they are portrayed by Turks who, in fact, don't know how they should be in order to be the way they were if only they were anything.

Distinguishing himself from the supposedly inauthentic competition and accusing them of "staging the Turk" is a means of profiling designed to assign a higher level of credibility to Somuncu. In terms of creating a credible ethos, Somuncu's knowledge of Turkish is a factor worth mentioning. Since his entire comedic oeuvre remains in German, however, this emphasis has only a tactical quality and no impact on the content of his shows. As representatives of the ethno-comedic genre, all of the artists mentioned above share the same functional move: Their incorporation of distinctly foreign features into a controversial social role allows them the subversive play with ethnic elements and designates the core theme of their events.

At the outset of a show in Dortmund (2011), Somuncu briefly addresses the nature of the night's event and says jokingly: "Heute Abend ist keine Theatervorstellung und schon gar nicht Kabarett oder Comedy – heute Abend [*blessing gesture*] ist Messe" (*hardcore live! 5*).³⁰⁸

Naturally, the subsequent performance still combines conventional elements of all three – like the apparent recital of preconceived text passages, caustic humor, or plain patter – but calling the event a "mass" gives it a distinctly ironic nuance right from the start and so quickly establishes its extraterritorial nature.

To obtain yet further liberties, Somuncu developed his ever-angry alias similar to Ceylan's janitor. Between his performances on stage and his online show *Hatenight*, Somuncu's role as the preacher of hate gained continually in conceptual foundation and finally emerged as the full-grown epitome of a counter-social reference point. Based on wrathful intolerance, the artistic concept behind the *Hassprediger* manifests the social type of the artificial jester (see 3.3) as the negative sum total of a society's values and mirrors its wrongs in the loudest possible voice. Hate as a matter of artistic principle overcomes any conventional inhibition and opens the door for radically free speech.

The resulting potential for witnessing the breach of taboos but also for exposing oneself to an uncontrollable act and actor shape the tingling atmosphere typical of such a "mass." The way Ceylan fashioned himself as the rock star among comedians, Somuncu sufficiently cultivated his own image that he can evoke and access as easily to set the mood for each show. Ceylan's *eccomi*, the trademark heavy metal hand gesture, suffices to excite the audience and indicate an atmosphere of spectacle.³⁰⁹ For Somuncu, moving on the plain of clerical terminology, the ironic mention of a word like "mass" insinuates his iconic stage character, which constitutes a tongue-

³⁰⁸ "There will be no theatrical performance tonight, and certainly neither Kabarett nor Comedy – tonight, [*blessing gesture*] we have mass!"

³⁰⁹ The original "eccomi!" ("here I am!") was a jump, the harlequin's signature entrance in the *commedia dell'arte*.

in-cheek confirmation of the spectators' expectation of an aggressive show and stokes up their respective anticipation. Establishing himself as the *Hassprediger* and thus setting the mood most opportune for his performance affords Somuncu the last part of the jester-like liberties necessary for successful ethno-comedy.

6.2.2 *Truths in Criticism*

Somuncu exploits the freedoms thus available to him to confront three major deficiencies he identifies in contemporary Germany's ethnically diverse society: Instead of integrity, respect, and self-determination he feels surrounded by hypocrisy, intolerance, and a number of largely faceless fears – a paranoid herd mentality of superficial, ignorant mediocrity. Most of these deficiencies he ascribes to the twisted but currently predominant priorities of the people, often instilled and nurtured by governmental abuse of power. Between moral suasion and impassioned pleas he mostly employs rants, ridicule, and immanent deconstruction to fight these phenomena. The following aims to provide an overview of his core topics and means before the final section distills the ends.

In reference to a recent mega event hosted by the comedian Mario Barth in Berlin, Somuncu states: “Wir leben in Zeiten des Mittelmaßes. Deswegen ist das Olympiastadion auch voll, weil es einfach mehr Assis auf der Welt gibt.” (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 6).³¹⁰ His assessment confirms Nietzsche's dark vision who likewise felt suffocated by an all-encompassing mediocrity (“Schlechte Luft! Schlechte Luft!”; “*Bad air! Bad air!*”)³¹¹ when he diagnosed:

³¹⁰ “*We're living in times of mediocrity. That's why the Olympiastadion is sold out, because there is a majority of morons on earth.*”

³¹¹ Where Nietzsche as Zarathustra referred to himself as the “Antichrist,” one of Somuncu's book titles seems to suggest he calls himself the “Antitürke.” Like Nietzsche intends much of his writing to debunk cultural and religious ignorance, Somuncu uses his comedy to do the same, which justifies reading them in close proximity to one another.

Was macht heute unsern Widerwillen gegen „den Menschen“? ... daß das Gewürm „Mensch“ im Vordergrund ist und wimmelt; daß der „zahme Mensch“, der Heillos-Mittelmäßige und Unerquickliche bereits sich als Ziel und Spitze, als Sinn der Geschichte, als „höheren Menschen“ zu fühlen gelernt hat ... Wir sehen heute nichts, das größer werden will, wir ahnen, daß es immer noch abwärts, abwärts geht, ins Dünnere, Gutmütigere, Klügere, Behaglichere, Mittelmäßigere, Gleichgültigere. (“Genealogie der Moral” 974-975)³¹²

What constitutes our aversion to “man” today? ... that ‘man’ is first and foremost a teeming mass of worms; that the “tame man”, who is incurably mediocre and unedifying, has already learnt to view himself as the aim and pinnacle, the meaning of history, the “higher man” ... Today we see nothing that wants to expand, we suspect that things will just continue to decline, getting thinner, better-natured, cleverer, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent. (Translation: Ansell-Pearson 24-25)

Echoing Nietzsche’s analysis, Somuncu, too, scowls on the docile and longs for a moment of strength and courageous self-determination. Pillorying fears as perceived dictatorships of the mind and a convenient excuse for bovine conformity, he calls his spectators to action:

Wir sind nicht nur unempfindlich geworden, wir halten Diktaturen am Leben dadurch, dass wir sie ignorieren. Es ist erste Bürgerpflicht seinen Arsch zu bewegen, manchmal in die Gegenrichtung, immanent zu dekonstruieren, manchmal von innen heraus antistruktuell zu denken! Das will doch jeder von Ihnen, jeder will doch individuell sein. Deswegen tragen

³¹² Nietzsche uses “klug,” i.e. clever, in a derogatory sense describing the skill to find the path of least resistance.

sie doch alle unterschiedliche T-Shirts. Oder wollen sie uniform sein, regiert werden wie eine Horde Vieh? (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 78-79)

Not only have we become insensible, we keep dictatorships alive by ignoring them. It is the citizen's first obligation to get off his ass, to move in the opposite direction from time to time, to deconstruct immanently, think counter-structurally from the inside every now and then! It's what each of you wants, everybody wants to be distinct. That's why you all wear different t-shirts. Or do you want to be uniform, be directed like a herd of cattle?

Disregarding the obvious polemics (the use of rhetorical questions or suggestive terms like “dictatorship” and “herd of cattle”), it is the personal relation Somuncu establishes between his audience and the issue at hand that lends his argument its cogency. He captures a discrepancy and ties it back immediately to the people in front of him, thus putting them at a crossroads: Either they admit their own indifference and reveal themselves publicly as sheeple, or they agree with Somuncu, accept their individual and social responsibilities, and attempt to confront their fears. As outlined in the very beginning by the artist, he wants people to position themselves, but it becomes equally clear how he ensures their choices remain simple.

Over the course of his program, Somuncu oscillates from rather general observations like this to quite specific instances. At the heart of his appeal mentioned above lies a profound sense of dissatisfaction with everyday hypocrisies. He seizes upon this theme repeatedly and from various perspectives. For instance, he draws attention to the ideological inconsistency displayed by girls who wear a headscarf but have a thong showing above their hip huggers, or men denouncing soccer as prohibited by Mohammed but accepting the national team of Iran (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 45-46). Likewise, he attacks double standards on a national level, for

instance when he pillories biased media attention for a German suicide compared to its ignorance of 40,000 children dying every day in Africa (see 5.2). Creating awareness for different perspectives exposes the frequent inconsequence of a universally projected self-image in relation to its eclectic accomplishment, appearance and reality, as in the case of generally assumed empathy and the clear bias in factual execution. Drily, Somuncu pours his scorn on mainstream mendacity while his entertainment-seeking spectators choke on the cynicism. The brutal truth inherent in his comparisons testifies to his approach and ambition: If the physical discomfort thus created lasts just long enough, maybe a few audience members actually do carry a single thought out of the venue, question a view or two, or even engage productively in critical exchange with others.

The first and most essential step towards realizing this goal is to disrupt the rut. In the profane parlance of the contemporary jester, Somuncu encapsulates the misery of monotony:

Der gleiche Turnaround jeden Tag: Nachricht rein, Nachricht raus. Angst erzeugt, Angst ist weg. Geilheit hoch, Geilheit runter. Das ganze Leben ist Warten: Warten auf den Tod, warten auf den nächsten Fick, warten auf den nächsten Kack. Wie wir die Zeit sinnvoll ausfüllen, mit uns zurechtkommen, uns akzeptieren und vielleicht akzeptiert werden – das ist ne ganz entscheidende Frage auf der Suche nach Sinn. (hardcore 85)

The same rut every day: message in, message out. Fear created, fear is gone. Lust up, lust down. Life is wait: waiting for death, waiting to get laid, waiting to take a dump. How to spend our time sensibly, accept ourselves, and maybe get accepted – that's a crucial question on our search for meaning.

His reduction of existence to bodily functions and failure creates a comic effect by relating life's perceived complexity to the base instincts of our most primal nature. In line with Bakhtin's descriptions, the focus on things entering or leaving the body is deeply grotesque, including its potential for solid lavatorial humor. The simple rephrasing of everyday routines in crude terms exposes the empty mundaneness of most ordinary lives and functions as an interlude to the tedium. At this point, Somuncu could either develop his opposition of dull inaction or direct the attention towards concrete alternatives. After the articulation of shared physical needs has degraded and unified all attendees in their smallest common denominators ("whether you're a professor or a simpleton"),³¹³ he opts for the latter and adds another universal yet distinctly human component to the mix which restores the temporarily abandoned aspect of complexity, i.e. the twofold question of acceptance on our search for meaning.

In this short juxtaposition of a simplistic hypothesis – "the same rut every day" – and the follow-up question of acceptance we find two indirect means to provoke thought. Firstly, the initial statement of repetitiveness demands to be challenged already. The second is equally implicit but subtler. Instead of lingering on the topic of an idiotic waste of time and exploiting the massive comedic potential of respective examples, Somuncu focuses on a more constructive progression. By means of personal pronouns, he establishes a connection between his audience and himself ("*our* time") and then proceeds to the duality of acceptance. Preying on everyone's assumed desire to be included, the "preacher ex negativo" asks how we may get accepted by others, thus merely implying the need for people to become more accepting of others. Once this implication has been understood, detecting the subliminal call for more open-mindedness towards immigrants and integration efforts is only a stone's throw away. In both instances, we find

³¹³ Ceylan. Cf. 5.3.2.

Somuncu supplying the material and tasking the audience to actively engage with it in order to extract personal gain but also advance social well-being.

In this example, it also becomes obvious how closely related or sometimes even indistinguishable Somuncu's private and stage character are, and at the same time how utterly irrelevant that distinction is. Whether a view is held by himself as a citizen or only as the *Hassprediger* is of no importance to anyone aware of this central mechanism of *Kabarett*, namely the presentation of ideas for public contemplation. The relation of positive to negative staging of information, i.e. offering something to accept vs. something to process, is the same as with fast and fibrous food: Feeding the intellect something of denser content may take longer to digest, but it also lasts much longer. As a professional entertainer, Somuncu provides a challenging diet to the intellectual benefit of his audience, whether or not he has the same at home is completely insignificant.

In the same way that Somuncu uses the safeguard of his roles as an artist in general and the *Hassprediger* in particular to express potentially controversial views on stage, he suggests his audience use him as a mouthpiece that is free of all conventional shackles. This idea can take a variety of forms, as will become clearer in the following three examples. The first one belongs to the category of typical opening remarks to any *Kabarett* show. It is deliberately vulgar for comical effect and intended only to outline the very basic concept:

Ich beherrsche nicht mehr die Terminologie des politisch Korrekten. Ich sag allen alles ins Gesicht. „Arschloch!“ zum Beispiel. Wenn mir einer nicht gefällt: „Arschloch!“ Ich lass es einfach raus. „Arschloch!“ Und Sie können ja mich heute für Sie sagen lassen, was Sie sich nicht zu denken trauen und dann können Sie vielleicht morgen durch die Stadt gehen und

befriedigt denken, „HRMM!!“, weil ich es für Sie ja schon getan habe. (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 14)

I no longer command the terminology of the politically correct. I say everything to everyone. “Asshole!”, for instance. When I don’t like someone: “Asshole!” I just let it out. “Asshole!” You can have me say for you today, whatever you don’t dare to think, and maybe you can walk through the city tomorrow and think with satisfaction, “HRMM!”, because I already said it for you.

Of course, saving an insult in public is not the main objective of this mouthpiece function. The example merely serves to demonstrate the jester-like opportunity of conditional speech as well as the explicitness with which Somuncu recommends its calming qualities with a wink to his audience.

The second example of psychological liberation comes not from Somuncu but from the German President Gauck. Both men occasionally touch on delicate subjects and both put their fellow citizens in a situation where they need to position themselves against their model. Clearly not a jester but likewise endowed with special freedoms to speak his mind, President Gauck gave a speech in April 2015 on occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Ottomans’ killings of Armenian people and was the first German statesman to officially call it a “genocide” (“Völkermord-Debatte”). Immediately after, several high-ranking politicians supported this choice of words, liberated by the President having said it first.

Confirming the medieval saying that only jesters rivaled or even surpassed the freedoms of kings, Somuncu engages in cultural and political discourses as well and puts feelings, phrases, or thoughts up for debate which may then be referenced by a public that has been released of the

burden of sole responsibility for their own expression. That way, *Kabarett*, comedy, and theater offer an opportunity to reflect and self-identify. The process of consciously agreeing or disagreeing with the artists' suggestions creates transparency and clarity, both within the individual and to the outside, and produces an enlightening effect.

The third example comes from Somuncu again, this time portraying a position from the Turkish-German perspective. He thinks through the evolutionary argument put forth by the German politician Thilo Sarrazin, which states that the high procreation rates of notoriously ill-educated Turkish people (and others) threatened to slowly deteriorate the German meritocracy (64), and comes to the following conclusion:

Vögeln wir Türken den Deutschen die Frauen vom Markt? Ist es jetzt Sozialdarwinismus? Dann wär doch die logische Schlussfolgerung, dass der Türke eben ein stärkeres Gen hat und der Deutsche verrecken muss! Aber der Deutsche jammert [*wails*]. Der Deutsche ist ne feige Drecksau! (*hardcore live!* 10)

*Are we Turks humping all the women from the German market? Is this social Darwinism now? Then the logical deduction was that the Turk has stronger genes and the German needs to perish! But the German wails [*wails*]. The German is a gutless bastard!*

Somuncu embarks on a dubious claim and makes a mockery of it. He forges a counter-rationale, debilitates Sarrazin's argument, and provides the formulated material to his fellow Turkish-German citizens which they may now reference. In this sense, the artist not only shoots his own bullets on stage but also arms his audience for their own verbal battles outside the carnivalesque event.

The deliberately generalizing tone in Somuncu's deduction and subsequent attack indicate the satirizing intentions behind his hatemongering. Designed to produce reactions, assaults like these are traps set for (parts of) the audience whose reactions disclose their ability to see through the bait, stand above it, and take the testing blows. Where the irritation of a spectator exposed a lack of intellectual and emotional intelligence for missing clear cues and being unable to maintain one's composure, an even temper on the other hand suggested a higher understanding and in turn the instrumentality of the provocation.

In the interest of conceptual transparency, Somuncu even explains this tactic to his audience and highlights his overall strategy of cultural comparison:

Im übrigen brauchen Sie keine Angst zu haben wenn Sie deutsch sind – es wird auch einen sehr türkenfeindlichen Teil am Abend geben. Wir wollen erst mal die Deutschen zu dem bringen, was ihnen gebührt, und dann überprüfen ob die Türken toleranter sind als die Toleranz die sie verlangen. In der Regel nämlich nicht. Und während Sie jetzt noch denken, „Der Türke lacht mich aus!“, warten Sie mal ab wie der Türke gleich reagiert, wenn Sie ihn auslachen. (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 37)

By the way, in case you're German you don't need to worry – there'll also be a part tonight that's particularly hostile towards Turks. First, we're going to give the Germans what is due to them, and then check whether the Turks are more tolerant than the tolerance they demand. Usually, they're not. And while you're thinking now, “The Turk is laughing at me!” just wait and see how the Turk reacts when you're laughing at him in a little bit.

Naturally, full disclosure of the procedure would defeat its purpose, which is why Somuncu conceals the flipside of this tactic for the moment. The whole trick to this carnivalesque exercise is to develop sensitivity for the power and multi-directionality of laughter. With all cautionary reservations for judging others by one's own standards, the degree to which one feels offended by being ridiculed still gives a pretty decent estimate of the extent to which others are comfortable being mocked. The switch in perspective necessary for this realization requires a general sense of empathy ethno-comedians typically strive to foster, as it is a primary weapon in their struggle against hypocrisy.

Throughout his program, Somuncu substantiates this reflection on laughter. Another type of rhetorical trap, for instance, tries to elicit misguided laughter or approval. Applauding the *Hassprediger's* declaration "Ich hasse Osis!" ("*I hate East-Germans!*"), exposes an ignorant state of mind, just like inappropriate schadenfreude does. Halfway through reprimanding a man for putting his jacket on stage, Somuncu's celebrated accusations turn into a subtle experiment testing the integrity of his audience by adding progressively hostile comments against the initial culprit. When the audience keeps laughing at his increasingly tasteless insults, the trap eventually springs and Somuncu turns the tables: "Das ist auch typisch Deutsch, dass wenn man einen exemplarisch fertigmacht, alle diejenigen jubeln, die es nicht getroffen hat! GNAAA!!! Ihr Deutschen seid Hurensöhne" (*hardcore live! 59*).³¹⁴ Past the point of no return it becomes obvious how Somuncu deliberately overstepped the boundaries of good taste in order to make a point. Once more, he provides instrumental material on stage with a purpose outside its own literal content and, in this case, contributes to the further differentiation of laughter.

³¹⁴ "That's also prototypically German, when you hose someone exemplarily and all those whom it didn't hit cheer. GNAAA!!! You Germans are sons of bitches."

His most straight-forward clue regarding the only safe directionality of laughter comes already in the first two minutes of his program. At the outset of the show, Somuncu outlines the target area of the night:

Jede Minderheit hat ein Recht auf Diskriminierung. Und deswegen wird es Juden, Schwule, Neger, Türken, schwule Juden-Neger und türkische Schwul-Juden mit Vorliebe treffen – aber auch Deutsche! Ja. Der Deutsche hat eine historische Verantwortung zum Humor, das heißt: Wer nicht lacht, ist Nazi. (“Ein demagogischer Blindtest” 2)

Every minority has the right to be discriminated against. Accordingly, it'll hit mostly Jews, gays, blacks, Turks, gay Jewish blacks and Turkish gay-Jews – but also Germans! Yes. The German has a historical obligation towards humor, that is: Who doesn't laugh is a Nazi.

Based on the assumption that any self-respecting Nazi would certainly laugh at Jews, gays, blacks, and so forth, the only direction worth highlighting is the desired self-referential one. Since no one capable of self-deprecating humor can put oneself credibly above others, displaying this quality draws a clear line between oneself and rightwing radicals. Mirroring Ceylan's reminder to citizens of Turkish background “Those unable to laugh at themselves aren't integrated,” Somuncu expresses the counterpart for Germans when he says “Who doesn't laugh is a Nazi.” The implications are identical: Both artists ask to take oneself not too seriously, especially in humorous contexts, and to show sufficient maturity when it is their turn to take a blow.

Like Ceylan's programs, an ample portion of Somuncu's material, too, draws on stereotypes as the central pillars and propagators of socio-cultural ignorance. For instance, picking up the ancient German stereotype of the exotic Turk as a sexual predator he contrasts male genitalia, comparing barbaric German monstrosities to the allegedly filigree tools of the Turkish, and gushes about the latter's prowess and performance in almost otherworldly images before he interrupts himself and apologizes for the indecency by professing he only learned German quite late in life ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 52-53). In one go, he destroys two stereotypes, one by exaggeration and the other by immanent deconstruction. Inflating the fear-driven projections of an all-devouring sensuality amplifies their innate absurdity and ultimately helps deflating the notion altogether. In the process, Somuncu puts a temporary emphasis on his Turkish identity once more through the use of personal pronouns ("wir Türken"; "*us Turks*"), but at the same time he displays an above-average eloquence that stands in stark contrast to his final remark regarding his poor language skills.³¹⁵ He explicitly assumes the role of "the Turk" only to demonstrate a level of articulacy that even in its obvious overstatement still undermines the less favorable assumptions the German majority society frequently associates with that role.

Despite its slightly accusatory subtext, the grotesque humor and the final twist leave the audience in a state where amusement still dominates uncomfortable insight. The last example shows a reversal of this relation. During an appearance at the Quatsch Comedy Club in Berlin, Somuncu tells the following story:

³¹⁵ His comment becomes even more absurd from the perspective of anyone who is aware of Somuncu having grown up in Germany since he was about a year old. He also relinquished his Turkish passport in 2002.

Hab ich überlegt, bah, ich hab ne geile Idee: Ich spiel jetzt ne andere Rolle. Ja, jetzt geh ich sofort zum Flughafen, Berlin Tegel. Ich mach ne ganze Tasche voll mit Shampoo [*laughs mischievously*]. Und alle so [*mimicking a panicking passenger*], „Hey, guck ma! Der ist verdächtig! Der hat ne Glatze und die Tasche voll Shampoo!“ Ja, und dann geh ich in den Flieger zu meinem Platz und alle denken so [*in terror*], „Ahhh!“ Ich denk so, „Muahaha!“ [*evil laugh*] Und dann steig ich auf meinen Sitz in der höchst möglichen Anspannung mittlerweile. Angst ist ja der Konsens der uns regiert, ja. Stehe ich auf diesem Stuhl und überlege, „Was sag ich jetzt? So ein geiles Wort... Ein zentrales Wort der Verständigung...“ Und dann sage ich... [*hesitates, his face contorted in indecision*] „Hitler!“ Und alle denken [*wipes sweat off his brow*], „Gott sei Dank!“³¹⁶

I was thinking, bah, I have a great idea: I'll play a different role now. Yes, I'll go to the airport right now, Berlin Tegel. I'll fill a bag with Shampoo [laughs mischievously]. And everyone's like [mimicking a panicking passenger], "Hey, what have we here? He's suspicious! He's bald and his bag is full of shampoo!" Yes, and then I'll go to the airplane and to my seat and everyone's thinking [in terror], "Ahhh!" And I'm thinking "Muahaha!" [evil laugh] And then I'll get on my seat at the highest possible tension. After all, fear is the consensus governing us all, yes. I'm standing on my seat and wonder, "What am I going to say? Such a great word... A key term of communication..." And then I'll say... [hesitates, his face contorted in indecision] "Hitler!" And everyone thinks [wipes his forehead], "Thank God!"

³¹⁶ Serdar Somuncu at the Quatsch Comedy Club: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWWCHL_NH1Y>.

Once more, Somuncu toys with the idea of role play, this time eliciting the image of a jihadi in reference to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The setting of Berlin Tegel suggests the presence of predominantly German people who ogle the ominous stranger. From the outset, the obviously nonsensical shampoo part confirms the comical nature of the story which also makes the caustic dig at collective fears bearable for the audience. At the end of the skit, however, there is a double punchline that delivers two twists in rapid succession. The first one, “Hitler,” is a conventional turn which creates a comic effect through its surprise appearance and the unconventional interpretation thus triggered of Hitler as a seemingly positive means of identification. The second one, instead of rectifying this discrepancy, reveals the critical essence behind the comical disguise. In his last sentence, Somuncu completely inverts the expectation of jihadi terrorists as the butt of this joke and turns his scorn against the implied German public.

Through its multi-referentiality, the skit is political on several levels. Focusing on the present, it exposes a German fear of the foreign which remains so deep-seated that it seems to outweigh the horrors of Hitler, however briefly. Reframing the Führer as someone to induce a feeling of relief ideally triggers the realization that contemporary attitudes towards the foreign are still accompanied if not governed by fears so great that even Nazism can appear agreeable by comparison. Focusing on the past, the skit reveals the troubled relationship of many Germans to their national foretime. The sickening recognition of these massive disproportions needs to be digested, leads to their questioning, and possibly to a key moment of ethno-comedy – the willing revaluation of self and Other.

6.2.3 Non-Dogmatic Transformations

According to Bakhtin, the third pillar of the carnivalesque event, next to enjoying freedoms and speaking truths, is the imagination of transformations. Although Somuncu lashes out in pretty much all directions, the *Hassprediger* still makes it quite clear which way he would like to see society changed. Essentially, he preaches the biblical proverb “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”

The central prerequisite for this attitude is a critical assessment of one’s environment, particularly the social, political, and media landscape, as well as an analogous introspection based on an impartial openness to expand one’s horizon. As indicated earlier Somuncu is perfectly aware of the ambitious nature of his goal and limits his expectations accordingly (“carry a single productive thought!”). This ironic understatement acknowledges Henningsen’s delimitation of the artist’s competences: “Der Kabarettist, der sich oder seine Aussage tierisch ernst nähme, seriös an einer Rettung Europas oder der deutschen Seele zu arbeiten gedächte, stieße das Publikum vor den Kopf” (20).³¹⁷ At the same time, he describes a generally critical state of mind which he hopes to support through his art: “Eine ... Überprüfung des eigenen Gewissens, des Handelns und der Bezugnahme zu den sich verändernden Gegebenheiten des Lebens ist es, was ich von mir selbst und meiner Umgebung ... erwarte” (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 77).³¹⁸

These inward and outward examinations are fundamentally and multiply dialogic in that the spectators engage with the material, with themselves, and with other viewers. The need to position oneself initiates an identification process and therefore necessarily requires others for completion. Any questioning of a view or exploration of a different perspective eventually requires the involvement with someone outside oneself to determine contrast and accord.

³¹⁷ “The Kabarett artist who takes either himself or his message overly seriously, who really tries to work towards saving Europe or the German soul would certainly alienate his audience.”

³¹⁸ “I expect from myself and others the examination of our consciences, our actions, and our relation to the ever-changing circumstances of life.”

Somuncu's performances provide an abundance of metaphorical bait designed to engage each audience member in renegotiations of opinions and attitudes based on the personal and communal processing of his provocations. Ideally, the individual involvement with the piece of art is followed by self-assessment, complemented by its relation to the reactions of others.

In view of that, Somuncu perceives himself as a mere supplier of stimuli who cannot fully control the outcome of these negotiations. However, when the perennial thespian states, "Theater ist ein Gesprächsangebot, also weder ein Monolog noch eine vorgefertigte Antwort" (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 111),³¹⁹ he understates his level of influence. The genres of *Kabarett* and ethno-comedy may be deeply non-dogmatic in their mutual pursuit of public enlightenment, but Somuncu's rhetorical skills definitely suggest a general direction. In this sense, the preacher of hate shows a certain path but provides no fixed set of instructions.

Complementary to Henning's claim that satire always needs to be against something, Greiner stresses that it requires a clearly demarcated standpoint from which it subjects its targets to laughter (68).³²⁰ With few explicit exceptions, this position usually has to be inferred. Somuncu typically conveys his message of liberalism suggestively, *ex negativo* through the often exaggerated enactment of opposites, or in a combination of both. Occasionally, however, he becomes quite direct, for instance when he describes with an air of wistful accusation his view of a sexualized, sensationalist society and contrasts it in a defiant, dreamy subjunctive:

Wär schön, wenn wir ein bisschen empfindlicher würden, wenn wir emphatischer wären,
wenn manchmal moralische Ansätze unser Denken regieren könnten, als ständig diese
Sensationsgier und der Voyeurismus und gleichzeitig auch der Exhibitionismus, der unser
Handeln und Denken leitet. ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 2-3)

³¹⁹ "Theater is just an offer for talks, i.e. neither a monologue nor a preconceived answer."

³²⁰ "Satire benötigt eine fest umrissene Gegenposition, von der aus sie ihre Objekte zum Verlachen preisgibt."

It'd be nice if we were a little more sensitive, a little more empathetic, if moral ideas governed our thinking from time to time instead of this perpetual sensationalism, the voyeurism, and the simultaneous exhibitionism which guide our thoughts and actions.

Without spelling out a specific course of action, Somuncu merely indicates his position. He names a few core values but, as a non-dogmatist, he leaves the rest up to his audience. At the very outset of his program, this rather straight-forward call for compassion and the parallel denunciation of the mediocre majority's indifference (see 6.2.2) set the general tone for his subsequent focus on questions of cultural identification.

A little later then, he first derides the constantly recurring question whether he feels more German or Turkish and then, in an equally suggestive tone, abandons the notion of a national identity altogether:

Ich möchte nicht wissen wie es ist, sich nationale Identitäten zu geben. Ich möchte auch nicht, dass man religiöse Identität mit nationaler Identität verwechselt. Ich möchte, dass jeder tut was er will und dabei den anderen respektiert. ("Ein demagogischer Blindtest" 43-44)

I don't want to know what it's like to provide national identities. I also don't want people to confuse religious and national identity. I want everybody to do as they please and respect each other.

In light of statements like this, Bower calls Somuncu a “self-styled philosopher of transnational humanism” (“Reframing Integration” 194). Regardless of faith or origin, the key to social harmony in Somuncu’s eyes is a reflected, respectful conduct that acknowledges equal freedoms of others as the limits to one’s own. Once more, he provides a general guideline but no dogmatic agenda detailing one’s every step. His emphasis on liberties of the individual suggests a concept of society as something organic, perpetually changing, and ultimately uncontrollable if these liberties are to be upheld. In particular, a naturally vastly heterogeneous immigrant society defies blanket directions but requires broad guidelines as a basis for individual and communal negotiation. Any politics exceeding this idea risk degenerating into totalitarianism, as polemically established, for instance, during Somuncu’s condemnation of governmentally induced fears as “dictatorships of the mind.”

The final quote is from Somuncu’s *hardcore* routine and encompasses many of his central ideas and mechanisms.

Ich mag keine Juden. Ich mag dieses Pack nicht! Der Broder³²¹ schreibt sonst seine Artikel „Bäh, hier diskriminiert...“ und dann sitzt er als erster in der Talk Show und haut auf die Türken mit ein: „Türken, Türken, Türken!“ die gleichgesetzt werden mit Muslimen, die nichts anderes sind als Ersatz-Juden. Man muss ja einen Feind haben. Der Türke verkörpert diesen Feind perfekt mit seiner eigenen Schuld und seinem eigenen Beitrag natürlich. Man muss ja einen Feind haben. Vorher lässt man sich mit dem Taxi von irgendwelchen Kanaken durch die Stadt transportieren, ja, kauft beim Türken sein Gemüse, schleckt sein italienisches Eis, ja. Aber nachher, wenns einem nicht mehr passt: „RAUS! RAUS! RAUS!“ Dann besinnt man sich auf sein originäres Deutschsein. Dabei gibt es kein

³²¹ Somuncu refers to the Jewish writer Henryk Marcin Broder (“Henryk M. Broder”).

originäres Deutschsein. Deutsch ist eine Sprache, keine Herkunft. In diesem Land leben viele Leute, schon seit Jahren: Allemannen, Goten, Kelten, Ubier, Merowinger, Westfahlen, Türken, Hund, Katze, Maus – Amis! Ist das nicht schön? Schaut ihr, die ihr euch für deutsch haltet, doch mal eure Haarfarbe an: Straßenkötterbrünett! Da hat jeder mal reingesteckt! Jeder! Und was soll diese Deutschkacke? Ist doch schön hier! Lass uns doch alle zusammen hier leben, wunderbar, egal woher wir kommen, wohin wir gehen... (12-13)

I don't like Jews. I don't like this vermin. This Broder, usually he writes his articles "Bah, here someone discriminates against..." and then he's the first to attend a talk show and partake in bashing the Turkish: "Turks, Turks, Turks!" whom he equates with Muslims who are nothing other than Ersatz-Jews. After all, you need to have an enemy. The Turk embodies this enemy perfectly with his own guilt and his own blame of course. You need to have an enemy. First, you have some wog drive you around town, get your groceries from the Turkish supermarket, eat his Italian ice cream, yeah. But then, when you're sick of it: "OUT! OUT! OUT!" Then people remember their original Germanness. And yet, there is no original Germanness. German is a language, not an origin. So many people are living in this country, have been for years: Alemannians, Goths, Celts, Ubii, Merovingians, Westphalians, Turks, dogs, cats, mice – Americans! Isn't that wonderful? Why don't you, who consider yourselves German, take a look at your hair color: mongrel brunette. Everyone put their oar in! Everyone! So what about this Germanness shit? It's so nice here! How about just living here together, great, no matter where we're from, where we're going...

First, he performs the immanent deconstruction of an Anti-Semite. His hostile rejection of Jews displays the dull ignorance of all racism and so generates a feeling of opposition towards it. His second target is hypocrisy, in this instance when members of one ethnicity enjoy freedoms which they deny others or exploit people's services now and scapegoat them later. In between, he pillories once more the confusion of national and religious identifications and adds an implied warning of history repeating itself.³²² Far from equating the Holocaust with contemporary discrimination of Turks, the lessons learned in terms of overly aggressive othering for the sake of an illusionary national identity need to be applied ubiquitously in order to prohibit similarly devastating consequences.³²³ The "need for an enemy" is thus ironic to the extent of cynicism. Next, he implements derogatory and therefore self-deprecating terms for Turks in examples of how society benefits from Turkish migrants and so attacks the eclectic double-standard at play among arrogant natives. Afterwards, Somuncu subverts the absurd duality of supposedly pure and hybrid identities, completely shattering the dominant misconception of binary identifications when he differentiates not only the cultural Other but also undermines the supposedly fixed constant of the native. At the end of this bit, the jester delivers a degrading truth with grotesque vulgarity while easing the tension with a clever pun in between, allowing the audience to laugh at the joke but also themselves. He concludes with a contemplative plea for open-minded coexistence. His simple message stands in stark contrast to his initial statement, a deliberate inconsistency which highlights once more the artificiality of his *Hassprediger* character.

³²² For Somuncu, the active involvement with German history is one indispensable prerequisite for all immigrants in order to shape a harmonic future based on mutual understanding: "Der Umgang mit dieser Geschichte ist gleichzeitig auch der Einstieg in eine neue gemeinsame Gegenwart" (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 93); "The contact with this history also provides access to a new, consolidated present."

³²³ Identification through negation of an "enemy's" characteristics may happen on an individual level but is much more common on the collective one. Long before and still after the German nation was founded in 1871, Germans were trying to establish a national identity. The unifying strategy of the cultural nation followed a twofold approach: On the one side, it attempted to affirm German virtues as attested by Tacitus, deducted from literature as old as the *Nibelungenlied* (~1200) and past the Weimar Classicism, or recognized in war victories; on the other, complementary and equally important it emphasized its perceived differences to the arch enemy France. One could argue about what exactly constitutes "Germanness," but no one would disagree that it was not French.

In rants like these, Somuncu pursues genuinely postcolonial purposes with his performances. Bachmann-Medick describes a key interest of the field as “sich eben nicht auf vorgegebene Identitäten oder kulturelle Ganzheiten zu berufen, sondern dem Konstruktcharakter nachzugehen, feste Einheiten – auch Kulturen – zu dekonstruieren, aufzuzeigen, wie Kulturen in sich mehrschichtig, widersprüchlich und unrein, da von Gegendiskursen durchzogen sind” (205-206).³²⁴ Revealing the ridiculousness inherent in any claim to cultural originality is then the ethno-comedic correlation to Bhabha’s attempt at exposing its absurdity in a serious manner. To paraphrase Göktürk, these are the moments where the ethnographic gaze is turned around and supposedly settled non-immigrants are mocked and unsettled (“Strangers in Disguise” 121). The resulting state of instability requires a change of thinking in the audience and so opens up a possibility for Somuncu’s cultural political agenda of transnational humanism to take root.

Somuncu’s critical comedy exposes everything to laughter, especially those parts of his environment others usually dare not touch. This complete lack of reserve is a core quality of jesters as described by Bakhtin: “For the medieval parodist everything without exception was comic. Laughter was as universal as seriousness; it was directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology” (*Rabelais and His World* 84). Religious ridicule in particular already fell into the carnivalesque mockery of the Middle Ages. Accordingly, when in 2014 a fellow comedian, Diether Nuhr, was sued for a satirical remark against Muslims (“Kabarettist”), Somuncu came to his defense and responded with a parody of people who felt that comedy hurt their religious sentiments. Echoing Henningsen’s position that individual fate is not a category of the public (32),³²⁵ he asserted the freedoms of satire and criticized the lack of self-determination

³²⁴ “*The methodical stimulus of the postcolonial turn lies in abandoning the idea of predetermined identities and cultural corpora and instead examining their constructedness, deconstructing fixed units – including cultures – and illustrating the many layers of culture, their contradictions and impurities due to counter-narratives.*”

³²⁵ “Individuelles Schicksal ist keine Kategorie der Öffentlichkeit.”

displayed by the supposed victim, telling him to simply switch off his TV when he disagreed with a joke (*Satire versus religiöse Gefühle*).

Somuncu's performances are profound contributions to cultural politics. He attacks, introduces, or reinforces views and perspectives in the hopes of influencing the minds of individuals and by extension the public. The transformation he aims for is hence a holistic one based on rigorous scrutiny and presented as ridicule, where his weaponized humor does not leave scorched earth but in fact nurtures insight. Although composed by a follower (but certainly approved by Somuncu), the preface to the *Hasstament* gives a concise summary of Somuncu's artistic intentions as the *Hassprediger*: "Der Hassismus soll Denkstrukturen ändern, zu Reflexionen durch das Mittel der Entfremdung anregen, indem Grenzen gesprengt werden durch die vulgäre Sprache und indem der alltägliche Wahnsinn widergespiegelt wird" (Somuncu, *Hasstament* 17).³²⁶ On this basis, the preacher of hate has become a key player in the context of integration and cultural politics.

³²⁶ "Hatism is supposed to alter thought structures, to trigger reflections by means of alienation, by dissolving boundaries through foul language, and mirroring everyday insanities."

7 – Conclusion

The point of departure for this thesis was my doubt of Christie Davies' claim that humor had no social effects outside of mere amusement and its implication that any aesthetic construct was by nature devoid of political potential. Following Thomas Bernauer's explanation that any social act designed to influence the thoughts and actions of other people was by definition political (see 2.2), I turned to ethno-comedy and the regularly underestimated field of humorous performance to investigate this question. Göktürk, El Hissy, Boran, and Bower already laid excellent foundations for this analysis; yet, when looking at Turkish-German comedians in 2012, Bower still faulted that their "popularity has not been balanced by any substantive critical attention to their work" ("Reframing Integration" 194).

Accordingly, it became the primary objective of this thesis to elaborate on their works by broadening and deepening the field. By extending the analysis to a long history and by closely examining two case studies I want to suggest an aesthetic model of Turkish-German ethno-comedy that includes a proper definition of the genre, rests on a historical basis, and allows insights into central mechanisms underlying the cultural politics of its weaponized humor. Following the jester tradition since the Middle Ages and combining theories of the carnivalesque, humor, and postcolonialism, my main contributions to scholarly discourse are a paradigmatic description of ethno-comedy, and the demonstration of how the artists' influence over their audiences' feelings and perceptions exceeds aesthetics through its deliberate promotion of a cultural political agenda. These findings could justify the inclusion of humorous platforms of articulation in other academic discourses across disciplines.

The somewhat unorthodox dimensions of this study clearly bear certain risks, too. As mentioned in the beginning, Berman already warned of "the charge of dilettantism" in the context

of transgressive, multi-disciplinary, and thus literally extra-territorial scholarship. I admire her caution, but her subsequent contravention even more so. Any advance into uncharted territory must remain unformed to some degree. Yet, without a first exploratory step everything waiting to be discovered outside the initial disciplinary boundaries possibly eludes the scholarly field of vision forever. Accordingly, my attempt at exercising transdisciplinary humanities hopes to broaden the range of conceivable material, in this case by including ethno-comedic performances, and expand the frame of combinable theory available to German Studies, for instance by connecting Relief Theory with Bakhtin's study of the carnivalesque and linking both to postcolonial questions in literary analyses of Turkish-German comedy performances.

In line also with Bower's call for more critical attention, the massive scope of this undertaking necessarily warrants numerous points of further inquiry. For example, a focus on specifically non-male contributions to the jester tradition in general and ethno-comedy in particular provides a valuable expansion of the analytical perspective. Looking at the influences of Brechtian and street theater on stand-up performances could substantiate structural and performative aspects of the ethno-comedic model. Elaborating on the imperial expansionism of the Ottomans or continuing Boran's investigations of Turkish forms of cabaret could supplement the historical basis. Gathering empirical data could deliver insights on audience constellations, perceptions, expectations, and reactions. Finally, cross-referencing my Turkish-German model with other hybrid comedians around the globe could nuance each comedic approach.

In Germany, the social type of the jester as depicted in chapter three, especially as the wise fool, is classically acknowledged to embody witty subversion under a comical guise and, as this thesis demonstrates, in today's ethno-comedians we find clear traces of this powerful figure. Through their choice in topics as well as their intention to influence the minds of their audiences, comedians like Ceylan and Somuncu prove that there is more to their humorous performances

than mere amusement, that there is in fact an undeniable cultural political component to their acts. This component is more pronounced in some performances and less in others, but it proves the general possibility for an aesthetic entity to carry and convey political meaning.

In “Le Joueur généreux” Charles Baudelaire wrote: “The devil’s finest trick is to persuade people that he does not exist.”³²⁷ Although conceptual associations of jesters and the devil have been around since the Middle Ages, the parallel here refers not to personality traits but only to the deceptive manner with which many ethno-comedians downplay or even deny this political element in their position while clearly pursuing a cultural-politically informed agenda in their programs. The pretense of comical political innocence conceals the subversive act of these contemporary ethno-jesters just as it opened the door for the courtly fools of old. The following final contemplations return to the estimate of ethno-comedy’s sociocultural impact factor.

Although Pschibl rejects the comparability of court jesters and *Kabarett* artists, she accepts the fool as metaphor for critical on-stage agency:

Das Bild des „modernen Hofnarren“ kann im Zusammenhang mit dem Genre Kabarett nur metaphorisch gebraucht werden. ... Die Kritik der „modernen Hofnarren“ ist nicht harmlos und keine Clownerie, auch wenn sie mit den Möglichkeiten des Genres und ihrer Abhängigkeit vom Interaktionspartner Publikum nur sehr eingeschränkte Wirkungsmöglichkeiten hat. Sie stellt Alltagskriterien in Frage und fordert die Urteilsfähigkeit der Zuschauer heraus. Der „moderne Hofnarr“ ist ein Kennzeichen für die Reflexivität und (intellektuelle) Distanzierungsfähigkeit in modernen Gesellschaften. (319-320)

³²⁷ “La plus belle des ruses du diable est de vous persuader qu’il n’existe pas,” *Le Spleen de Paris* (1862).

In the context of the Kabarett genre, the image of the “modern fool” can only be used metaphorically. ... The critique of these “modern fools” is neither harmless nor buffoonery, although it has only very limited potential for influence due to the possibilities of the genre and its dependence on an interactive audience. It questions criteria of everyday life and challenges the spectators’ power of judgment. The “modern fool” is an indicator of reflexivity and the (intellectual) ability to distance oneself in modern societies.

Even from this very reserved point of view, there is no denying the general efficacy of ethno-comedy. Looking only at regular *Kabarett*, not the *Kabarett* approach to ethno-comedy, Pschibl’s argument comes from a time before ethno-comedy as outlined here even existed and considers only the rational processing of information while neglecting the emotional and subconscious levels. Ironically, this focus becomes particularly obvious in her own critical observation that the discussion on the effects of *Kabarett* revolves mostly around its potential for transferring new information, and that the genre’s level of influence could be determined much more accurately if only there was proof for this transferal (320). Her request, however, runs contrary to the whole nature of the genre as outlined by Henningsen: “Das Kabarett kann das Publikum nicht umständlich mit Informationen füttern...; es muß sich der Informationen bedienen, die immer schon mitgebracht worden und also vorhanden sind” (17).³²⁸ In order for the audience not to feel lectured, any artist needs to abide by this basic premise.

The same condition holds true for today’s ethno-comedic performances, of course, but the artists can nonetheless affect the public in a variety of ways. On the cognitive plane, for instance, instead of feeding facts to people ethno-comedy encourages self-recognition and provides alternate perspectives, perhaps a different kind of gaining information. Furthermore, as outlined

³²⁸ “Kabarett cannot feed information to the audience...; it has to make use of the information which the audience brought, i.e. which is already present.”

in chapter four, three other crucial factors increase its capacity to exert influence: likely emotional and psychological effects, the genre's unprecedented purview through mass media, and the emancipatory value it can have for the marginalized. Taking into account these three elements shows how cognitive transfer of knowledge or facilitation of insights – e.g. self-recognition or realizing alternate positions – is just one part in the overall range of ethno-comedy.

On the emotional level, for instance, the comedians tweak perceptions of cultural identifications, not through rational explanation but shared experience. At live events, the artists form temporal communities, equalized by the multi-directionality of laughter, where the mutual practice of self-deprecating humor instigates social bonding mechanisms. Nationally-televised events likewise expose their viewers to culturally comparative humor that alienates the familiar and habituates the strange. Simply by making people laugh with others at themselves, ethno-comedy with its enormous media-enhanced reach fosters the emotional maturity of millions, which is a vital condition for the peaceful coexistence within a pluralist society. Moreover, the socio-psychological benefit of accustoming a majority society to the increased visual presence of polycultural artists may be difficult to assess in detail but is absurd to deny completely. Further research in this direction could provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of broadly televised hybrid artists causing a subliminal shift in the perceptions of former visual markers of foreignness.

Facilitating gradual change in mainstream perceptions was already the main intention when first-generation migrants founded the first Turkish *Kabarett* programs and venues in Germany of the mid-1980s. *Kabarett* artist Sinasi Dikmen of the Turkish duo “Knobi-Bonbon” said in an interview: “Warum machen wir nicht unser eigenes Kabarett selbst? Die deutschen Künstler sind zwar sehr gut und sagen tolle Sachen über uns, aber SIE sagen [*sic*] über UNS. Wir

sollen SELBST über uns sagen [*sic*]” (Boran, “Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarettts” 216 original capitalization).³²⁹ The result was a slow subjectification:

Getrieben vom Verlangen, sich selbst Ausdruck und Geltung zu verschaffen, wurde die Stummheit des Gastarbeiters überwunden und der getürkte Türke [wich] dem eigeninszenierten Türken, welcher aus einer Position der zunehmenden Autorität kulturellen Widerstand leisten und dabei sogar Themen anzuschneiden vermag, welche deutschen Darstellern verschlossen bleiben. Dass „der Türke“ endlich und endgültig zur Sprache gefunden hat und sich nun relativ eigenständig zu repräsentieren vermag, heißt freilich nicht, dass er sich damit auch bereits selbst „gefunden“, das heißt definiert und festgeschrieben hat – beziehungsweise dies überhaupt tun möchte. Auch heute noch thematisieren Kabarettisten türkischer Herkunft die gleiche Frage nach der eigenen Identität. (Boran, “Eine Geschichte des türkisch-deutschen Theaters und Kabarettts” 284)

Driven by the desire to express oneself and assert one’s position, the muteness of the guest workers was overcome and the turked Turk yielded the self-staged Turk. Occupying a position of growing authority, he is able to offer cultural resistance and even touch on topics that remain inaccessible to German performers. Of course, the fact that “the Turk” finally and definitely found the means for self-expression and may now represent himself relatively independently does not mean that he had “found” himself just yet, i.e. defined and established himself – or even aspires to do so. Even today, Kabarett artists still address the same question of their own identity.

³²⁹ “Why don’t we make our own Kabarett? The German artists may be very good and say great things about us, but **THEY** say them about US. It should be US talking.”

The temporary culmination of this development lies in the acts of today's hybrid comedians. The shift in focus from largely heteronomous to growing self-identification remains one of their primary goals. Highlighting the performativity of ethnicity and nationality, the artists aim at a change in perspective and attitude: Germanness or Turkishness, just like Europeanness, is never fixed but, as outlined in the first half of chapter two, a label of identification that is by nature processual, dynamic, and interpersonal and hence subject to negotiation.

From a postcolonial perspective as described in the second half of chapter two, the hybrid artists stage an ethnic power struggle in contemporary Germany. In an interview with Rutherford, Bhabha states: "Hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them" (216). Ethno-comedy certainly entertains, but as an extraterritorial zone of free speech it also provides a unique platform for politically significant representation and fosters the cultural participation of minorities. It offers a way of counter-representation to the mainstream, creates a rupture in public perception of majority/minority relations that demands revaluations, and thus it functions – as Dikmen envisioned – as a means for the marginalized to take the power back.

Imagining cultural renovations has been a feature of all carnivalesque events. Bakhtin summarizes their transformative qualities like this:

For thousands of years folk culture strove at every stage of its development to overcome by laughter, render sober, and express in the language of the material bodily stratum (in an ambivalent sense) all the central ideas, images, and symbols of official cultures. ... The carnivalesque disasters and parodical prophecies freed man from fear, brought the world closer to him, lightened the burden of time, and turned it into a sequence of gay transformations and renewals. (*Rabelais and His World* 394)

As Somuncu pointed out, people in postmodern societies are frequently governed by insecurities and fear: fear of disease, death, or divorce, of unemployment, poverty, alienation, loss, loneliness, terrorists, Gods, of being hurt or unappreciated or utterly devoid of purpose. The hate preacher addresses and pillories these fears, mocks them, and elicits the cathartic laughter Bakhtin describes. To Somuncu, even the final applause indicates release of these tensions as it expresses a certain gratitude or feeling of greatness in having successfully confronted individual or collective fears (*Nachlass eines Massenmörders* 219). Even Ceylan's make-believe escapism maintains loose ties to these troubled realities when he campaigns against Nazism, humanizes popular images of migrants, or fights latent racism in common choir songs of public schools. Of course, carnivalesque laughter does not entirely eradicate ethnic discrimination or anxieties; but it continues to "lighten the burden of time" while suggesting ways into a brighter, communal future.

Establishing a reflected, transnational, humanitarian attitude that values the individual regardless of origin becomes all the more important in the wake of recent refugee movements where hundreds of thousands continue to flee the jihadi terror of the self-proclaimed caliphate "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS). The exodus triggered vastly different reactions in the German populace. On the one hand, Muslim fundamentalism and corresponding mass migrations are grist for Pegida's mill of xenophobic paranoia. On the other, many people welcomed refugees with such enthusiastic sponsorship that Somuncu already criticized their public display of sympathy again as bordering on ostentatious self-presentation ("Das ist so typisch deutsch"). While ethno-comedy is not going to deliver political solutions to questions of migration, the artists' promotion of a critical but cordial attitude contributes to preventing Germany's history of attempting cultural isolation from repeating itself by laying favorable foundations for supporting

inclusive solutions and especially for absorbing the probably inevitable consequences of a few bad decisions along the way.

The immediate social relevance of the main topics, the high probability of significant beneficial influence, and the underlying time-proven mechanisms to help facilitate cultural political change shape a coherent concept which reveals ethno-comedy to be a unique phenomenon of great potential. In 2005, Erol Boran asked where Turkish-German comedy was headed (“Faces of Contemporary Turkish-German Kabarett” 183). A decade later, we can see that it is steadily building width: It already helped the subjectification of Turks and Turkish-German hybrids, it gets increasingly involved in challenging German identifications, and in the context of recent mass migrations its core messages gain relevance even on a pan-European scale. Only its own growing success will eventually render the mediative qualities of ethno-comedy obsolete.

At the outset of this dissertation, I mentioned the risk of stylistic spillover when writing about comedy and asked to take my occasionally “jovial” tone with a grain of salt. At the end of my thesis, I appreciate the patience mustered thus far and, in closing, would like to emulate a quality typical of postwar German comedy – the legitimizing regress into absolute seriousness.

On the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, May 8th 1985, former German President Richard von Weizsäcker concluded with an appeal to the younger generations. It is a testimony to the insight and providence of a great statesman that articulates perfectly the central idea of all ethno-comedy. Its applicability in this context highlights the shared interest of cultural politics and ethno-comedy, showing that over the last three decades neither discourse has lost sight of its ambitions, and therefore deserves once more to stand as the closing words:

Die Bitte an die jungen Menschen lautet:

Lassen Sie sich nicht hineintreiben in Feindschaft und Haß

gegen andere Menschen,

gegen Russen oder Amerikaner,

gegen Juden oder Türken,

gegen Alternative oder Konservative,

gegen Schwarz oder Weiß.

Lernen Sie miteinander zu leben, nicht gegeneinander.³³⁰

My plea to the young people is:

Don't let yourselves be driven into enmity and hate

against other people,

against Russians or Americans,

against Jews or Turks,

against leftists or conservatives,

against black or white.

Learn to live with one another, not against each other.

³³⁰ Dr. Jachmann, Maika. *Webarchiv des Deutschen Bundestags*. Web. 10 Sept. 2015.
<<http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/archive/2006/0202/parlament/geschichte/parlhist/dokumente/dok08.html>>.

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