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Europe's Invisible Ghettos: Transnational Existence and Neoliberal Capitalism
in Julya Rabinowich's *Die Erdfresserin*

Sie zogen durch Kleinasien nach Europa und nahmen ihre
Schätze mit sich, und so lange diese dauerten, waren sie
überall willkommen; wehe aber allen Armen in der Fremde.
(Achim von Arnim *Isabella von Ägypten*)¹

Introduction

Julya Rabinowich was born in St. Petersburg in 1977 and was, according to her website, “entwurzelt & umgetopft” to Vienna in 1993.² In Vienna, she eventually studied interpretation and art. For several years, she worked as a simultaneous interpreter for psychotherapy sessions with refugees, which has greatly contributed to her writing of *Die Erdfresserin*, her latest novel published in 2012. *Die Erdfresserin* is Rabinowich's third novel, preceded by *Spaltkopf* (2008), the semi-autobiographical tale of a young Russian girl and her family immigrating to Vienna, and *Herznovelle* (2011), the story of a heart-sick patient becoming enamoured with her heart-surgeon. She also has written numerous plays and writes a weekly column for *Der Standard*.

Rabinowich's novel *Die Erdresserin* traces and aesthetically mirrors the gradual disintegration of the main character Diana's body and psyche as she tries to make a living as an illegal sex worker in contemporary Europe, periodically returning to her native Russian Republic

1 While Rabinowich does not explicitly refer to Achim von Arnim's golem tale, the novel echoes von Arnim's thematic preoccupations, such as economic and sexual exchanges. However, whereas Isabella's final journey ends in her being crowned the queen of her people, Diana's final journey merely leads her to insanity and her death.

2 See Rabinowich's website at <http://www.julya-rabinowich.com/leben.html>, accessed 29 Jul 2013.

of Dagestan to deliver remittances to her dependent family. Working the streets all over Europe with the diminishing hope to eventually work in her professions as a stage director, the “Einzelwanderin” Diana eventually finds temporary respite in Vienna due to a terminally ill Austrian client, the police officer Leo, and charitable psychotherapy sessions, only to then plunge even more forcefully into poverty, eventual insanity, and finally, to her death. Written after the financial crisis of 2008 and its consequences – or lack thereof – Rabinowich’s novel illustrates how the often-invisible structures but concrete material effects of neoliberal capitalism threaten any viable transnational present for Europe’s non-European denizens.

In the following, I will draw on the work of scholars such as David Harvey, Wendy Brown, Eric Cazdyn, and Imre Szeman to theorize the connections between globalization, neoliberalism, and transnationalism. In the main part of the paper, I will provide a close reading of Rabinowich’s *Die Erdfresserin*. In this timely novel, Rabinowich acknowledges the confluence of a myriad of concerns of contemporary migrants whose fates are shaped by matters of intersecting ethnic, religious, and gendered identities. Her novel thus resonates with issues thematized by a now sizable body of Germanophone literature concerned with cultural transnationalism. However, I argue that the text also reflects important and necessary critiques of these more dominant discourses, showing that however important and interconnected the former concerns are, they presuppose that migrants’ basic needs such as food, shelter, and access to medication have been met. As Rabinowich’s sometimes gross depiction of the fate of a transnational illegal sex-worker clearly shows, for the roughly estimated half million illegal immigrants in contemporary Western Europe, they are not.³ Her novel thus resonates with

3 Given their nature, it is of course difficult to find statistics about illegal or undocumented workers, making this number an estimate only (Riebsamen).

scholars such as Nancy Fraser, who cautions that too much emphasis on cultural phenomena and matters of identity may deflect from economic issues due to a focus on recognition rather than redistribution. *Die Erdfresserin* shows that the effects of such a lack of redistribution is suffered most by denizens who are not protected as members of a Western nation state, which, at least in the European context, seem to safeguard basic human rights for its citizens. Foregrounding her main character's justified anxiety about meeting basic material and bodily needs, Julya Rabinowich thus draws attention to the problematic fact that one's participation in cultural transnationalism in the current area of neoliberal capitalism is premised to a large extent on one's membership in and protection by a nation.

Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Transnationalism

Much scholarship on the transnational stresses its distinctiveness from globalization. For instance, drawing on a variety of scholars such as Michael Kearney and Glick Schiller, Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar emphasize that global processes are largely independent from and transcend specific nation states, whereas transnational processes are both anchored and grounded in particular national places and histories, to a certain extent affirming the importance of nation states and the borders between ("trans") them (Mahler and Pessar 443–4). In his emphasis on the cultural nature of transnationalism, Randall Halle also separates transnationalism from globalization, arguing that if "we distinguish the material economic processes ... as belonging to the dynamic of globalization, in transnationalism we find a term to designate the socio-political ideational processes, or to put it more simply, the dynamic of culture" (Halle 5).

Yet, as Rabinowich's novel *Die Erdfresserin* shows, it is questionable whether such a neat distinction between the economic and socio-cultural is possible in the current era of

neoliberalism. As David Harvey shows, neoliberal practices have become entrenched globally since the 1970s, spear-headed by the U.S. under Reagan and by Thatcherism. As a practice, neoliberalism proposes that “human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey 22–3). As Wendy Brown highlights, neoliberalism therefore is not merely an economic phenomenon. Rather, in neoliberalism, all aspects of existence are affected, since “not only is the human being configured exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus*, [but] all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality” (Brown, Sec. 9). As the 2008 financial or the continuing Euro crises highlight, neoliberalism thus has been detrimental to the welfare of populations and the environment around the globe, giving credence to Harvey’s sinister assessment that the “destruction neoliberalization has visited across the globe is unparalleled in the history of capitalism” (Harvey 39). As Rabinowich’s novel *Die Erdfresserin* highlights, neoliberalism has thereby also destroyed the possibility for many to enjoy the freedoms and creative impulses arising from the socio-cultural processes of transnationalism.

Money, Money, Money

Rabinowich’s disturbingly bleak novel spans the years before the fall of the Iron Curtain up to 2012, and is set in 2011-12. For the first-person narrator and sole focalizer Diana, the rapid changes after communism in the East European cities she passes through, are decidedly negative, described as so sudden and “brutal wie ein Schlag ins Gesicht”(Rabinowich 117). For the illegal immigrant narrator, the immediate post-communist area is marked by a battle between the old, communist system and the new capitalist one, in which people like her “gerieten den beiden

Giganten ständig unter die Füße und in die geballten Fäuste” (117). For Diana, the eventual victory of the West, however, does not represent any kind of political or cultural triumph of democracy or the freedom to travel, but rather the end of a balance of powers. As Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman show, after the Cold War “the globalization of one of the systems (capitalism) usurped the other system” (Cazdyn and Szeman 59). As a result, the “immer gleichen Global Players” now reign “im Bewusstsein ihrer Weltmacht, die anderen Weltmächte hatten ja zu existieren aufgehört” (Rabinowich 117). It is therefore not Europe over Russia, West over East, not one nation or ideology over another, but rather the capitalist global system itself, which has emerged as the winner in the 21st century. As I will detail in the following paragraphs, Rabinowich’s novel foregrounds this economic reality, which affects all other areas of life such as matters of ethnic, religious, and individual or familial identity, which are more typically emphasized in literary accounts of migration and transnational experiences.

Even though Europe and its borders figure prominently in the novel, Rabinowich’s focus is on the economic essence of the union. Diana’s native country Dagestan is rich in agricultural produce, part of the “Kornkammer” of Russia (Rabinowich 17). However, its produce is exported for give-away prices. With what the novel depicts as acute unemployment in Dagestan and considering that one can earn ten times as much in Vienna than in Dagestan for the same amount of work hours (117), labour migration is not a choice but necessity for many. Thus, Diana observes that ironically, the “fruchtbarste Gebiet von allen ist Westeuropa, das alle ernährt. Das gibt es Korn, da gibt es Arbeit” (17). As a 2009 study of immigrant sex workers in Europe shows, for both new and non-Europeans, “Western Europe still offers the best working and earning potential” despite increasingly restrictive immigrant legislation (Brussa 17). In Diana’s

view, post-communist neoliberal economic realities have therefore forced her entire country to sell its produce, labour, and bodies, so that essentially, “das ganze Land begann, sich auf mannigfaltige und höchst legale Art und Weise zu prostituieren” (Rabinowich 38). Resonating with Robin Ellis’ interpretation of Hans-Christian Schmid’s *Lichter* (2003) in this volume, *Erdfersserin* thus also highlights that prostitution “is the nature of all labor in a capitalist economy” (Ellis “Conference Paper” 15).

While such legal, economic prostitution is enabled by capitalism for nations as well as legal immigrants, it is not so easy for Diana and other illegal sex-workers in Europe, the majority of which come from non-EU Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Brussa 18). Like anyone else, Diana desired “nur einen Löffel vom Honig, ein Gläschen nur von der Milch, die in Europa fließt” (Rabinowich 17), only to eventually realize that economic security is only possible for “die hier geboren und aufgezogen wurden mit der warmen Milch der gesetzlichen Sicherheit” (92). In the land of milk and honey, the milk does not flow the same for everyone but only for those who happen to be protected as citizens of a wealthy nation. Diana’s condition thus is representative of Judith Butler’s notion of precarity, which denotes the fact that “[a]nything living can be expunged at will or by accident” unless it is protected by social and political institutions that are at present – and problematically so – only found within the framework of the nation-state (Butler ii).⁴

However, quasi-national borders such as the Schengen border zone do not pose the major problem for Diana. While crossing borders is hazardous due to, for example, corrupt border guards, Diana does not experience the crossing as a significant obstacle, stating: “Ich habe [diese

4 In her analysis of Kartin Kremmler’s *Die Sirenen von Coogee Beach* (2003), Faye Stewart also highlights that the effects of neoliberal globalization in the end entail an “obligation to act, to extend the privileges of living in a stable democracy to refugees who desperately need it protection”(Stewart “Conference Paper” 16).

Straßen] unzählige Male ungestraft passiert und werde es wieder tun” (Rabinowich 17). Oftentimes, the reader cannot even discern what country Diana finds herself in at a given moment, rendering considerations of national borders secondary. Instead, the novels foregrounds the more insurmountable borders as being those between poor and rich, which permeate European society much more pervasively. Thus, the most acutely described scene of Diana’s exclusion does not take place at a border crossing but rather in the middle-class streets of a Dutch town where Diana observes a couple’s quiet evening routine through the curtainless window. While transparent, this border is impermeable for someone like her. The borders keeping Diana out, then, are not national but rather economic borders, which are criss-crossing West European space.

Looking at Vienna’s streets, Diana observes “dass es hier kein Ghetto gibt, das Ghetto muss nicht eingezäunt und abgegrenzt werden hier, es ist allgegenwärtig” (Rabinowich 114–115). Importantly, the terminally ill Austrian police officer Leo, whom Diana cares for and sleeps with in exchange for food and rent, also is part of the unbounded ghetto, a victim of the economic system. When he can no longer work due to his terminal illness, his colleagues soon forget about him – a fact Leo finds even harder to deal with than not hearing from his still beloved ex-wife (104). Not working, that is, not taking one’s place in the capitalist system by commodifying one’s labour, renders the individual irrelevant. In his irrelevance, Leo thus comes to resemble the invisible illegal immigrants such as Diana (216). As Vanessa Plumly argues in her analysis of Juli Zeh’s novel *Nullzeit* (2012), Zeh’s Swiss, Scottish, and German characters all are similarly “held captive as – metaphorically speaking – prisoners of an economic war” (Plumly “Conference Paper” 10). Together with Rabinowich’s Russian and Austrian characters,

they inhabit the non-demarcated ghetto of global capitalism that is not defined primarily by national and ethnic belonging but rather by economic status.

Just as there is no spatially locatable ghetto, Diana also lacks any apparent community, be it of an ethnic or religious nature. Instead, she is one of the many “Einzelwanderer” traversing Europe “unsichtbar und allgegenwärtig” (Rabinowich 216). While both Judaism and Islam are hinted at as forming part of Diana’s background, religious identity is not fully thematized in the novel. Diana’s country of origin, Dagestan, is Russia’s most ethnically diverse republic, not allowing for any conclusions to be drawn about Diana’s religion or ethnicity. The narrator’s use of “Gott ist groß und barmherzig”, a combination of the beginning of the Adhan (*Allāhu akbar*), the Muslim prayer call, and the first line of the first sura in the Qur’an, is most likely cultural rather than religious, on par with the Austrian Dr. Petersen’s daily repeated “Grüß Gott” (167). Despite the prominence of the Golem legend that I will return to below, and a star-shaped piece of family jewelry her mother clings to, nothing in the novel allows for conjectures about Diana’s religious background. In fact, the jewelry explicitly functions as a symbol of a lost era of the maternal family’s “früherem Reichtum”(147), that is, as a sign of economic rather than religious or ethnic affiliation. Diana thus resembles several other minority characters in contemporary German-language fiction. In this volume, Anke Biendarra for instance highlights Olga Grjasnowa’s character Cem in *Der Russe ist einer der Birken liebt* (2012), who after a conflict ensuing a fender-bender does not want the incident to be turned into a matter of his ethnicity, stating that he needs “einen Anwalt und keine Kulturtheorie” (Grjasnowa 158). Like Cem, Diana’s character ultimately refuses an analysis focused on cultural issues such as religious and ethnic affiliation.

Just as questions of national, ethnic and religious belonging turn out to be dominated by economic concerns, Diana's personal family problems are ultimately overshadowed by material, economic needs. When Leo and Diana's mutually beneficial relationship ends after a year due to Leo's death, Diana suffers a psychotic breakdown, giving in to an overwhelming urge to eat and cover herself with soil.⁵ As a result, Diana is institutionalized by a Viennese charitable organization, heavily medicated, and undergoes daily psychoanalytic sessions with Dr. Petersen, which frame the chapters in the first half of the novel. In the novel's opening paragraph, Dr. Petersen encapsulates the psychoanalytic process, telling Diana that he is interested in "Sie, Ihre Familie, Ihre Vergangenheit" (9).⁶ Yet, while her absent father and troubled, often cruel mother figure prominently in her past, it becomes obvious that they are not her problem in the present. Instead, the present is overdetermined by the need to provide for her disabled son and her unemployed mother and sister who are taking care of him. That is, Diana simply cannot afford to take care of her own mental health, answering Dr. Petersen's question of whether she has ever despaired stating: "Das muss man sich leisten können" (87). In fact, she has to pay bitterly for the few weeks she stays in the hospital, since the lack of remittances puts her son's life in immediate danger. Thus, while Diana might benefit from psychoanalysis, she simply does not have the luxury to do so.

Indirectly commenting on German and Austrian literature's longtime and somewhat solipsistic preoccupation with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Rabinowich's novel here also points to the need for German-language literature to thematize present concerns that speak to what

5 As an interviewer in the Austrian newspaper *Kurier* points out: "Es geht ums Überleben. Da frisst man schon manchmal Erde, um nicht ins Gras zu beißen." "Interview: Julia Rabinowich über *Die Erdfresserin*", 04 August 2012 *kurier.at* <http://kurier.at/kultur/literatur/julya-rabinowich-ueber-die-erdfresserin/806.937>.

6 The novel here resonates with Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's argument that we need to "rethink the reliance on the family as a primary locus of difference and inequality" and that even though the family is of undisputed importance as a figure of modernity, it is "not the only site of subject production" (667).

Stuart Taberner calls “the larger transnational reality of mobility and global communities” (Taberner 641). If it fails to do so, it risks being as out of touch with reality as Diana’s psychoanalyst, who believes that Diana can simply return home and find a job if she addresses her psychological issues - an assumption to which Diana merely replies: “Aber mein Land kann das nicht, Herr Doktor” (Rabinowich 183). Her reality is not about her own individual past or roots but about providing for her family, which constitute her “ausgedörrten Wurzeln, die [sie] tiefer ins Erdreich versenken konnte als [ihre] eigenen” (200). Economic necessities throw Diana back into a family network, in which taking care of oneself personally is an unaffordable luxury. Thus, Rabinowich’s novel to some extent aligns with Chandra Mohanty’s recent critique of the effects of “postmodern intellectual framings of transnational, intersectional feminist theorizing”, in which oftentimes “all experience is merely individual, and the social is always collapsed into the personal” (Mohanty 967, 971). While the psychoanalysis session provided for refugees in Vienna, which Rabinowich interpreted for and that her character undergoes, are certainly well-intentioned, they seem to miss the point by reducing systemic economic problems to personal ones.

That Diana is first and foremost a victim of present economic realities transcending all other concerns, becomes most apparent towards the end of the novel. While Diana is afraid of state institutions such as the police (Rabinowich 128), she actually is not once brutalized by a member of the state. In fact, neither the Austrian police, doctors, nor the immigration officer are depicted as being very powerful. Thus, while both men certainly could have done more to help Diana, Dr. Petersen simply has no legal power to help her obtain legal status and Leo cannot even go to the bathroom by himself anymore. Power in the form of brutal violence instead is

exerted by the private security guards of a “drei Stockwerke hohen Reich[s]”, a fancy department store in which Diana seeks shelter from the snow on her attempted final journey back to Dagestan (218). Wishing one of the beds on display had her name on it, just like the ones apparently reserved for Mr. Armani and Mr. Hilfiger, Diana cuddles up in one of the soft beds to be promptly and forcefully removed by private security guards.⁷ Out of the sight of customers, “hinter all der Pracht und dem Glanz”, Diana is violently beaten by the guards, reduced to howling like a “verzweifelt Tier” (222). Confused both on account of her abruptly ceased psycho-pharmaceutics and the violence of the guards, it is in this capitalist private “Reich” that Diana is dehumanized, loses all memories of her family and forgets the fact that they will die if she does not find her way back home (223), thus severing the only roots that had given her hold in sanity (200). Thrown back into the cold winter streets, Diana no longer remembers where she was supposed to go and what she was looking for. Thus, while Austrian authorities and institutions are certainly depicted as at least passively complicit in Diana’s ultimate demise, the overwhelming share of the blame lies with a private corporation.

A Golem without a Ghetto

Diana’s fate as a transnational illegal sex worker brings current neoliberal realities into sharp focus, illustrating that the economic has come to permeate all aspects of physical and mental life. As *Pictures of a Reality* (2012), a collection of interviews with sex workers from nine European cities shows, the majority of the (mostly female) sex workers in Western Europe are all driven by economic necessity rather than war or human and natural catastrophes (Munk).

⁷ In this scene, the public/private split is subverted on several levels such as the private bedroom in the public department store or the publicly funded police versus private security, pointing to a system in which everything is for sale at the expense of the private and the rights formerly associated with it.

Yet, Western countries fail or refuse to acknowledge the urgency and consequences of this economic migration. Thus, an immigration officer contacted by Dr. Petersen explains to Diana: “Schauen Sie ... Sie kommen aus keinem Kriegsgebiet. ... Sie gehören nicht einmal einer ethnisch verfolgten Minderheit an. Das ist ein Problem. ... Sind Sie denn wenigstens vergewaltigt worden?” (Rabinowich 179). Never having been raped, Diana is once more unable to buy herself membership in what Terri Tomskey calls the present trauma economy, in which even trauma has become implicated in economics by being turned into a currency in “international circuits of mediation and commodification” (Tomskey 50). Neither an immigrant, refugee, nor a demure victim to be easily sympathized with, Diana instead is condemned to a life in transit and illegality, which come to define her ontologically. A fitting example of the effects of what Foucault coined ‘biopower’, a concept elaborated upon in Vanessa Plumly’s chapter, Diana’s body itself is marked by economic necessity, so that she follows “nur der einen Straße, die aus meinem Herzen in die Welt hinausführt, ... meine Arterien und Blutgefäße und Nervengestränge hängen fest verbunden an diesem Weg, es ist keine Frage, ob ich folge, ich muss folgen” (Rabinowich 195). Her way of life as well as the cause for her psychotic breakdown is the result of economic pressures, her body and mind owned by the necessity for survival.

This need for survival is moreover gendered as feminine. In part, this reflects the nature of the sex industry, in which 93% of all migrant sex workers in Europe are female (Brussa 14). In addition, this gendering also highlights the particular vulnerability of the female body, which is thematized by the novel’s use of the golem legend.⁸ Desperate to return to Dagestan to save her

8 The multiple functions of the golem figure in the text are complex and exploring all the intertextual allusions and thematic connections hinted at by the novel are outside of the scope of this paper.

son, who has been institutionalized by the authorities and is now in danger of dying from neglect and abuse unless the staff can be bribed, Diana flees from the psychiatric institution in Vienna and thus also abruptly stops her antipsychotic medication. Trying to find her way back home on foot, as she had done many times before, she becomes increasingly disoriented, losing her way, her sense of the past and future, and eventually her sense of identity. Instead, she blindly follows the Golem she believes herself to have command over. However, this golem instead leads her to her death somewhere on a field in a country not her own.

The golem's eventual failure to help Diana can be attributed to the realities of her embodied female existence in a world marked by global capitalism. After all legal and illegal channels are exhausted, Diana clings to this folkloristic creature that she calls out of the earth to take care of her, chanting "Der Vater, den ich nie kannte. / *Ein Atemzug hinaus.* / Das Geschenk, das ich bereit bin, an seiner statt anzunehmen"(203). Meant to substitute for her disappeared father, the version of the many golem tales invoked here is one in which a wise man commands a golem to protect his family and community (169), a duty her father as well as the unknown, never mentioned father of her own child, neglect. Even as a child, Diana wishes to be "dieser gelehrte Mann ... dessen Hand die Zeichen in die leere Golemstirn geritzt hatte, um ihn so zum Leben zu erwecken, wie eine Frau es niemals tun könnte" (50). However, the act of male imaginative creation based on learned wisdom is sharply contrasted with female procreation, because whereas a golem is useful and ready to serve from the moment of its inception, a mother has to tend to her child for "eine ermüdend lange Zeit" and is "durch das von ihr geschaffene Wesen gebunden" (50). For women and outside of the realms of the intellect and imagination, creation is not necessarily empowering but rather a physically messy act and a child a lifelong

responsibility. Whereas the rabbi of the legend can simply terminate the golem's existence by wiping a letter from his forehead, Diana is bound by her mentally and physically ill son's needs, no matter how often she asks him: "Wann stirbst du denn endlich" (100). Ultimately let down by matters of the intellect, Diana eventually drowns the books she had kept with her on her travels in a river at the end of the novel, stating that they "stillen weder Not noch Hunger" (229).⁹

Since she is reduced to matters of survival, the novel puts Diana's bodily needs into sharp focus. In her analysis of Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* (2008) and Helene Hegeman's *Axolotl Roadkill* (2010) in the present collection, Hester Baer shows that in popfeminist texts, a similar focus on bodily experiences constitutes an attempt to "map subjectivity" due to "the absence of stable identity constructs" (Baer "Conference Paper" 15). In the case of Rabinowich's Diana, such a mapping fails on account of the necessary material pre-conditions for such an endeavour. Whereas in popfeminism, a phenomenon driven by white, middle-class Western writers, the protagonists are reduced to focusing on the body as a last refuge from neoliberal structures, they at least can seek such refuge (see also Baer "German Feminism" 371–2). Denizens and illegal sex workers such as Diana are deprived even of that last resource, their body having become fully co-opted as a commodity. In a scene reminiscent of *Feuchtgebiete*'s explicit and vivid descriptions of female anatomy and bodily functions and in a last effort to resist the golem leading her astray, Diana creates herself a little Adam in the final pages of the book. She forms him from the soil into which she empties her menstrual fluids and the blood she squeezes from a self-inflicted wound in her breast. Yet, her act of creation is ultimately powerless. By emphasizing that it is her Adam, this scene rather highlights Diana's acute sense of disenfranchisement, which is further enforced by the way she walks away from the scene,

9 Rabinowich here points to the failure of intellectuals

imprinting the road with her bloody “Schamlippen, damit [die Straße] mein Zeichnen trägt und niemandes Zeichen sonst. Ganz meine Straße ist” (229).

The only thing Diana does own, therefore, is the reality of her displacement as a *Einzelwanderin*. In her study of golem legends, Cathy Gelbin points out that despite its “heterogeneous cultural origins, [the golem] has become a signifier of globalized Jewish cultural identity” (Gelbin 2). Yet, as above mentioned, *Einzelwanderer* like Diana are not part of an ethnic or religious diaspora, exemplified for instance by global Judaism. Nor is she part of any kind of the transnational diasporas and communities enabled by modern technological advances in communication. Without economic means, cell phones and the internet are out of reach for both Diana and her family in Dagestan.¹⁰ From Diana’s vantage point, in Western cities one therefore has to wait “lange, lange ... auf den Golem” (Rabinowich 115). While a superman-like golem defends and protects the Jews of the Prague Ghetto¹¹ – and by default, the city’s prostitutes who were also located there – against adversaries, any distinct and geographically locatable community as well as easily identifiable enemy are missing in Diana’s present-day Western Europe. And without a ghetto or community, there also cannot be a golem. While much literature and scholarship on migration focuses on questions of culture and identity, Rabinowich’s novel therefore echoes critiques of such an emphasis. Thus, it is in implicitly agreement with scholars such as Nancy Fraser, who has argued that a focus on matters of culture, ethnicity, and identity often deflects from economic issues by focusing on recognition rather than redistribution (see Fraser and Honneth).¹²

10 After Leo’s death, Diana has to rely on a phonecard handed to her by Dr. Petersen, who attempts to assuage his bad conscience when he is unable to help Diana obtain legal status. She also steals a cell phone once but can only make one phone call before having to destroy it.

11 That is according to Yudel Rosenberg’s popular 1909 adaptation of the legend (Thomas 51–52).

12 The question that arises here of course being whether redistribution actually is possible without being preceded by recognition.

Conclusion

In his analysis of the various versions of the Prague golem legend, Alfred Thomas argues that:

[T]he theme of the double made prominent by Freud and Otto Rank coincided with the emergence of the modernist treatment of the golem. Both the doppelgänger motif and its manifestation in the golem legend were the result of a philosophical and religious crisis brought about by the Enlightenment. It is no coincidence that Freud was a central European Jew whose writings were generated in the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with its multiethnic and multireligious communities. What characterized this moment in central Europe was the post-Enlightenment crisis of liberal thought. (Thomas 55)

In light of the extended scene in which Diana witnesses the 2011 funeral procession of Otto von Habsburg, “hauptberuflich Kaisersohn” (127), the prominence of psychoanalysis, and the just outlined economic focus of the novel, it stands to reason to suggest that the golem figure in this text points to yet another moment of crisis, this time the one brought about by neoliberal global capitalism in a Europe of austerity. In addition, the golem’s failure, the novel’s hopeless ending with Diana’s death, and the lack of a future embodied by her terminally ill son, suggest that there also is a marked lack of an alternative, positive vision of the future. There is not yet any imaginative creation, no golem, to save its people by pointing to the future. As Ulrich Beck points out in a recent EUROPP interview, this lack of a creative response is what distinguishes what he calls ‘first modernity’ from the present situation:

First modernity, which lasted from around the 18th century until perhaps the 1960s or 1970s, was a period where there was a great deal of space for experimentation and we had a lot of answers for the uncertainties that we produced: probability models, insurance mechanisms, and so on. But then because of the success of modernity we are now producing consequences for which we don’t have any answers, such as climate change and the financial crisis. (Beck)

While Dr. Petersen stresses the past and Diana the present, the future is not imaginable in this

novel on account of a system that imprisons Diana in the present, denying her the luxury to think about the future.

In its lack of vision for the future, Rabinowich's novel echoes current anxieties of what is supposed to come after or replace globalization in its current neoliberal guise. In *After Globalization*, Cazdyn and Szeman argue that globalization as a project to render neoliberalism invisible, has ended due to the 2008 financial crises, which has drawn renewed and due attention to issues such as capitalism and class. Yet, alternative visions for what comes after have yet to be formalized, a process impeded by the fact that, by its very nature, “[g]lobalization involves a certain configuration of time – one that cannot imagine an “after.” Modernity could have a post-modernity to follow it. But globalization? Post-globalization sounds like some dystopian coda to everything, not a new phase of human existence” (Cazdyn and Szeman 2).¹³ As Nancy Fraser points out, the response to the financial crises of 2008 consequently has been one of individuals or small groups, a bunch of Rabinowich’s ‘Einzelwanderer’, rather than a movement.¹⁴ In view of the lack of any “broader, transnational alternatives”, one is left to wonder with Fraser why “‘society’ [does] not organize politically to protect itself from ‘economy’” (Fraser 127).

Indeed, in light of most nations’ collaboration with neoliberalism, even citizens of Western nation states, such as Greece, cannot necessarily rely on receiving such protection from their own nation. As Cazdyn and Szeman argue, without our current political divisions, global capital would have no “differential zones of labour, no spaces to realize profit through the

13 In an interview in spring 2013, Ulrich Beck also notes that in contrast to earlier periods, the present one is marked by a lack of alternatives or answers. Until the 1970s, that is until the globalization of neoliberal practices, answers and new experiments seemed to abound, whereas “we are now producing consequences for which we don’t have any answers, such as climate change and the financial crisis (Beck).

14 As Fraser put it, “popular opposition fails to coalesce around a solidaristic alternative, despite intense but ephemeral outbursts, such as Occupy and the *indignados*, whose protests generally lack programmatic content” (Fraser 121).

dumping of overproduction, [and] no way to patrol surly populations who might want to resist capitalism”, and therefore, “[w]e don’t need the nation- capital does” (Cazdyn and Szeman 49). Until there is an alternative to neoliberal nations, then, migrants like Rabinowich’s Diana are in danger of being lost in transit. Unable to benefit from the positive and creative socio-cultural aspects a transnational life could afford, they face the consequences of neoliberalism, the only alternatives to which, the novel seems to suggest, presently are insanity or death.

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