

Reimaginings of the Bildungsroman in Contemporary German-Language Fiction:
An Analysis of Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* (2009), Fatma Aydemir's *Ellbogen* (2017),
and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Ausser sich* (2017)

by

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes reimaginings of the Bildungsroman in contemporary German-language fiction and the ways in which these maintain the prevalence of this classical genre in current times. The novels chosen for analysis are Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* (2009), Fatma Aydemir's *Ellbogen* (2017), and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Ausser sich* (2017).

Each novel subverts the classical structure of the Bildungsroman in a unique way, portraying the coming-of-age of its protagonists amidst contemporary burdens. The analyses of the protagonists' journeys focus on their background, their formative journey, as well as its conclusion leading to an expected maturation. The overarching methodological consideration throughout the thesis is the novels' engagement with themes that situate them within fields such as Gender/Queer Studies, and Postmigrant Studies. The diversity of intersectional discourses portrayed in the novels influences the approach taken in this thesis, namely the consultation of a variety of scholarly opinions regarding the genre and its possibilities.

The thesis considers what the existence of reimaginings like *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich* mean for the literary spaces and diversified audiences of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, through the analysis of the three novels, the thesis reflects on the different ways in which reimaginings expand the canonical Bildungsroman genre along with the authors' efforts of making it relevant for new audiences. The concluding section deliberates the possibilities for continued reimaginings and subversions of established genres.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mama Kristina and my babo Nedim. Thank you for giving me the most important supports of all – the opportunity to learn, the room to make mistakes, and, of course, love.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
Dedication	3
i. Introduction	6
ii. Contextualizing the Bildungsroman	15
ii.1 Historical Overview of the Bildungsroman and its Literary Definitions	17
ii.2 Contemporary Bildungsromane and the Need for Reimaginings	25
iii. <i>Feuchtgebiete</i>	35
iii.1 <i>Feuchtgebiete</i> Bildungs-journey	39
iii.1.1 Helen's Hospitalization and Fight for Agency	41
iii.1.2 Helen's Identity through Sexuality and Childhood Trauma	49
iii.2 <i>Feuchtgebiete</i> Conclusion	55
iii.2.1 Departure from the Hospital and Exhibit of Abuse	57
iii.2.2 Difficulties of Maturation for Protagonists with Challenging Personalities	61
iv. <i>Ellbogen</i>	65
iv.1 <i>Ellbogen</i> Bildungs-journey	69
iv.1.1 Istanbul as an Escape and a Confinement	71
iv.1.2 Murder, Abuse, and Societal Disadvantages	75
iv.1.3 Broadening of Horizons	80
iv.2 <i>Ellbogen</i> Conclusion	84

iv.2.1 Rejection of Return and Remorse	85
iv.2.2 The Rejection of <i>Bildung</i> in <i>Ellbogen</i>	92
v. <i>Ausser sich</i>	97
v.1 <i>Ausser sich Bildungs-journey</i>	101
v.1.1 Istanbul as Ali's Playground.....	103
v.1.2 Multitudes of Belonging and Ali's Exploration of their Identity	106
v.1.3 Family History, Farewell to Anton, and the Finalization of Formation	113
v.2 <i>Ausser sich Conclusion</i>	117
v.2.1 Last Stop: Istanbul	118
v.2.2 Influence of Family History for Ali's Understanding of their Personal Identity	120
v.2.3 Coup Attempt, Chosen Family, and Cautiously Looking Ahead	128
vi. Conclusion	132
vii. Works Cited	140

i. Introduction

The literary landscape in twenty-first century Germany is composed of texts distinctly focused on world events and societal discourses affecting both Germany, and the world more broadly. These texts are representative of diverse themes such as migration and flight, the redefining of identity conceptualizations, as well as life in the age of Social Media, to name but a few. The presence of such texts results in a literary landscape full of bustling energy, establishing a creative space that encourages innovative perspectives and conceptualizations. The relative independence with which contemporary authors are able to compose their works allows for audiences to form their own opinions and encourages them to challenge societal notions they may not agree with. Although literature has historically often served as a medium through which authors and their audiences attempt to understand the world and the issues which concern them, the twenty-first century has brought about a notable increase in the vocabulary and conceptualizations of discourses which impact the population's ability to articulate their thoughts. As a result, contemporary authors are able to utilize the manifold of new terminology and intersectional approaches which may not have been possible in the past. The political climate of the century in Germany is marked by discourses on topics such as migration, sexuality and gender, the rise of artificial intelligence, right-wing nationalism, and the response to international conflicts, among others. Such themes trigger the creation of various types of art such as film and visual media, and the composition of many forms of literature. This thesis analyzes three novels by authors who have been engaged with sociopolitical discourses in contemporary Germany both personally and through their works: Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* (2009), Fatma Aydemir's *Ellbogen* (2017), and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Ausser sich* (2017).

The authors of the literary works that are being composed in this context are not only unique in terms of the intersectional approaches they often use, but also in the way they challenge and play with literary conventions. While this may simply be a change to character archetypes or refusing characters closure in a genre that typically features it, it can also materialize in a more substantial alteration such as genre reimagination. The challenging of literary conventions by authors may be a result of contemporary audiences being more drawn to texts which subvert expectations and cause surprise in readers, rather than texts that closely follow typical genre rules. Genre subversion is a popular method of playing with literary conventions because of the range of possibilities it allows. This thesis analyzes one approach to genre subversion, namely reimagination, while considering the different possibilities thereof as demonstrated in the three novels, which will be introduced further along. Genre reimaginations represent a type of subversion in which genre tropes are creatively redefined rather than entirely disregarded. This works particularly well with genres that are of a more formulaic nature and feature multiple tropes that are used to steer a text in a certain direction. Contemporary authors have creatively undertaken the task of redefining what a Bildungsroman may be like in the twenty-first century, often purposefully playing with the genre conventions, resulting in entirely new iterations of the genre. These reimaginations follow the typical Bildungsroman tropes while actively modernizing them, and in doing so placing the protagonists' coming-of-age narratives within discourses prevalent today.

Coming-of-age narratives are among those texts consistently present, in some form or another, ever since they first emerged in the eighteenth century.¹ These narratives tend to be relatable to a significant portion of the general population because they represent the common struggles that young people encounter on their road to maturation. The term Bildungsroman has perhaps been the most commonly used categorization for such narratives and, as a result, has been subject to frequent scrutiny by scholars. This genre is known for its formulaic nature and multitude of tropes often included in texts, thus establishing a longstanding literary tradition that focuses on the coming-of-age of its protagonist (Cuddon 77). This genre, in its historical iterations, follows a straightforward structure that allows for the protagonist to mature amidst hurdles they are being confronted with as part of their journey. Apart from the storyline, another aspect of the genre, which is characteristically formulaic in the historical renditions of the Bildungsroman, is the protagonist's background. The white, male, traditionally educated protagonist whose maturation resolves successfully is arguably not representative of many people's experiences with growing-up in the twenty-first century. Because coming-of-age in current times tends to be more complex and perhaps ambiguous in its outcomes, diverging from historical Bildungsromane, audiences are less likely to be inclined to engage with stories that are neatly wrapped up and therefore difficult to identify with. This is one major reason why the Bildungsroman represents an example of a genre that greatly benefits from contemporary reimaginings to remain relevant in our changing world. Similarly, the Bildungsroman's presence as a genre also benefits the young people who may read these texts while on their own

¹A few notable examples of coming-of-age narratives include the more canonical Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), as well as the more recent examples such as Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2005) and Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* (2017). An early example of coming-of-age narratives includes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther* (1774). More recent examples in the German-speaking context include Benjamin Lebert's *Crazy* (1999), Alina Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* (2008), Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Tschick* (2010), and Helene Hegemann's *Axolotl Roadkill* (2010).

formative journeys. Within Germany and the previously mentioned discourses, the literary engagement of a genre with such complex themes may help its audience comprehend the world around them better. Whether Bildungsromane are read by young people on their own time, or are perhaps taught in an educational setting, the influence of the genre is compelling. Analyses of the approaches taken by authors to genre reimaginings are therefore necessary and can potentially influence the composition of future Bildungsromane by serving as examples of subversion possibilities for authors. This thesis aims to analyze German contemporary reimaginings of the Bildungsroman by considering the way the texts address discourses and real-world events debated in society, all the while determining the different types of genre trope subversions they demonstrate.

Authors play a large role in the establishment of the literary landscape with the themes they choose to write about, and the way in which these are subsequently received by critics. In the case of Bildungsromane, which are primarily driven by the protagonist's journeys, the author's choice in terms of both the nature of the protagonist and their actions steer audiences toward specific outcomes. Regardless of the nature of the problem that the protagonist is facing on their journey, their engagement itself acts as a guide by which audiences are prompted to form their own conclusions. The engagement of authors with socially relevant discourses further contributes to the environment of the Bildungsroman in which discussions can be had and concerns can be raised. Some authors, as is the case with the novels being analyzed in this thesis, utilize genres with particular reputations in order to make an argument. The usage of a genre such as the Bildungsroman, with a reputation as being an established German genre with little flexibility in the tropes it features, and redefining large portions of it, creates a statement on its own.

Each of the novels analyzed in this thesis significantly subverts the Bildungsroman. The authors' choice of telling their stories through the lens of this genre creates a subversion in itself as a result of the novels' subject matter not typically being featured in Bildungsroman iterations. Charlotte Roche, Fatma Aydemir, and Sasha Marianna Salzmann have each been very open about their desires to resist and challenge popular notions in German society, which is evident in each of their protagonist's engagement with discourses such as hygiene, violence, and gender identity, for instance. Furthermore, Roche, Aydemir, and Salzmann each defy the expectations typically associated with the Bildungsroman, and in so doing resist an aspect of the German literary tradition. It is important to note that the existing scholarship on these three novels has focused very little on the experiences of the protagonist within the coming-of-age context. Instead, representations of sexuality, self-harm, violence, migration, and complex familial narratives have received the most attention. This thesis aims to create a productive analysis of the Bildungsroman reimaginings demonstrated by the novels and their protagonists, while simultaneously highlighting their influence on overarching considerations of the genre in the German context.

Before the analysis of the novels, the thesis is going to provide a contextualization chapter which establishes the historical and sociocultural context of the Bildungsroman in German eighteenth-century literary spaces that is needed for a productive engagement with genre reimaginings. Within the contextualization chapter, the traditional structure and storyline of the Bildungsroman will be described alongside the genre tropes which were commonly associated with the historical iterations of the genre. The contextualization will be supported with texts from Marianne Hirsch and Todd Kontje, among others, who provide comprehensive summaries of the genre's sociopolitical background within German society, and outlines of the themes which can

be found in this genre. Due to the number of novels being analyzed, the nature of discourses present, such as popfeminism and postmigration, as well as the scale of the Bildungsroman as a genre, this thesis is going to utilize a variety of scholarly perspectives to provide a multifaceted analysis. The analysis itself is going to be conducted through a genre reimagination lens with a cross-analysis of each texts' efforts in engaging with prevalent societal discourses.

The novels that are analyzed in this thesis include Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* (2009), Fatma Aydemir's *Ellbogen* (2017), and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Ausser sich* (2017). Each of the three novels has received notable attention in society and the media with *Feuchtgebiete* and *Ellbogen* also having been adapted into movies. The reason why they are chosen for analysis in this thesis is because of the unique ways they portray Bildungsroman reimaginings. Furthermore, the novels heavily engage with themes that situate them within fields such as Gender/Queer Studies, and Postmigrant Studies. They also caused significant backlash from critics and scholars upon their release due to the subject matter portrayed in their stories, such as the graphic portrayal of surgical wounds in *Feuchtgebiete*, and the authors' engagement with possibly controversial discourses, such as the incestuous scenes portrayed in *Ausser sich*. Contrastingly, the authors were, at the same time, praised for their courageous portrayals of difficult themes and for the novels' productiveness in engaging with discourses that are often avoided.

Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* features Helen, a protagonist embarking on a coming-of-age journey that takes place entirely in the hospital, while dealing with themes such as sexuality and hygiene. Roche's engagement with such themes explicitly challenges societal expectations for how a young woman should act and speak. *Feuchtgebiete* features discussions of bodily autonomy and female sexuality that align the text with Gender Studies, more precisely

its early 2000s German rendition, popfeminism. Analyses of coming-of-age texts through a popfeminist lens establish new intersections and discursive spaces with themes heavily focusing on the female body and its sexuality and hygiene, diversifying the literary canon of the Bildungsroman. The analysis of *Feuchtgebiete* will consider how Helen's formative journey unfolds in the hospital setting where she is physically unable to move but her mind is restless. In addition, I analyze to the impact that her childhood trauma plays in the outcome of her maturation.

Fatma Aydemir's *Ellbogen* features Hazel, a young woman who flees Germany following a murder she committed, prompting her formative journey. Hazel's journey is marked by themes such as violence and the disadvantages that Turkish people face in Germany today. Aydemir's engagement with such themes provides an insight into the experiences of demographics previously overlooked in German iterations of canonical genres such as the Bildungsroman. *Ellbogen* centers on themes of societal belonging for people in Germany who do not fit the supposed expectations of 'Germanness,' and asks questions about racism and the inequalities experienced by German Turks, situating the text within postmigrant discourses. The analysis of *Ellbogen* will consider how Hazel's formative journey is impacted by her crime and experiences of disadvantage, as well as her lack of maturity at the end of the text.

Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Ausser sich* features Ali, a protagonist who goes on a search for their twin brother Anton which marks the beginning of their formative journey. Ali's journey is complicated through their gender dysphoria and difficult family history, which features as a prominent part. Salzmann's own experiences as a postmigrant and non-binary person influence aspects of their protagonist's identity and contribute to the diversity of discourses present in this genre. *Ausser sich* features an immigrant queer protagonist who realizes they are transgender and

begins their transitioning, positioning the text within postmigrant and Gender/Queer Studies discourses. Furthermore, *Ausser sich* has the most complex structure out of the three novels, adding a further layer to the subversion of the Bildungsroman. The analysis of *Ausser sich* will consider how Ali's formative journey is impacted by the exploration of their identity without their twin brother, and the conclusive outcome of their formative journey.

Each of the discourses mentioned above are crucial for inclusion in the analysis of these novels, because they each define a significant part of the protagonists' stories. This is another aspect of modern reimaginings of classical genres that needs to be recognized: that modern texts and characters are multifaceted and exist in an equally multilayered world. Contemporary audiences tend to be drawn to complex characters whose actions and personalities hinder the predictability of text outcomes. In order to create believable and realistic characters in texts, especially in the context of coming-of-age narratives, these characters will likely be affected by certain discourses, just as human beings naturally are. It is for this reason that the analysis of Bildungsroman reimaginings in this thesis will intersectionally consider multiple angles and fields, consulting a multitude of approaches to the stories and their characters.

The primary focus is going to be placed on the protagonists of the novels as they are the ones undergoing their formative journeys. The analysis will first focus on the backgrounds and identities of each protagonist prior to their coming-of-age to render their formative journeys more tangible. As previously mentioned, historical iterations of the Bildungsroman largely feature protagonists who are white, male, German, heterosexual, and traditionally educated to an extent. The backgrounds of the protagonists in *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich* largely differ compared to historical attributes and are therefore the first factor which will be analyzed in each chapter.

Following the background, the analysis will consider each protagonist's formative journey, during the remainder of the thesis referred to as *Bildungs*-journey. Each *Bildungs*-journey experience is unique and influences the overall maturation of the protagonist in differing ways. The analysis considers the way in which the *Bildungs*-journeys are reimagined, either through the circumstances which motivate the beginning of the journey such as in *Ellbogen*, or through the unusual setting of the journey such as in *Feuchtgebiete*. This thesis aims to consider how the reimagined aspects of the traditional *Bildungs*-journey circumstances impact the progression of maturation for the protagonist.

A similar approach is taken with the analysis of each protagonist's conclusions to their *Bildungs*-journey. The historical Bildungsroman typically concludes with the protagonist's maturation being accomplished or at least expected. This is an aspect of the genre that is perhaps less desirable for contemporary audiences who arguably tend to prefer ambiguous endings. As the Bildungsroman is also a genre whose endings are often subjected to subversion, this analysis considers the degree to which the conclusion of a protagonist's *Bildungs*-journey is reimagined. The conclusion to the *Bildungs*-journey portrayed in *Ausser sich* is the most definitive in comparison to the other two novels yet remains subversive to an extent; contrastingly, *Ellbogen* portrays a conclusion that is substantially reimagined, stepping away from the expectations for a Bildungsroman protagonist entirely. This approach to the analysis of *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich*, hopes to establish a comprehensive overview of the efforts taken by contemporary authors to reimagine a genre with a longstanding literary tradition.

ii. Contextualizing the Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman has received considerable scrutiny ever since its initial recognition in the eighteenth century because of the nature of the genre and its complicated ties to German history. Some scholars have argued that the genre does not even exist, calling it a pseudo-genre portraying a “literary manifestation of liberalism” (Cha 134), and a “trope for the aspirations of aesthetic humanism” (Redfield 39) rather than taking a distinct genre form. A contextualization of the historical Bildungsroman is therefore needed in order to define the parameters of the original iterations of this genre, which will subsequently allow for a thorough analysis of contemporary iterations. This chapter provides a brief historical overview of the Bildungsroman by situating it in the sociocultural circumstances of German national history. Whereas the genre of coming-of-age novels is not inherently German, which is a common misconception due to the popularized and now defaulted usage of the German name for this group of texts, these narratives nevertheless have close ties to German literary movements of the eighteenth century. Additionally, this chapter outlines the defining tropes of the genre and its protagonists, which will be considered during the remainder of the thesis. This is followed by a discussion of contemporary considerations regarding the genre, namely the reasons why the historical version of the Bildungsroman may not be productive for contemporary audiences, and addressing the discourses that are often present in contemporary coming-of-age narratives, but do not quite fit the parameters of the historical genre. This leads to a discussion on the necessity for Bildungsroman reimaginations, the possibilities for contemporary genre iterations, and a few examples thereof.

In order to discuss the genre of the Bildungsroman in terms of its initial perception as a genre, one ought to first consider the word ‘Bildungsroman’ itself. ‘Bildungsroman’ as a word is

made up of two German nouns: 'Bildung,' and 'Roman,' the latter simply being the German word for novel. This recognizes that the types of coming-of-age narratives associated with the term Bildungsroman are limited to novels. The term and notion of *Bildung*, however, is a uniquely German one which is difficult to translate to other languages. *Bildung* translates to education, however in German it represents more than the English equivalent allows for. Tobias Boes defines the notion of *Bildung* as "[referring] to a formative development governed by an inner law" (46). Paul Mendes-Flohr specifies *Bildung* further as "the humanistic ideal [...] of self-cultivation of one's intellectual and moral faculties [and] the refinement of one's aesthetic sensibilities" (26). These definitions productively portray the fact that the notion of *Bildung* is uniquely established in society at this time, and is a concept separate from traditional types of education.² Whereas the prevalence of *Bildung* for German societal development of the eighteenth century is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, for now it is important to note that even though the Bildungsroman genre gained its name and initial recognition from the historical and linguistic circumstances in Germany, it is not an inherently German genre. While the Bildungsroman today is a very popular genre around the world, historically it was predominantly present in European contexts. The usage of the word Bildungsroman is, even today, frequently scrutinized, with scholars from various disciplines such as Kyung-Ho Cha and Ricardo Quintana-Vallejo using their own judgements as to when this term is (and is not) appropriate to be used while exploring the suitability of alternatives such as Novel of Formation and Coming-of-Age.

Other variations of formative literary genres which stand in close relation to the Bildungsroman but are slightly different include the *Entwicklungsroman*, which focuses more on

² Kontje describes that the historical notion of *Bildung* is tied to the "individual development and national identity in a politically fragmented state" (18) of the eighteenth century, arguing these to be permanently linked to one another.

the development of a protagonist unrelated to their age; the *Erziehungsroman*, which focuses more on the educational development of a protagonist; and the *Künstlerroman*, which focuses on the formative development of a protagonist who is an artist. These are similarly European genres that have ties to German literary history and have maintained the usage of the German terminology. Scholars such as Marianne Hirsch explicitly re-define coming-of-age narratives to distinguish between German and non-German ones, arguing “the Bildungs- and the Entwicklungsroman are the German sources and manifestations of an overarching European genre, the novel of formation” (295). This thesis, however, is going to utilize the term Bildungsroman because it is the most widely accepted and recognized term for European coming-of-age narratives and because this term best fits the three German-language novels that are the main focus of the analysis.

ii.1 Historical Overview of the Bildungsroman and its Literary Definitions

The first examples of the classical historical Bildungsroman can be traced back to eighteenth-century Germany, where the societal circumstances were evolving significantly and texts were, for the first time, becoming accessible for non-aristocratic members of society. The previously outlined notion of *Bildung*, the “formative development governed by an inner law” (Boes 46) emerged because of the transformation of the public sphere in which sovereignties shifted as a result of non-aristocratic members of society becoming educated to work in government positions, and so the beginnings of modern nations became apparent (Kontje 17). This is also around the time in which the text that is commonly deemed the quintessential Bildungsroman was first published, namely Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795). The notion of *Bildung* demonstrated by the protagonist Wilhelm Meisters’ journey has heavily

influenced our understanding of literary coming-of-age narratives, making it one of the reasons why scholars believe the genre to be explicitly tied to the German context. Wilhelm Meister and his journey have been commended for their unique storyline and portrayal of formative concerns and development. However, while the Goethean notions of *Bildung* opened the door for coming-of-age narratives to become perceived in literature, coming-of-age narratives in general have, in some form, existed even before this seminal novel and were published in moral weeklies and epistolary fiction texts popular at the time (Kontje 12). Since then, iterations of coming-of-age texts, including the above-mentioned variants, have gradually evolved. While the establishment of the eighteenth-century notion of *Bildung* was influenced by the transformations in the German public sphere at that time, *Bildung* was not entirely defined by these changes, which resulted in the genre and the genre's themes becoming more universally applicable and contextually flexible for authors.

This section utilizes two scholarly texts on the Bildungsroman to create a guiding definition of the genre and provide an overview of the tropes typically present in a Bildungsroman. Todd Kontje's chapter "The German Tradition of the Bildungsroman" in Sarah Graham's *A History of the Bildungsroman* (2019) contextualizes the cultural and political history that influenced the recognition of the Bildungsroman genre. Marianne Hirsch's essay "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions" (1975), in turn, provides a framework for the typical Bildungsroman structure and protagonist.

The historical and political context of the eighteenth century in Germany had a large impact on the establishment of the Bildungsroman genre and the tropes which still define the genre today. Accordingly, Kontje highlights in his chapter that it is most productive to understand the classical German Bildungsroman "as the product of historical circumstances" (16). The

influence of the political environment in society is not limited to historical Bildungsromane, with themes that were prevalent in the eighteenth century such as the shifting of sovereignties from *Herrschaft* to *Verwaltung* (Kontje 17) having a significant role on the trajectory of protagonists' *Bildung*. The sociopolitical climate is also relevant for contemporary texts where societal discourses equally influence protagonists' *Bildung*. Kontje thus argues that the Bildungsroman is an "intrinsically political genre" (10) that arose as a result of the public sphere becoming "the venue for the exploration and articulation of bourgeois subjectivity" (17) in the eighteenth century. The historical Bildungsroman had ties to political discourses in society because it "[explored] in various ways the relation between the cultural nation (*Kulturnation*) and the political state" (Kontje 11). These insights explain the close relationship between politics and coming-of-age in society historically. This informs the understanding of why the same is true today, demonstrating that the themes present in Bildungsromane reflect the times in which they were written. Put differently, the journey that historical protagonists would usually embark on was in some way tied to the politicized societal expectations for young people at the time and the protagonists' response to these would, in turn, influence the final outcome of their stories. This reflects the persisting influence that politics has on a person's coming-of-age, as well as the genre more broadly.

The historical Bildungsromane usually follow an expected chain of events with protagonists from a background representative of a small portion of the demographic. The historical Bildungsroman protagonist is commonly a young man who meets heteronormative expectations, is typically from the middle class, and is always white. The formative journey that this protagonist will embark on in his coming-of-age story will, as previously defined, be referred to as the '*Bildungs*-journey' in hopes of maintaining uniformity with the other

terminology used throughout. The typical *Bildungs*-journey leads the protagonist into the world and larger society, where they “encounter experiences, often with members of different social classes, which leave a lasting mark on their evolving sense of self that is deepened by a series of retrospective reflections” (Kontje 11). This can be understood as an open-minded and natural process of a young person who is trying to understand how they fit into the world, which finds expression in the structural composition of the texts of this genre. The majority of the historical Bildungsroman canon is focused on this *Bildungs*-journey, its effects on the protagonists’ development, and experiences in the ‘real world’ for a previously sheltered young person. The historical *Bildungs*-journey is the most significant aspect of a coming-of-age story and therefore essential to every other aspect of the protagonist.

The class and racial background of the protagonist is born out of the context of the times in which the genre initially appeared. Whereas the protagonists’ belonging to the middle class was a result of the societal developments of the eighteenth century and the protagonists’ race arguably a result of white German authors maintaining a Eurocentric and colonial writing approach, the gender of the protagonist was a more debated aspect of the historical genre. This stems from the role that women had in the middle class of Germany at this time, or rather, the difference in roles in comparison to men. Kontje provides an insight into this, stating:

Whereas aristocratic women had played active roles in court society, middle-class women were expected to remain in the domestic sphere, devoting themselves to their duties as wives, mothers, and managers of the household economy. At least in theory, therefore, they were excluded from the public sphere that played such a crucial role in the formation of middle-class male identity. (13)

The number of female protagonists in historical Bildungsroman texts was therefore limited due to the general exclusion of women from the public sphere at the time; however, female protagonists were not entirely absent. The German Bildungsromane were typically male-centered, but other European authors, perhaps most notably Jane Austen (in this case about two decades into the nineteenth century), have famously written women-centered coming-of-age narratives. Although such stories have been published and were often positively received, a remaining disadvantage was that these female Bildungsroman protagonists usually embarked on a *Bildungs*-journey far different than the *Bildungs*-journeys of male protagonists. Whereas male protagonists' *Bildungs*-journeys were largely characterized by youthful adventures and career-focused conclusions, female protagonists' journeys were tied to purity, the search for the perfect husband and hardly any career-driven themes (Kontje 13-14). The differing societal expectations for the sexes significantly influenced this body of literature and the lives and types of experiences given to protagonists within coming-of-age narratives.

The tropes typically present in historical Bildungsroman texts have been outlined many times by various scholars according to their own interpretations, however they mostly follow similar notions as to what a protagonist is expected to go through during their journey and how the narratological structure of a coming-of-age text is likely to be formed. This is shown in more detail in Hirsch's essay, which provides an overview of German and non-German Bildungsromane and defines the overlapping tropes in iterations of the European Bildungsroman.

In terms of the narratological set-up, the structure of the Bildungsroman is usually "sequential and chronological" (Hirsch 305), following the chronological development of a protagonist's life during their *Bildungs*-journey. Additionally, the typical narrator of a historical Bildungsroman is heterodiegetic and critical of the protagonists' actions. Hirsch outlines the

Bildungsroman narrator to be “characterized by *irony* toward the inexperienced protagonist [maintaining that there is] a distance between the perspective of the narrator and that of the protagonist” (298; emphasis in original). Similarly, texts of this genre concern themselves with biographical as well as social issues where the society in which the protagonist is trying to find their place acts antagonistic to their development as a young person (Hirsch 297) by creating the obstacles the protagonist must overcome in order to mature. The focus of a protagonists’ *Bildungs*-journey is further described as “a search for a meaningful existence within society, for the authentic values which will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities” (Hirsch 297). Julian Osthues and Jennifer Pavlik elaborate on the connection between the *Bildungs*-journey to broader themes in a protagonists’ life, stating that the focus is on “[die] Suche nach Selbstentwürfen und Sinnstiftung sowie sämtliche Formen tief erfahrener Identitätskrisen, die zugleich soziale Spannungen zwischen Individuum und Familie, Gesellschaft, Kultur verhandeln” (473). This exploration is presented as a quest for what “one ‘ought’ to do in the service of the true and the good” (Mendes-Flohr 35). The ideal *Bildungs*-journey of the classical Bildungsroman can be understood as one which engages the protagonist not only with their individual development and interests, but also with the other actors in their life and society as a whole.

Apart from the *Bildungs*-journey itself, other important factors of the historical Bildungsroman protagonists’ lives are their backgrounds before the *Bildungs*-journey takes place, as well as the conclusions which follow it. The way in which a protagonist is embarking on their *Bildungs*-journey and the extent to which this journey proves valuable to them as a character is, in part, influenced by their background. Hirsch outlines that protagonists in Bildungsromane are “already in possession of precise values, standards, and expectations” (301) which implies

influence from their youth and surroundings prior to the *Bildungs*-journey. This influence, however, is also often portrayed as immaturity or naivete, which the protagonist is expected to grow out of, with “[maturation requiring] an adjustment of vision and a recognition of personal limitation” (Hirsch 301). The background details from the life of a protagonist before their *Bildungs*-journey are an ineliminable factor of their story which either positively or negatively shapes their coming-of-age.

While the protagonists’ formative journey is a significant part of the historical Bildungsroman, ultimately, this journey must lead to some sort of conclusion since coming-of-age is inherently not meant to be a never-ending process but a temporary chapter in a young person’s life. The ending of a Bildungsroman is meant to act as the closure and resolution of the literal and moral challenges that were presented to the protagonist on their *Bildungs*-journey. Hirsch outlines the typical ending of a Bildungsroman, stating “[its] *projected resolution is an accommodation to the existing society*. While each protagonist has the choice of accepting or rejecting this projected resolution, each novel ends with a precise stand on his part, with *his assessment of himself and his place in society*” (298; emphases in original). The protagonists’ ultimate coming-of-age is not separable from their understanding of society and their own role within it; the protagonist ultimately has to realize their own “social responsibility” (Hirsch 302) in order to move on to adulthood. As mentioned above, in most historical Bildungsroman examples, the acceptance of society and its expectations for a young person are heavily influenced by the political discourses prevalent at the time in which the story is set. This relationship between the protagonist and the expected acceptance of societal expectations thus further reiterates Kontje’s point on the persistence of politics within this genre.

This thesis analyzes the way in which *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich* reimagine the historical Bildungsroman by considering how the protagonists' backgrounds, *Bildungs*-journeys, and conclusions diverge from the traditional genre as outlined by Hirsch and Kontje. From a contemporary perspective, the attributes of the historical Bildungsroman genre appear not only restrictive in terms of the protagonists who are typically featured, but also in terms of the societal context with which they are associated. The limitations of the genre become apparent when looking at some texts that audiences for many years received as Bildungsromane, for example Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924). Although this novel was published two centuries after the genre was originally conceived, the biggest objections scholars bring against this text are that the protagonist Hans Castorp is too old for a Bildungsroman protagonist, and the *Bildungs*-journey takes place for too long, namely seven years. This demonstrates that even novels that seemingly possess the most significant features of the historical Bildungsroman are expected to follow the genre's strict formulaic nature. Notably, Mann is also one of the scholars who has argued that the Bildungsroman as a genre cannot exist past the eighteenth century (Kontje 24), therefore he was perhaps purposefully playing with genre themes in this work. Kontje describes the scholars who share this view as believing that the Bildungsroman started as a result of the 'Age of Goethe,' and that the notion of *Bildung* ended alongside the conclusion of the First World War (24). Another notable scholar in this group who did not believe in the existence of the Bildungsroman past the eighteenth century is Gerhart Mayer, who went so far as to introduce the concept *Antibildungsroman* in his essay "Zum deutschen Antibildungsroman" (1974), in which the tropes of the Bildungsroman are utilized "without participating in the ideology associated with the traditional [genre]" (Upadhyay 304). In this sense, one can

determine that the limitations of the Bildungsroman have been discussed almost as long as the definition of the genre itself has been debated.

Despite the fact that historical examples and expectations for the Bildungsroman are dated and difficult to imagine from a twenty-first century viewpoint, understanding the origins of the genre is necessary in order for the contemporary reimagination efforts to be fully comprehensible. As was mentioned by Kontje earlier, viewing the genre as a result of historical circumstances is the most productive approach, while also considering contemporary iterations. Genre reimaginations of some sort are, therefore, necessary for maintaining the Bildungsroman's relevance in contemporary times.

ii.2 Contemporary Bildungsromane and the Need for Reimaginings

The limitations of the historical Bildungsroman are largely due to the formulaic nature of the protagonists' backgrounds and *Bildungs*-journeys, as well as the predictable structure of the genre's plot lines. While these have been present arguably since the very beginnings of the genre, they have only become more limiting as a result of the passage of time and the continually evolving discourses on inclusivity and intersectionality.

The expectations for a Bildungsroman protagonist to be a white German male of middle-class background were already restrictive in the eighteenth century, although one could argue more fitting from the authors' perspectives as this demographic was publicly the most engaged with such texts at that time. However, with time passing and the demographics of Germany, and Europe at large, evolving, these protagonists are becoming less and less relatable for general audiences. Scholars such as Ricardo Quintana-Vallejo argue that the term Bildungsroman is so closely tied to its historical context and implication of the white, middle-class, male protagonist,

that it “cannot contain or encompass” (3) present-day coming-of-age narratives at all. In addition, Quintana-Vallejo finds that the genre is also “deficient as an analytical tool when scholars interrogate narratives at the margins of both social hegemony and plain-text canonical literature” (2-3). This is to say that contemporary reimaginings of the Bildungsroman, through their engagement with themes such as diversity and inclusion, create distance from the restrictive origins of the historical iterations of the genre. In order for these narratives to remain present in literary contexts as part of the Bildungsroman tradition, adjustments ought to be made to better represent and address narratives of minority groups and marginalized peoples.

This disconnect between the genre and its audience has not just emerged in contemporary contexts but has already been a concern for scholars during modernist times. The discussion of modernist Bildungsromane is relevant for this chapter because it further contextualizes the extent to which society and audiences have evolved. Gregory Castle’s essay “The Modernist Bildungsroman” (2019) provides an overview of genre discussions during the era of Modernism, including historical information and analysis of the sociocultural changes that influenced the genre. Castle outlines that Modernism brought about the realization that the historical notion of *Bildung* is an unattainable ideal (147) and that the expected happy ending of a Bildungsroman, in itself a result of the “dialectical harmony of the protagonist and her world” (144), never truly occurs. This shift in the perception of the genre resulted in the portrayals of Bildungsroman protagonists evolving away from their historical prototypes, proving that the questioning and challenging of historical genres and their themes are a natural development. Modernist Bildungsroman protagonists have more agency and decision-making power than before, and “they resist, by and large, the allure of socialised subjectivity and of any attempt to assimilate the moment of aspiration to the destiny” (146). Traces of modernist reimaginings can be found in

contemporary Bildungsromane as well, especially in the framing of the protagonist, their identity, and the dynamics between them and their society. Moreover, Castle outlines that the protagonists' "refusal to sanction the ideal [...] becomes the starting point for imagining new modes of self-formation and social belonging that do not depend on achievement and that reward aspiration as a goal in itself" (146).

Slight adjustments to the genre such as these create room for further change and open realms of new creativity for authors, producing storylines more fitting and relatable for contemporary audiences. When the emphasis is placed on the *Bildungs*-journey and the effort of the protagonist, as opposed to the conclusion of their coming-of-age, the genre becomes approachable for audiences because authors and their reinvented protagonists distance the contemporary genre from the idealized nature of its historical iterations. The modernist influences on the Bildungsroman are significant for the continued evolution of the genre, as they bridge the gap between historical and contemporary iterations, providing insight into the trajectory of the changes to the genre.

In terms of the plot line of a Bildungsroman, historical examples generally represent positive coming-of-age experiences and almost entirely exclude complex or ambiguous ones. The linear *Bildungs*-journey with a satisfying conclusion and a reintegration into society is arguably not representative of the majority of coming-of-age experiences. Contemporary iterations of the genre are increasingly showing more ambivalent and unexpected endings for coming-of-age protagonists. Kontje argues that the portrayal of these types of 'less-than-perfect' stories may open up an entirely new thematic possibility for the genre, stating that "a protagonist's inability to resolve all problems into a happy ending may open a window onto the irresolvable conflicts of a given society or reveal the sacrifices required for social integration"

(15). A protagonist should be able to go through their *Bildungs*-journey with no expectations as to how their story will conclude, other than the fact that they will mature and become more confident of themselves as a person compared to when their formative journey began. In contemporary contexts, this reimagined approach to a protagonist's conclusion better represents the societal understandings of how individuals and their experiences are perceived.

The need for contemporary reimaginings is also evident in the datedness of defining aspects of the genre such as the background of the protagonist and the happy ending typically present; however, the most notable facet is the evolution of the meaning of *Bildung* in society. Most contemporary definitions of *Bildung*, such as the ones exemplified above by Boes and Hirsch, exist independently of the historical context in which the notion of *Bildung* was first defined. Boes, Hirsch, and Kontje acknowledge the sociohistorical ties of their genre definitions in their respective texts; however, their own definitions prove to be rather universal to the greater human experience rather than limited to eighteenth-century Germany. *Bildung* also has characteristics that are more malleable and applicable across centuries, namely the very notion of formation and the self-induced wish for personal growth. *Bildung*, as a concept, is merely the experience of a self-driven formative development, which is universal to all young people across time due to the natural urge to mature or 'grow-up.' Furthermore, aspects of *Bildung* that are changing with the times include the varying types of experiences that one can consider to result in the formative development of a young person.

Whereas historically the formative journey was motivated by a small range of experiences such as the wish to explore larger society, in contemporary times these have become more flexible; formative journeys can now be motivated by both positive and negative experiences. The same can be said about the variety of the types of self-initiative or drive for

one's maturity which can now be found in Bildungsromane. There are varying degrees to which a protagonist can feel motivated for their formative journey, unlike in the historical genre where the self-drive would typically be represented as "disciplined passion" (Mendes-Flohr 26), which a person "'ought' to [demonstrate] in the service of the true and the good" (35). Reimaginings of the Bildungsroman are, in this sense, needed for these novels to demonstrate the changing times and expectations for young people, and in turn the types of formative experiences that more accurately demonstrate the meaning of *Bildung* in the twenty-first century compared to the eighteenth century.

Contemporary societies such as Germany have a wide range of people from different kinds of backgrounds and are becoming more diverse than ever before. This results in the development and intersection of various identities, as well as the evolution of the language used to define the new concepts which arise as a result. Even more so, people are able to define their identities, in newfound ways, both in terms of national identity and 'Germanness,' as well as in terms of personal identities such as gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. The evolution of the language and terminology in twenty-first century Germany has opened new discursive spaces in society where people can find their own niche and belonging, such as BIPoC³ and FLINTA*⁴ communities. A similar phenomenon is evident in the media and is becoming apparent in literature as well. While literary genres with deep ties to Germany historically may take longer to adapt to contemporary discourses compared to newer media such as Social Media platforms, there are groups of authors who aim to provide social commentary on current discourses with historical insights, typically influencing the trajectory for redefinitions of

³ This acronym represents communities of Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Colour.

⁴ This acronym was developed in German-speaking countries, and represents women, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans, and agender communities, with the asterisk portraying inclusivity of other non-heteronormative communities.

literary genres. Lea Laura Heim argues that this is an advantage for the Bildungsroman, stating that the “inherent duality of the Bildungsroman, coupled with its historical importance in the development of a German national identity, renders contemporary rewritings of the genre especially effective for offering critical perspectives on current German society” (168). Such critical perspectives are perhaps most accurately possible through first-hand experiences from authors with backgrounds in minoritized groups.

Contemporary German authors are diverse and are sharing their own experiences with German society. This proves to be relevant for the Bildungsroman because of the biographical and political nature of the genre. A German author of a specific ethnic background is more inclined to write either a protagonist of a similar background, or to create a story which includes experiences that the author themselves has gone through. This increases and diversifies the types of representation in literature more generally, but also most prevalently the Bildungsroman, which is historically homogenous, as outlined before. Similarly, authors like Aydemir and Salzmann are likely to have more direct experiences with the disadvantages present in German society for certain members of the population. Through these experiences, authors share insights into aspects of structural and societal barriers that otherwise may not be presented in the mainstream. Bildungsroman reimaginations allow for these layers to come to light and create space for the representation of a variety of different coming-of-age experiences. In writing *Bildungs*-journeys which are influenced by the personal experiences of diverse authors, contemporary Bildungsroman authors are bound to also reimagine the typical plot lines of *Bildungs*-journeys and to avoid the perfectly resolved happy endings for their protagonists, if desired. This results in the possibility for social commentary on coming-of-age and new discourses on the relationship between young people and German society in the contemporary context.

Furthermore, as Germany has welcomed a significant part of its current population through immigration and refugee experiences, such backgrounds must also be taken into account, and the definition of what it means to be German, in turn, reconsidered. Narratives of migration and flight are often featured in contemporary iterations of the genre. These themes are increasingly prevalent today amidst Germany's reputation as one of the countries in Europe that has been welcoming significant amounts of refugees and immigrants since after the Second World War. A 'German' protagonist of the eighteenth century and a 'German' protagonist of the twenty-first century are, more often than not, going to look very different from one another. In this sense, some relevant and identity-defining factors in a contemporary Bildungsroman context, which were not necessarily considered historically, could be the ethnic background of the protagonist and their familial identity, the protagonist's birthplace or citizenship status, as well as the extent and way in which the protagonist themselves identifies as being German, among others. While considering the influence that notions of nationality, status, and societal position have for developing identities, it becomes apparent how important such types of representations are for young people on their formative journeys, along with the need to see them portrayed in genres such as the Bildungsroman.

As a result of this increase in diversity in terms of audiences and authors of contemporary Bildungsromane, the topics addressed or represented in the texts have become broader in scope as well. Due to the new, more prevalent discursive spaces in German society such as migration and minorities, gender identity and sexualities, systemic racism and discrimination, the possibilities for coming-of-age narratives have become far wider. Similarly to Castle, Boes outlines that this expansion of the Bildungsroman already began in the twentieth century, arguing that "scholars of modernism began to see their period as an era of transition from traditional

metropolitan novels of formation and social affirmation to increasingly global and fragmentary narratives of transformation and rebellion” (231). Put differently, since the twentieth century, coming-of-age narratives increasingly feature protagonists who swim against the current of what is expected of young people. Bildungsroman protagonists ceased being examples of an ideal for young people to strive for and started showing realistic, often also distressingly truthful, experiences of growing up and maturing presently. This is not to say, however, that contemporary Bildungsromane are inherently negative and represent only difficult topics, but rather that contemporary iterations of the genre do not shy away from portraying more realistic experiences that commonly do not resolve as neatly as in the historical genre. Furthermore, it should also be acknowledged that contemporary audiences tend to be more drawn to complex characters that cannot be simply defined as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ because they exemplify the intricateness of real people and real journeys.

In conclusion, Bildungsromane are an archetypal genre for young people and the representation of the complex themes of growing up, finding one’s place in society, and understanding that coming-of-age is a natural process everyone goes through. A brief discussion of contemporary Bildungsromane includes Kontje who exemplifies Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s novel *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* (1992) as the “prototypical Bildungsroman of a new era marked by border crossings and cultural mixtures” (31-32). Similarly, other notable contemporary Bildungsromane examples include Benjamin Lebert’s *Crazy* (1999), Alina Bronsky’s *Scherbenpark* (2008) and Deniz Ohde’s *Streulicht* (2020). Each of these novels reimagines the historical Bildungsroman in a substantial way and features themes which are relevant for twenty-first century youth such as classism, racism, and rebellion. However, despite the diversification of themes, the *Bildungs*-journeys of the protagonists remain central to the plot.

Furthermore, there are novels which technically fit the mould of a contemporary Bildungsroman but are not widely known as examples of this genre, such as Gudrun Pausewang's *Die Wolke* (1987) and Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Tschick* (2010). These examples focus heavily on issues such as environmental disaster and experiences with troublemaking and authorities, respectively, which overshadow the formative journey of their protagonists. However, even in such novels, the protagonists' *Bildung* still takes place with notable self-reflective episodes, albeit more so in the background of the main action. The novels by Roche, Aydemir, and Salzmann also closely deal with specific discourses and focus on the *Bildungs*-journey to varying degrees; however, the protagonists' interaction with these discourses is significant to their unique coming-of-age experiences. The nuances of the degree to which a protagonist's *Bildungs*-journey is influenced by outside factors or discourses is a contemporary phenomenon and one of the most common forms of reimagination of the Bildungsroman.

It is important to mention that there are also some scholars who have spoken out about the supposed danger of Bildungsroman reimaginings. They argue that reimagining this genre can be risky, stating: "eine alte Gattung substantiell abzusichern, neu zu definieren und der heutigen Zeit anzupassen, [birgt] immer die Gefahr, die Substanz der Gattung zu verwässern" (Selbmann 43). These types of concerns are not unsubstantiated within this discussion and will likely continue to be brought up within Bildungsroman debates, similar to the discussions about the genre's definition throughout the years. However, it is not only the past century which has seen reimagination efforts for the Bildungsroman, and the number of contemporary iterations of the genre which are published only continues to grow. Contemporary reimaginings of the Bildungsroman can be done productively with the engagement of current themes, as long as the main focus of the story remains on the protagonist and their *Bildungs*-journey. This approach

allows for the contemporary Bildungsroman to remain one of the most prevalent genres in literature, while the reimagination efforts by authors continue evolving along with the times and discourses of the next decades.

iii. *Feuchtgebiete*

Feuchtgebiete (2009) reimagines the historical Bildungsroman in a bold way, namely by portraying unfiltered and sometimes excessive accounts of a young woman's maturation journey against the backdrop of her sexuality and healing processes. Charlotte Roche, the British-German author of this novel, rose to prominence with her work as a television presenter. Her debut novel *Feuchtgebiete*, however, solidified her legacy in German popular culture. This is the result of *Feuchtgebiete* becoming one of the best-selling German books on Amazon, but also because the text was thoroughly discussed and scrutinized in the public eye upon its release. Roche's most prevalent objectives for the novel were the exploration of discourses on the female body, sexuality, and hygiene, and how much of a person's opinions of and relationship with their body result from societal influences.

In early 2000s German society, when the novel was first released, the reactions to the themes at the core of *Feuchtgebiete* were very polarized. On the one hand, critics condemned *Feuchtgebiete* as pornographic shock fiction;⁵ on the other hand, supporters praised it as liberating social commentary.⁶ Such diverging sentiments are commonly present in discussions about texts that are part of the popfeminist⁷ discourse, since the aim of these texts is to create social commentary on issues often deemed controversial for the general public. For Roche, the female body in *Feuchtgebiete* "acts as a visual subculture born out of the tension between traditionally political notions of feminism and mass-media-driven pop culture" (Smith-Prei 18-

⁵ Literary critic Tommy Wallach deems Helen an "unapologetic sex-maniac" and summarizes his review of *Feuchtgebiete* as: "Yuck" ("Charlotte Roche's 'Wetlands' – Ick. Just Ick").

⁶ Nina Power, in her interview with Roche, noted that Helen "promises a certain kind of liberation – the right to be sick and sexy, the right to be damaged and confident, the right to speak about anything and everything without shame" ("Charlotte Roche brings 'Wetlands' to the English-Speaking World").

⁷ Popfeminism is a twenty-first century reconceptualization of feminism, mostly present in German feminist discourses. It "utilizes the symbols of global pop culture in order to create a critical, local, and individual subculture, a new public and visible space of resistance defined, not constrained, by gender" (Smith-Prei 20).

19). The protagonist of *Feuchtgebiete*, Helen, enjoys shocking the people around her with her brazenness, which is evident in her “unequivocal embrace of the slipperiness of bodily fluids” (Er 449) and in the unique terminology she uses to describe the anatomy of her vagina, for instance. She invents new names for each part of her vagina, naming the inner lips *Hahnenkämme*, the outer lips *Vanillekipferl*, and the clitoris *Perlenrüssel* (Roche 22). Such terminology, as well as statements like “[i]ch bin mein eigener Müllschlucken. Körperausscheidungsrecyclerin” (120) when referring to her hobby of consuming her bodily secretions, are not typically found in mainstream texts, but more likely to be found in feminist magazines. Seeing how a novel with such unusual language established itself in the literary landscape demonstrates that there is a desire for such topics to be portrayed and engaged with in literary contexts.

The protagonist, Helen, is an eighteen-year-old high school student who ends up in the proctology ward of a hospital after an accidental anal fissure on her hemorrhoid caused by shaving. The majority of the text takes place in said proctology ward and follows Helen’s convalescence after the surgery for this shaving wound. Helen is fiercely sexually active and prides herself in her poor hygiene and her body’s ability to remain healthy in spite of the many dangerous experiments she conducts on it. She enjoys spreading her own bacteria, as well as absorbing those from strangers, in public places, such as washrooms at gas stations. Furthermore, Helen enjoys having unprotected sex with various people without worrying about sexually transmitted diseases. She prides herself in her vaginal health, as well as the regular check-ups with her OBGYN, Dr. Brökert. Pregnancy is also not a concern for Helen since she chose to get sterilized the day after she turned eighteen. However, aside from the unique and fiercely

independent aspects of Helen's personality, she is still a young woman who is trying to make sense of the world and is trying to find her place within it.

At the core of Helen's being, are traumatic memories of the various abusive incidents at the hands of her mother, and the often-inattentive nature of her father. Helen's present-day troubles stem from her blurry memory of a murder attempt where her mother tried to take her own life and that of Helen's brother. Helen's discovery of her mother and brother lying unconscious in front of a gas stove is the reason she develops the trauma response of smelling gas, which still follows her: "Es riecht nach Gas" (63). Helen does not enjoy her time in the hospital because it forces her to think about these horrific moments from her past, as well as the healing anal wound. She decides to not leave the hospital yet and schemes on about prolonging her stay. Her main motivation for remaining in the hospital is to get her divorced parents back together, which she often fantasizes about. In order to delay her discharge from the hospital, Helen hides her bowel movements, unsuccessfully attempts to rip her wound open with a blow-up pillow, and then ultimately succeeds in self-mutilating her wound with the pedal brake on her hospital bed. After being rushed to emergency surgery and almost not making it due to extreme blood loss, neither of her parents come to visit her in the time frame which Helen deems appropriate, and she abandons the dream of her parents' reconciliation. This gives her the courage to finally confront her parents about the murder and suicide attempt, tell her brother the truth about this event, and to get discharged from the hospital to her new boyfriend and former nurse, Robin.

In this novel, the protagonist's *Bildungs*-journey takes place in an unusual setting compared to the historical Bildungsroman, namely a smaller society than the one in which the protagonist usually resides, which places the maturation journey in a sort of microcosm. Helen's

entire journey occurs during her hospital stay, which is not longer than a couple of days; however, she is able to explore the themes that burden her mind, such as sexuality and hygiene, and consider her past in a very concentrated manner.

It is not only through the genre tropes that Roche creates a subversive layer in *Feuchtgebiete*, but also through the representations of bodies, health, and sexualities, as briefly mentioned above. Roche, who had been very vocal on female sexuality and societal expectations in her career even before *Feuchtgebiete* was released, outlined her intentions with the novel in an interview with Decca Aitkenhead of *The Guardian* in 2009:

I wanted to write about female sexuality and go into detail very strongly. And I wanted it to be funny and light to read. So I definitely wrote a few scenes in the book to make people horny. For the reader it should make you sort of blush and get warm, like when you watch a scene like that on TV [...] Men think they can be disgusting and sexual and stuff, and now I've shown them that women can do the same.

One of the main themes of this novel is Helen's unrelenting efforts to gain agency over her body in the hospital, in her relationships, and in the way she presents herself to the world. This significantly influences the subversive core of this novel by creating an atmosphere of resistance, fitting of Roche's intentions with the novel. Scholars such as Helen Hester, however, argue that the emphasis on sexual elements in *Feuchtgebiete* "often comes at the expense of the novel's more genuinely disconcerting elements" (243) such as the engagement with bodily fluids and surgical wounds. At the same time, the novel is narrated entirely from Helen's point-of-view, and the emphasis placed on sexuality is arguably meant to reflect Helen's own perspectives and interests in such topics. Her focus on these is likely influenced by broader societal discussions and expectations of female sexuality, and are meant to reflect their pertinence for young women

in the early 2000s. Helen is also an unreliable narrator, which is evident in her uncertainty over childhood memories, and an immature young person who acts rather selfishly at times. Margaret McCarthy characterizes Helen as someone who “combines a seventies-style, second-wave mandated natural body with a contemporary stylized selfhood [who] converts the self-reflective *Innerlichkeit* ‘interiority’ of German women’s novels of the 1970s to an in-your-face *Äußerlichkeit* ‘outwardness’” (61; emphases in original). The subversive function of sexuality and the language used in this text, as well as the choice of having Helen’s story be told as a coming-of-age story, contribute to the representations of sexualities and their influence on youth in the German literary canon. The representation of coming-of-age on her own terms paints Helen as an antiheroine to whom young people can look up and who can encourage them to question societal beliefs.

This chapter considers how *Feuchtgebiete* reimagines the historical Bildungsroman by analyzing Helen’s *Bildungs*-journey and the conclusion of the same. The *Bildungs*-journey will be analyzed with regard to Helen’s hospitalization, sexuality, her fight for agency, as well as the childhood trauma that is preventing a proper identity exploration attempt. The conclusion to Helen’s *Bildungs*-journey will be examined with respect to her decision to ultimately leave the hospital after finally addressing her trauma, as well as the influence of her paradoxical personality which keeps her in a state of unresolvedness and immaturity.

iii.1 *Feuchtgebiete* Bildungs-journey

The *Bildungs*-journey portrayed in *Feuchtgebiete* demonstrates the heightened difficulties of coming-of-age amidst societal pressures and unrealistic expectations pushed upon young people, in this instance young women. These overshadow the identity exploration through self-

optimization usually focused on by a historical protagonist. Helen's identity is largely grounded in her determination to gain agency of her body in every way possible. The strictness of societal expectations in the early 2000s forces her to mainly focus on her resistance attempts at this stage in her life. Helen's *Bildungs*-journey is not initiated or directly desired by herself, but rather caused by her sudden hospitalization. In addition, Helen is not very engaged with this journey once it begins. This highlights the need for expansion within the genre to account for differing circumstances in a protagonist's life. In Helen's case, this is partly the result of her focus on the physical healing of her body, and partly because she is preoccupied with the plotting of her parents' reunion. Her disinterest in maturation inverts the historical protagonist's supposed fixation with coming-of-age and bettering oneself. Helen's *Bildungs*-journey, in this sense, takes place in the background of the other themes of the novel she is dealing with such as healing. In contrast to the historical Bildungsroman, in which there is typically an omniscient narrative voice "characterized by *irony* toward the inexperienced protagonist [maintaining] a distance between the perspective of the narrator and that of the protagonist" (Hirsch 298; emphasis in original), Helen's homodiegetic narration creates limitations for readers of the novel because it does not allow for additional perspectives to the story, especially during moments in which Helen may not be sensible as a result of her surgeries and medications. Additionally, the strong focus on the traumatic memories from Helen's childhood, which she has not been able to properly consider, render her unable to fully engage with her *Bildungs*-journey. Helen's inability to overcome her trauma and the added difficulty of her hospitalization present themselves as barriers to her *Bildungs*-journey.

Out of the three novels analyzed in this thesis, the aspect that aligns *Feuchtgebiete* the closest with the historical Bildungsroman is the background of the protagonist. Helen is a white,

German, middle- to upper-middle class young woman who is seemingly heterosexual. Such characteristics place her in a position of power, which allows her to avoid certain societal disadvantages that the other two protagonists being analyzed in this thesis, Hazal and Ali, encounter.

The other notable characteristic that fits the historical genre is the inherent presence of political themes in the novel. Since this text can be read from a popfeminist perspective, the efforts of resisting and subverting gender norms in society reinforce the text's political identity. Furthermore, the discussions on hygiene and what is and is not considered to be clean can also be considered from a political perspective, since protagonists who are not of the same background and social status as Helen would arguably not have been able to explore these themes to the extent and in the manner in which she does. Hygiene discourses are presented in significantly contrasting ways in literature even today depending on the background or heritage of characters. The different implications for white versus not-white characters' engagement with hygiene discourses largely stem from colonial and Eurocentric writing. Helen is a highly privileged protagonist, which influences most of the discourses that she encounters along her *Bildungs*-journey, and which shape the outcome of her story.

iii.1.1 Helen's Hospitalization and Fight for Agency

Helen's *Bildungs*-journey begins with her hospitalization after she accidentally cuts her hemorrhoid while shaving. Although she chooses to go to the hospital to seek medical attention, Helen does not choose to go on a journey of maturation in the traditional sense while being there. The *Bildungs*-journey is, in a way, forced upon Helen due to the circumstances she finds herself in. Helen has seemingly no intentions or interest to become a mature person, however by being

on her own for most of the day, she is forced to ponder on her identity and existence in the world. This reimagines the self-motivation aspect of a *Bildungs*-journey as is typically seen in a historical protagonist's clear desire for embarking on a formative journey, as well as the theme of doing what one "'ought' to do in the service of the true and the good" (Mendes-Flohr 35). Helen does not exhibit this desire for growth throughout her journey, especially near the beginning of the novel. She does, however, show traces that this drive for self-improvement exists within her. This becomes evident in her wishes regarding the type of patient she hopes to be, at least at the beginning of her hospital stay: "Ich habe jetzt schon beschlossen, die beste Patientin zu werden, die dieses Krankenhaus je gesehen hat. Ich werde sehr nett zu den überarbeiteten Schwestern und Ärzten sein. Und ich werde meinen Dreck immer selber wegmachen" (Roche 16).⁸ Even though the circumstances of Helen's hospitalization are not very pleasant, she seems to be in good spirits upon her arrival. Although the factors surrounding the beginning of Helen's *Bildungs*-journey are largely reimagined versions of the historical genre, one aspect that does correspond is the unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life which the protagonist exhibits before their coming-of-age journey starts. Before the hospitalization, Helen is at a liminal stage in her life in which she is in-between youth and adulthood, unable to fully move on from her childhood and mature because of the sheer weight of the trauma she is carrying, causing her dissatisfaction with her place in the world. The *Bildungs*-journey thus occurs at a time when Helen needs it the most and unfolds in a way which fits Helen's personality and circumstances at present.

As already mentioned, the location of Helen's *Bildungs*-journey is the proctology ward in a hospital. The hospital, in Helen's case, is also the new environment and society that the Bildungsroman protagonist explores as part of their journey. While the location of Helen's new

⁸ Helen's motivation for wanting to be an exemplary patient are characterized by her wishes to heal: "wer sich so gut selbst versorgen kann, wird bestimmt bald wieder gesund" (Roche 17).

society is not typically what is found in the historical iterations of the genre, in which the new environment is usually a different town or neighbourhood of a city, for Helen this location makes sense. Early on in the novel, she explains her thoughts on hygiene, which become an accompanying factor of her narration both in the present setting of the story, as well as in the flashbacks which she provides. Helen is determined not to follow what her mother has taught her about personal hygiene, making it her personal mission to be as unhygienic as she possibly can be while staying healthy. She explains:

Hygiene wird bei mir kleingeschrieben. Mir ist irgendwann klar geworden, dass Mädchen und Jungs unterschiedlich beigebracht kriegen, ihren Intimbereich sauber zu halten. Meine Mutter hat auf meine Muschihygiene immer großen Wert gelegt, auf die Penishygiene meines Bruders aber gar nicht. (18)

This portrayal of female bodies as being dirtier than male bodies is something Helen has found to be unfair from early on in her life with her rejecting societal narratives about ‘proper’ hygiene targeted primarily towards young girls. As a result of the disproportionate expectations placed on her compared to her brother by their abusive mother, Helen has decided to personally become a “Muschihygieneselbstexperiment” (20). A few examples of the experiments she conducts include direct contact with dirty surfaces in public washrooms, the swapping of used tampons with friends, and the application of makeup to the vagina. By placing Helen in a largely sterile environment for prolonged periods of time, Roche creates an environment in which Helen is confronted with her thoughts on hygiene and the beliefs which she has held so intently. The contrast between the hospital setting and the graphic content of the story also emphasizes the descriptive nature and “utterly disgusting elements” (Er 444) of Helen’s storytelling. Additionally, in an episode immediately after her initial hospitalization, Helen is startled at the

discovery that her dirty underwear had been folded by a nurse, presumably her future love-interest Robin, again recalling something her mother told her: “Mama findet, das Wichtigste für eine Frau, die ins Krankenhaus kommt, ist, saubere Unterwäsche anzuhaben” (Roche 30). This brief insight into Helen’s mind after her surgery demonstrates that she is still heavily affected by what her mother had been telling her throughout her childhood, even if Helen is convinced that she is far removed from the concepts that had been pushed upon her as a child. Her mother’s constant critiques are part of a bigger societal issue and Helen’s mother “functions as a spokeswoman for all those health and beauty regimens mandated for the outer female sexual organs that are echoed in the media and educational mores” (Volkhausen 73). The notion of hygiene and cleanliness is a more significant part of Helen’s journey than may be apparent upon first glance. Because so much of her identity at this stage in her life is made up of the defiance of hygiene regimens prescribed by her mother and society, Helen has not been able to determine how much of her convictions and actions are something she genuinely believes in. As part of her *Bildungs*-journey, Helen has to consider her own opinions on hygiene, question what is actually safe for her to be doing with her body, and how she could perhaps be defiant in medically safer ways.

The hospital itself, although an unusual setting for a *Bildungs*-journey, mostly fulfills its purpose for the protagonist. For Helen, the hospital is a microcosm in which she meets a varied group of people every day (doctors, nurses, volunteers, and cleaners), and once she is able to walk and leave her hospital room, she meets other patients and their visitors as well. These groups of people are unfamiliar to her, and the setting allows for her observations in which she explores her opinion of them in more detail and considers the characteristics of theirs which she

likes and dislikes. This helps her piece together different attributes of the type of person she wants to become upon her maturation.

In terms of the single room that Helen is placed in, she is left to entertain herself mostly on her own because of the few visitors she receives. Other than her parents and brother, the only people who come into her room are medical staff, cleaners, and hospital volunteers. The time alone proves productive for Helen's personal development as it removes the distractions she would usually busy herself with. Being left to her own devices, Helen is forced to grapple with her identity, her trauma, and her opinions of the world for most of the day. Hester argues that because Helen is unable to leave her bed for part of her hospital stay, the diegesis of the novel is "restricted to a world of medicalized bodies, [and] corporeality emerges from the start as an explicit and central theme" (240). Helen is restricted in physical movement; however, her mind actively wanders and confronts themes such as hygiene, womanhood, and wounded bodies. The hospital setting is a reimagination of the new society to which a historical protagonist travels to undergo their coming-of-age; however, regardless of how unusual the setting in this novel may be, it largely provides the necessary factors for Helen to embark on her *Bildungs*-journey.

As previously mentioned, the focus on corporeality as one of the main themes (Hester 240) for Helen's hospitalization plays a significant role in her *Bildungs*-journey and presents itself in her efforts of regaining agency. Because of the traumatic events that happened in her childhood, Helen was never able to regain agency in a satisfying manner, which is why her persistence in fighting back the expectations for her body and lifestyle choices are such a large part of her identity. Before the hospitalization, Helen's most invasive way of reclaiming agency over her body was her sterilization. Helen makes this decision only because she believes that all first-born girls in the family, like herself and her mother, are "nervenschwach, gestört und

unglücklich” (Roche 40). The medical procedure represents a way in which Helen regains power over her body with the conscious decision not to have children of her own, but also because of her worries that she will end up like her mother. Whereas Helen’s sterilization fits the notions of “neoliberal [attitudes] towards health and self-optimization” (Hill 822), it also overlaps with the historical Bildungsroman’s ideal of “self-cultivation” (Mendes-Flohr 26), albeit in a corporeal sense.

A further way of pursuing agency from before Helen’s hospitalization which carries over into her *Bildungs*-journey is her relationship with shaving. From the very beginning of the novel, Helen bemoans what she labels “[moderner] Rasurzwang” (Roche 9), describing “[f]rüher war ich unrasiert sehr glücklich” (9), and “[i]ch dachte, man kann die Zeit, die man damit im Badezimmer verplempert, besser nutzen” (47). However, eventually Helen gives in and begins shaving, or rather, begins being shaved by someone else. Her opinion transforms: “Ich bin es gewohnt, rasiert zu werden. Ich finde, wenn Männer rasierte Frauen wollen, sollen sie auch das Rasieren übernehmen” (57). Helen’s pursuit of agency through her relationship with shaving is represented both in her initial rejection of shaving, which goes against what her mother taught her as necessary for young women, also in her decision and enjoyment of being shaved by others. Although her stance on shaving becomes muddy at times, the important part is that the very act of shaving results in her hospitalization, as she declares herself: “Alles das Ladyshaven schuld” (10). This is one aspect of her identity which Helen will need to reconsider following her *Bildungs*-journey; namely if shaving is something she will continue to resist, and if yes, if this will be because of societal pressures, or perhaps because her opinion has changed following her hospitalization.

During Helen's hospital stay, she is unable to engage in another activity through which she consistently maintains agency of her body, namely her sexual activities. As a hospital patient, Helen is not only physically unable to have sex, but she also feels as if she has no control over her body and how it is perceived. As a result, Helen explores other ways in which she can maintain agency of her body. Reminiscent of the historical protagonists' being "already in possession of precise values, standards, and expectations" (Hirsch 301), Helen has to feel comfortable in her identity and who she is in order to truly begin her *Bildungs*-journey. However, soon after her initial surgery, before Helen is able to feel in control of her body in the way she would like to, her insecurities begin to show: "Ich will lächeln, um meine Hilflosigkeit zu überspielen, obwohl keiner sonst im Raum ist" (Roche 28). Such glimpses reveal that Helen may not be as confident and sure of herself as she wants others to believe, highlighting that identity formation and maturity are not yet completed aspects of her journey. Helen's insecurity in showing her vulnerability to the medical staff demonstrates that she is still pretending to be at a magnified level of maturity, even while physically unwell.

The way in which Helen tries to maintain agency in the hospital is by challenging power structures embodied by her doctors and nurses. Even before her surgery, Helen makes a unique request:

»Lieber Betäuber, wäre es möglich, das, was die da bei der Operation wegschneiden, nachher zu sehen? Ich mag das nicht, wenn man mir was wegschneidet und das einfach im Müll landet, zusammen mit den Abgetriebenen und Blinddärmen, ohne dass ich mir ein Bild davon machen kann. Ich will das selber mal in der Hand halten und untersuchen.« (15)

Her wound, as well as the skin which is to be taken off, represent parts of Helen that she cannot see and has no control over, causing her great discomfort. These feelings of incapacity remain even after the surgery is complete and Helen requests a picture to be taken of her wound so she can see it for herself. Julia Reichenpfader argues that by asking for a picture, Helen “übertritt [...] nicht nur die Schönheitsnormen, sondern auch die Blickordnung im hierarchisch strukturierten Krankenhaus. Sie versucht, sich die Deutungshoheit über ihren Körper zurückzuerobieren, welche dem ärztlichen Blick innewohnt, der den Körper zergliedert” (30).

These moments portray aspects of a *Bildungs*-journey tied to bodily autonomy and considerations of corporeality, as mentioned by Hester, rather than exclusively the “inner capacities” (Hirsch 297) from the historical iterations of the genre. This shows that contemporary Bildungsromane may focus as much on the protagonist’s relationship with their bodies as they do on their minds, reflecting the societal emphasis placed on physical wellness and appearance.

Helen’s defiance against the hospital hierarchy is also evident in how she refers to her doctor. After Helen’s surgeon, Dr. Notz, upon initial examination of her wound, inflicts significant pain on her, Helen resolves to avenge herself with subtle actions. She begins with her body language: “Ich begrüße ihn und gucke ihm dabei fest in die Augen. Das mache ich immer so, um den anderen einzuschüchtern” (Roche 59), which then extends into the language she uses “»[v]ielen Dank, Herr Notz.« [...] Ich hab extra alle akademischen Titel weggelassen” (68).

Through these efforts, Helen is trying to maintain some form of agency and power, the need for which is now amplified by her vulnerable wound and immobility. Her *Bildungs*-journey is therefore, at least in the early stages, defined by a panicked state in which she transitions from being mostly focused on resisting societal pressures to looking inwards and starting to explore her identity.

iii.1.2 Helen's Identity through Sexuality and Childhood Trauma

As previously mentioned, the identity exploration aspect of Helen's *Bildungs*-journey is deeply impacted by the childhood trauma that she has not been able to overcome until this point, as well as the fiercely active sexuality which serves as a distraction from her personal worries. In the context of her *Bildungs*-journey, they become obstacles that must be confronted by Helen to break out of her youth and immaturity.

On a personal level, Helen at times exhibits childlike behaviours that point to her longing for comfort. Most notable is the way in which Helen soothes herself after her surgery:

Um mich zu beruhigen, lege ich wieder eine Hand auf meinen Venushügel. Hab ich früher als Kind schon immer gemacht. [...] Für mich ist das die wichtigste Stelle am ganzen Körper. So schön warm. Auch perfekt auf Handhöhe gelegen. Mein Zentrum.
[...] So kann ich am besten einschlafen. (Roche 36)

Assuming a sleeping position from her childhood shows Helen being stuck in a childlike stage in her development. This can be read as a result of the abuse Helen suffered and the suicide attempt she witnessed. These events have confused Helen, impacted her understanding of her own memory, and stunted her personal development. Helen has had to find ways to comfort herself amidst trauma for which she never got the help she needed and that was ignored by her parents. Helen is generally uncertain about how real her memories are, declaring “[e]s gibt noch eine Erinnerung, von der ich mir nicht sicher bin, ob sie eine Erinnerung ist” (63) when referring to the suicide and murder attempt. These moments reiterate the impact which the collective ignoring of traumatic events in the family has on Helen's identity and arguably explain her overactive imagination which serves most prevalently as a distraction for her. Whereas her imagination can be seen as a defense mechanism for Helen, with her clinging “to the fantastic

nature of dreams to unburden her mind” (Volkhausen 73), it creates a further distraction from the true issues at hand that she has to address in order to mature.

In addition to the ways in which Helen’s trauma manifests itself and influences her personal development during her *Bildungs*-journey, her understanding of the world and her place within it is greatly influenced by her view of her parents. Although Helen’s childhood trauma stems mostly from her mother, resulting in their relationship being complex to say the least, the relationship she has with her father is equally perplexing. Helen does not only analyze how the hospital workers and the other people she meets act, she also analyzes the way in which her parents act from a different perspective. Throughout most of Helen’s *Bildungs*-journey, the view she has of her father is very positive, in stark contrast to the view she has of her mother. This is, for instance, evident in the pride she takes in her knowledge of flowers: “Hat mein Vater mir beigebracht. Ich kann mir alles, was mein Vater mir beibringt, sehr gut merken. Für immer eigentlich. Alles, was meine Mutter mir beibringt, nicht” (Roche 127). However, Helen’s opinion of her father begins to change in the later stages of her *Bildungs*-journey with her realization that he is not as kind of a person as she thought him to be, which will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

The other aspect that Helen’s parents play in her *Bildungs*-journey is connected to her obsession about their reunion. The novel opens with Helen’s determined opinion on divorce:

Als Scheidungskind wünsche ich mir wie fast alle Scheidungskinder meine Eltern wieder zusammen. Wenn sie pflegebedürftig werden, muss ich nur ihre neuen Partner ins Altersheim stecken, dann pflege ich meine geschiedenen Eltern zu Hause, wo ich sie in ein und dasselbe Ehebett reinlege, bis sie sterben. Das ist für mich die größte Vorstellung von Glück. (7)

Helen's determination for a parental reunion acts as another example of her immaturity at this stage in her life, because she is old enough to understand why couples divorce and she is also aware of the poor treatment her mother experienced from her father. This begs the question of other potential reasons why Helen may have such a focus on wanting her parents to get back together. Based on the previously discussed aspects of Helen's personality and the, at times, Freudian regression evident in her actions and thoughts, it can be argued that Helen's motivation for the reunion results from her fixation on life before her childhood trauma and abuse. Helen believes that the reunion would make her struggles disappear since she describes the reason for wanting to reunite her parents as follows: "Damit wieder zusammenwächst, was zusammengehört" (136).⁹ Not least, this reunion fantasy is the reason why she rips open her healing wound. She is motivated to harm herself because she wants to prolong her hospital stay so her parents have more chances to run into one another: "Je länger ich im Krankenhaus bleibe, umso mehr Chancen habe ich, sie hier zusammenzuführen" (99). Simultaneously this also prolongs her *Bildungs*-journey, allowing for Helen to have more time to explore her identity and consider her past without distractions from the outside world. Helen's childhood and relationship to her parents are unavoidable aspects of her *Bildungs*-journey which will continue having an impact on her as a person even after this journey ends.

Another influential aspect of Helen's identity during her *Bildungs*-journey is her sexuality. Unsurprisingly, positioning a protagonist's sexuality at the centre of their *Bildungs*-journey is not something that would have occurred in a historical Bildungsroman. The subversiveness of the extent of sexuality portrayed in *Feuchtgebiete* is therefore unique in terms

⁹ This is a reference to Willy Brandt's famous declaration regarding the fall of the Berlin Wall, in which he states: "Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört" ("Neue Ostpolitik: Der lange Weg zum Frieden"). While Brandt uses this expression to describe two entities that ought to be one in a political context, Helen uses it for her own private situation and parents, who ought to be joined back together.

of the Bildungsroman genre, but also more broadly in terms of German literary spaces. The significance of female sexuality in this novel is a result of Roche's intentions of creating a narrative that serves as social commentary subversive of societal expectations. Because of the multitude of sensitive discourses addressed in this novel, especially the acknowledgement of the impact of Helen's trauma on her selfhood, the media's superficial discourses on the portrayal of sexuality in *Feuchtgebiete* show that society still may not be a place in which more complex discussions can be had. Roche's efforts in creating a productive social commentary on the possibilities for female sexuality were overshadowed by the most scrutinized aspect of the novel being the 'grossness' of Helen's sexuality. Although sexuality is central to the storyline, Helen as a character is much more intricate and deserving of a thorough analysis. According to Heike Bartel, however, this is where Helen's true subversive power lies; it is "not so much the fact that she is 'sexually confident' but the fact that [this] is linked with what is perceived as disgusting" (115). Thus, Roche's intentions were undermined in the novel's reception, and the female body is once again reduced to an object that is judged merely for its sexual behaviours.

In Helen's case, as a young person who centers much of her identity on sexuality, the impossibility of maintaining her sexual relationships while being hospitalized creates a big void. This makes room for the exploration of what sexuality really means for Helen's identity and how much of it is rooted in her efforts to defy expectations. With frequently graphic statements on sexuality such as "[w]arum immer dieses bescheuerte Waschen danach? Wenn man Schwänze, Sperma oder Smegma ekelhaft findet, kann man's mit dem Sex auch direkt bleiben lassen. Ich mag es gerne, wenn Sperma auf der Haut trocknet, Krusten bildet und abplatzt" (Roche 26), Helen appears to be overcompensating. Arguably, as is the case with her childlike soothing techniques, her sexuality is merely a tool to make herself appear more mature than she truly is.

While bound to her hospital bed, Helen ponders on her sexuality, taking her on a journey in which “[sie] regressiv nochmals alle Stufen der Entwicklung – besetzt Mund-, Anal- und Genitalregion mit großer Funktionslust libidinös [gedanklich durchläuft]” (Bahmer and Bahmer 722).

It could be argued that Helen’s struggle for agency over her body is not hindered exclusively by her inability to engage in sexual encounters while hospitalized, but rather by her never having achieved agency over her body in the first place. Helen became sexually active at a very young age, perhaps before realizing the gravity of sexuality and the value of her own body, which evolved into her overcompensating with the language she uses to describe sex generally. Helen is possibly “nicht fixiert auf *eine* psychosexuelle Entwicklungsphase, sondern insgesamt in ihrer (sexuellen) Identität verunsichert” (Bahmer and Bahmer 722; emphasis in original). These insecurities reveal themselves during Helen’s hospitalization and directly affect the trajectory of her *Bildungs*-journey. Helen likes to think of herself as sexually liberated and engaging in sexual acts in a way in which she believes to have power; however, as a patient who was operated on one of the body parts associated with her sexual encounters and is lying in a hospital bed without much mobility, the hoax begins to unravel. With Helen’s overcompensation of her sexuality, she reverts to “attention-getting tactics of small children” (McCarthy 90), reiterating the influence of her childhood that is keeping her in a state of arrested development ahead of maturation. The disconnects in Helen’s identity only become apparent to her as a result of the *Bildungs*-journey she is currently on. In this manner, the temporary discomfort she is feeling about the inability to act in the way she usually does, is merely part of a process which will result in her becoming a mature person.

The final act of immaturity of Helen's which arguably marks the end of her *Bildungs*-journey is the instance in which she rips open her wound in order to stay hospitalized so she can continue plotting to reunite her parents. It is important to note that this is not an accident or a spontaneous decision, but rather one which she actively plots for some time. She describes her decision during her visit to the cafeteria after she is able to walk again following her first surgery "[i]ch will mir, während ich hier sitze und Kaffee trinke, überlegen, wie ich es schaffe, länger im Krankenhaus zu bleiben. Irgendwie muss ich mir eine weitere Verletzung zufügen oder die alte wieder aufreißen" (Roche 142). She first attempts to do this with a blow-up pillow which her dad brings and which she is advised against using at the risk of harming her wound; however, this attempt is unsuccessful. After this failed attempt, Helen escalates her efforts to an extreme and sits on the pedal of her hospital bed, rips her wound open and is subsequently being rushed to emergency surgery. She is losing so much blood that the doctors begin operating on her before she is properly anesthetized, which only traumatizes Helen further. After the surgery Helen is back in recovery and realizes that neither of her parents came to visit after being notified of her situation, this becoming the moment in which Helen decides she wants to leave the hospital and abandon her family, as well as the family reunion wishes. While this moment of self-harm is graphic in the descriptions of the effects it has on Helen's body, perhaps such an extreme climax is the only way in which a character as complex as Helen is able to snap out of her imaginary world.

Helen's *Bildungs*-journey is portrayed as a complicated and non-linear process, which contrasts the historical *Bildungs*-journey that is typically marked by straightforward factors. Contemporary iterations of Bildungsromane such as *Feuchtgebiete* portray different angles and approaches to *Bildungs*-journeys, ones which are not uncommon with young people. In this case

they are the effects which trauma and abusive pasts can have on a protagonist. It is to be expected that a *Bildungs*-journey is going to be heavily influenced by the past experiences of a protagonist, because such experiences greatly impact the lives of young people. These experiences are presented as an added layer to the already complicated maturation process of a person. In Helen's case, she is unable to ignore her past any longer and is forced to confront her trauma.

iii.2 *Feuchtgebiete* Conclusion

The conclusion of Helen's *Bildungs*-journey, similar to the journey itself, progresses very slowly and unpredictably in comparison to historical genre iterations. With consideration of the conclusions typically found in historical Bildungsromane, in which readers can easily predict the outcome and the default steps which are to be taken by a protagonist to fully complete the maturation process based on the factors presented in the story, Helen's conclusion almost becomes a second storyline within the novel. Since Helen is never fully proactive in her *Bildungs*-journey and it is just happening to her as a result of her circumstances, the traces of gained maturation are not immediately apparent but have to be actively looked for. Helen, as a narrator, is so invested in the shock and disappointment of her parents not visiting her, as well as the physical pain she is in after her second surgery, that she herself is not in a place to explore how her opinions and identity have changed during her hospital stay. However, aspects of Helen's inner thoughts do provide glimpses of the more mature viewpoints she now possesses. Most notably in connection to the bed pedal wound and her surgery, Helen shows true fear from her actions: "ich habe Angst, wegen meiner Elternverkuppplungs-idee zu sterben" (Roche 174). Helen's realization that her body is not invincible and that there is more use to her body than

purely for sexual purposes shows significant growth in comparison to her thoughts before maturation.

In the aftermath of her emergency surgery, Helen's more mature personality finds expression in changes to her narrative voice. She becomes more self-reflective and aware of potential issues in the things she does, such as considering if telling her brother about the suicide and murder attempt was actually a good idea: "Ich mache oft Sachen, bei denen ich nachher erst über die Konsequenzen nachdenke" (210). In terms of her trauma, even though this is an aspect which Helen does ponder upon during the earlier stages of her formative journey, it is arguably not something that can be completely resolved by her. Upon leaving the hospital, Helen experiences a sensation which is a trauma response from when she found her mother and brother as a child: "Ich kann Gas riechen" (219). Even though Helen's newly matured personality allows her to entertain different viewpoints and understandings of herself in the world, her trauma still remains a factor she has to work through during her adulthood. Similarly, Helen's newly developed mature personality is not a fully finished version, with certain immature aspects still remaining within her actions and thoughts. The lack of clear-cut differences between her personality before- and after her *Bildungs*-journey are part of the genre reimaginations which make the novel more relatable for contemporary audiences since coming-of-age is typically not as straightforward as historical Bildungsromane portrays it to be. The conclusion to Helen's *Bildungs*-journey in *Feuchtgebiete* is characterized with a similar complexity and unpredictability like the journey itself, demonstrating a more diversified approach to protagonist maturation.

iii.2.1 Departure from the Hospital and Exhibit of Abuse

Helen's decision to leave the hospital reveals itself to be significant for her development as a person, namely by underlining the changes in perspective she has acquired as a result of her maturation. Helen realizes the importance of her body by not attempting to harm it anymore and sees the hospital as a temporary situation rather than a playground inside of which she only wants to cause trouble. Similarly, her change of opinions regarding her parents marks a significant development from before her *Bildungs*-journey and she recognizes it is not up to her to 'fix' her parents. She states: "Ich bin eher deren Eltern als die meine. Damit muss ich aufhören. Schluss damit, Helen. Du wirst jetzt erwachsen. Du musst ohne sie klarkommen. Merke endlich, dass du sie nicht ändern wirst. Ich kann nur mich selber ändern. Genau. Ich will ohne sie leben. Planänderung" (Roche 185). These insights reveal her realization that there is more to life outside of the hospital and her little world of resistance. It is in these moments that Helen exhibits a wish for self-improvement which, in a historical protagonist, would have appeared much earlier on in the story. However, even if it appears later, it still signifies the "adjustment of vision and a recognition of personal limitation" (Hirsch 301) required of Bildungsroman protagonists as part of the conclusion to their formative journey.

A further example of reimagination is the fact that, upon leaving her *Bildungs*-journey society, Helen does not return home to her original society but rather leaves with Robin, her nurse and boyfriend. Ironically, amidst all of the progress that Helen has made in terms of subversiveness and transgressions, her leaving with a male love-interest places her back into outdated structures of the historical genre. As Kontje outlines, the historical female protagonists' journeys are tied to the search for the perfect husband and have limited career- or education-driven themes (13-14). Helen's lack of educational or professional exploration and the departure

with Robin place her back into heteronormative structures. Helen's departure with Robin expands the scope of the popfeminist discussion within this novel, since according to scholars "it is so difficult to find genuinely erotic narratives in which heterosexual women feature as subjects rather than objects, this aspect of Roche's novel is disappointing, especially as the ending sees Helen leaving the hospital with Robin" (Armitt 157). This choice essentially undermines Helen's subversiveness when considered through popfeminist and Bildungsroman lenses because it confines her within the very heteronormative structures which she was so desperately attempting to resist.

The function of Robin for Helen's identity more broadly is confusing because her inner monologue is unreliable, as Helen has not fully matured from her intrusive thoughts. Whereas Helen, near the end of the novel, states "eigentlich finde ich doch, dass er denken kann, ich bin in ihn verliebt. Bin ich nämlich" (Roche 201), the sincerity of her feelings is uncertain. Helen's feelings seem to be centered more around having Robin become interested in her. It is possible that Helen is, maybe unintentionally, still fighting for agency over her body by trying to have Robin be attracted to and intrigued by her. To support this point, Helen has expressed insecurities throughout the novel over the fact that Robin had easier access to and was able to view her wound when she was not: "Komisches Gefühl, dass Robin mehr darüber weiß als ich" (29). With Helen's bodily autonomy challenged, she could very well be forcing, or even feigning, an interest towards Robin to challenge the power dynamics between them. This is also evident when Helen is desperately trying to avoid going home and tearfully asks Robin if she may live with him. Following this, she again feels the need to be in power and she brings up sex, followed by "[a]ber nicht heute. Ich bin zu müde" (220), even though Robin did not bring up or suggest them having sex to begin with. These instances result from Helen's insecurities about being alone in

life, declaring “[m]ir macht das Alleinsein Angst. [...] Ich würde mit jedem Idioten ins Bett gehen, damit ich nicht alleine im Bett sein oder sogar eine ganze Nacht alleine schlafen muss” (103). Robin’s role could be seen as a mixture of caretaker, which Helen will need while healing, a partner for sexual relations, and family, since Helen has seemingly abandoned her own. Amidst all of these, however, he matches Helen’s desires in a partner since he is more of a passive person than she is and hardly ever challenges or disagrees with her.

One of the pivotal moments for Helen as a character is when she finally acknowledges the abuse and trauma from her childhood. Before leaving the hospital, Helen decides to confront her mother, and indirectly her father, with an exhibit of her trauma, and to tell her brother the truth about his attempted murder. Before doing this, Helen leaves a voicemail for her mother and only after hanging up, blurts out the question she has been too scared to ask until now: “Und warum hast du versucht, dich und meinen Bruder umzubringen, Mama? Geht’s dir nicht gut? Was hast du denn?” (196). Although this confrontation will never be heard by her mother, from Helen’s perspective it shows growth and a newly developed confidence in standing up for herself. Following this, her brother Toni visits her; he is the only family member who visits her after her second surgery, and this time Helen tells him the events of that fateful day. Toni reveals that he has suffered traumatic consequences from the suicide and murder attempt himself, stating “[d]eswegen habe ich immer diese Scheißträume” (210). In terms of Helen’s father, although she does not confront him for his poor treatment of her mother, Helen comes to terms with the fact that he is not the good person she wanted him to be, which is evident in her admitting: “Papa tut mir oft sehr weh. Merkt es aber nie” (213). Within only a few hours in a day, Helen exhibits a notable amount of maturity when compared to her behaviour before she enters the hospital.

Helen's view of the world has changed, and she finally figures out from which aspects of her past she wants to distance herself.

Helen channels her trauma into an artwork that she creates in her hospital room right before being discharged. Helen's choice of creating a piece of art to confront her traumatic memories differs from her usual vocality. Choosing to create an art exhibit without utilizing any words suggests that Helen is aware her usual approach may not work in this case, and that her maturity is encouraging the exploration of other means of expression. She recreates the scene of the suicide and murder attempt by using clothing, snippets of her own hair, and a few other supplies she finds in the hospital. She describes the scene as follows: "Da liegen sie. Meine Mutter und mein Bruder. Wie ich sie gefunden habe. Die haben alle gehofft, dass ich das vergesse. So was kann man nicht vergessen. Durch ihr Schweigen ist es für mich immer größer geworden. Nicht kleiner" (219). Here, Helen both acknowledges that she remembers what happened, and due to her running away with Robin, the breaking out of her cycle of trauma. Helen reflects on this exhibit, and she declares it to be "[m]ein Abschiedsbrief. Der Grund, warum ich sie verlasse. Das Schweigen" (219). The silence represents the very reason why Helen was not able to overcome her trauma and is the same factor that her matured self is going to resist in order to heal.

Upon leaving the hospital, Helen literally breaks the silence by screaming: "ich lege den Kopf in den Nacken und schreie" (220), ending the novel and her coming-of-age journey. Together, the exhibit and scream create a powerful combination which marks a new chapter for Helen. They signify a physical release of the weight of trauma, the leaving behind of adolescence, as well as arguably her final statement on the pressures of young womanhood. Helen's maturation is characterized by a more personal and reflective approach to her trauma and

identity exploration. Whereas Helen started off as a person seemingly sure of herself, her maturity allows her to see that she has faults too and that this is part of the human experience. Helen's efforts to regain agency of her body during her hospitalization are transformed in a manner that supports her personal healing. This is evident in her efforts being focused less on societal resistance and more on personal and familial inspection, which helps her create a clearer sense of self.

iii.2.2 Difficulties of Maturation for Protagonists with Challenging Personalities

The conclusion to Helen's *Bildungs*-journey is an example of the ways in which contemporary coming-of-age narratives are broadening the literary canon of Bildungsromane by redefining the core notion of closure. Helen, as a flawed character with a troubled past, strongly strays away from the seemingly perfect historical Bildungsroman protagonist who is able to relatively easily resolve the issues that accompany their *Bildungs*-journeys upon maturation. In Helen's case, while she channels her energy away from resistance and more towards healing, she is arguably unable to overcome her flaws because she does not explicitly seek out her *Bildung* herself. Although this line of thinking may be more reminiscent of the limitations of a historical Bildungsroman, it can still be posited that Helen would have achieved a more conclusive maturation had she approached her *Bildung* in a more proactive way.

Arguably, the most evident flaws which remain with Helen even after her discharge from the hospital are her hypocrisy and paradoxical nature. Helen does not realize how entrenched she still is in heteronormative expectations, both for herself and for her parents. Although the departure from the *Bildungs*-society with a romantic interest would be fitting for a historical protagonist, in Helen's case this very notion is a subversion of genre tropes since it reflects this

characters' inability to fully mature. Because of Helen's insecurities and the fears of being alone left over from her childhood, she is unable to live independently, even though this is arguably the lifestyle that would make most sense for her at this stage. The historical notion of *Bildung* is unattainable for Helen because of her past and because of her determination to break out of societal norms. Since the historical Bildungsroman frames *Bildungs*-journeys in a way in which fitting into society and realizing one's own "social responsibility" (Hirsch 301) is the protagonists' main focus, characters such as Helen are not mouldable in a way that corresponds to these values. The core pillars of Helen's identity are the questioning and resisting of societal pressures for young women, which is an unattainable ideal that drives her to madness (Volkhausen 68). Because Helen is unable to come to a conclusive opinion on womanhood, she is unable to engage with society in a critical way and find her place within it. For as long as Helen is "as much a prisoner of her own body [...] as she is a rebel" (Volkhausen 75) on the journey of hygiene and gender norm resistance, she is an outsider in terms of her place in society. While this may not be an issue for Helen who tends to prefer seeing the world from the outside, it is an aspect which maintains her distance from the historical Bildungsroman protagonist whose objectives for maturation include the finding of a place in society.

The discrepancies which are present in a few aspects of Helen's actions upon her maturation in the hospital are arguably another example of how unconventional protagonists expand the historical genre by including story outcomes previously not considered possible. With Helen's choice of leaving the hospital with Robin, she abandons her parents and thus her original environment; and since the hospital is a temporary residence in itself, she does not stay in the society which hosted her *Bildungs*-journey. Helen's departure to a third location with Robin subverts the historical protagonist's return to their original society.

Helen's propensity for unexpected decisions plays into the discrepancy between the aspects of her identity which matured and the ones which have remained immature. This is evident even in the final scene of the novel in which Helen is afraid to sit on the back of Robin's bike because of her wound, soon after which she makes a joke about them having anal sex. These oscillations can be explained as the "[conjuring of] both a child's helplessness and an adult's defiant sexuality" (McCarthy 62) which represent the degrees of Helen's ambivalent identity. Similarly, Helen essentially runs away from home by not notifying her parents, which marks her immaturity; however, she is legally an adult and is therefore allowed to leave to wherever and with whom she chooses. This part of Helen's story is illustrative of her entire journey and perhaps her identity in which "women caught in an elaborate system of power that saturates the discourse of femininity [...] are bound in contradictions that are far too entangled to escape unscathed, [and] often have little choice but to fall back into adopting socially prescribed norms" (Er 455-456). Helen as a character dissolves genre tropes because her traumatic past and rebellious personality cannot be confined to the formulaic structures of this literary tradition, similar to the strict nature of societal expectations which follow her throughout the entire novel. Roche's complicated conclusion for Helen is arguably reflective of the experiences that young women who are sexually liberated and comfortable with being unhygienic are likely to encounter in a society that has far different expectations for them. For a popfeminist novel, the departure from rules and expectations is fitting, and so *Feuchtgebiete* creates an example of a layered and contradictory Bildungsroman protagonist who is attractive for contemporary audiences that have dealt with similar issues as Helen.

Charlotte Roche's reimagination of the Bildungsroman creates a story that serves as a social commentary on the pressures that young women experienced in the early 2000s and their

desperation to break free. With the ending of *Feuchtgebiete*, Roche makes a statement on the difficulty of breaking out of heteronormative structures. This is demonstrated with Helen, a character who is otherwise not afraid to speak her mind and to do as she chooses no matter what others may think, ending her journey in a heteronormative relationship. Helen, as a contemporary Bildungsroman protagonist, experiences coming-of-age with liberating outspokenness, and juxtaposes it with burdensome factors such as her trauma. Amidst all of Helen's struggles, she still chooses what is right for her and considers ways in which to heal from trauma, comes of age on her own terms and portrays a "less straightforward trajectory from innocence to experience" (McCarthy 110). Even though most tropes associated with the historical Bildungsroman that are included in this novel are reimagined in some way, the protagonist still manages to achieve a certain level of maturation. This demonstrates that, even though this genre was historically considered to be strict as a result of the tropes which limited variations for protagonists and their journeys, contemporary authors find ways to flip the genre on its head and make it work for the stories they share.

iv. *Ellbogen*

Fatma Aydemir's novel *Ellbogen* (2017) reimagines the historical Bildungsroman by rejecting the usual genre tropes for the most part and focusing on a protagonist who is more of an antihero. This novel serves as an account of Bildungsroman reimaginings in which the protagonist seemingly does not achieve maturation. *Ellbogen* has received a lot of critical attention due to its subject matter and Aydemir's daring approach to societal discussions such as violence, remorse, and the portrayal of Turkish families in Germany.

Aydemir is a German novelist, essayist, and playwright, and is the granddaughter of Turkish-Kurdish immigrants. She is often included in discussions of German postmigrant discourses and the efforts of bringing migrant experiences into German literary and cultural spaces. This can be seen in the case of this novel, as well as Aydemir's co-editing a collection of essays titled *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum* (2019). This collection features a variety of writers, including *Ausser sich*'s Sasha Marianna Salzmann, who portray a multitude of migrant experiences in Germany and assume a critical stance of societal discourses which are increasingly right-wing and opposing of immigration. Jon Cho-Polizzi further defines Aydemir's works as being "characterized by a distinct negotiation of these archives of (im)migrant memory – a notable attempt to write and rewrite the cultural signifiers of Turkish and Turkish German identity into the German-language literary record" (100). In terms of *Ellbogen* being analyzed through a Bildungsroman lens, Aydemir's portrayal of migrant stories is not only contributing to the wider German literary context, but also to a genre that has a longstanding tradition within German-language literary spaces. Aydemir has been vocal in sharing her family's immigrant experience, her own essay from the above-mentioned essay collection titled "Arbeit," shows a glimpse into her experiences and resistance efforts:

Migration ist immer ein Versprechen auf ein besseres Leben, einen German Dream. Der German Dream meiner Großeltern war, etwas Geld zur Seite zu legen und damit in der Türkei ein Stück Land zu kaufen. Der German Dream meiner Eltern war, ihren Kindern ein Studium zu ermöglichen und ein großes deutsches Auto zu fahren. Und was ist meiner? Ganz einfach: Ich will den Deutschen ihre Arbeit wegnehmen. (36)

Sentiments outlining the systemic disadvantages and disillusionment experienced by immigrants in Germany, along with the notion of so-called deintegration from the greater ‘German culture’¹⁰ are core themes of the still-evolving postmigrant discourse.

Postmigrant literature and discourses largely developed from the so-called *Migrantenliteratur* (also known as *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, and *Ausländerliteratur*, among others) which became part of German literary spaces in the 1980s and 1990s amidst waves of workers who immigrated to Germany. Such texts and discussions centered the themes of migration into German society and, by extension, its literary space. At the time, *Migrantenliteratur* focused most commonly on “das literaturwissenschaftliche Interesse auf das Migrantendasein, zugleich wurde jedoch auch der Sprache, bzw. Mehrsprachigkeit der Autoren große Bedeutung beigemessen” (Flinik 174). However, in time these discourses developed further and the understanding of the complexities of migration evolved. Additionally, new generations were born to the groups of immigrants who had settled in Germany permanently. This second generation redefined the concept of Germany as a land of migration and prompted German society to reshape what it means to be German. Through these new perspectives, the previously outlined

¹⁰ Selma Rezgui et al. outline the notion of radical diversity which “enable[s] radical redefinitions and resignifications of identity, subjectivity, and community” (2), furthering that for the German context these “alliances at the heart of radical diversity and deintegration are conceived of in opposition to the notion of *Leitkultur*, the prescriptive and homogenizing ideal of a national culture in which there is little or no diversity of sexuality, religion, gender, or other identity categories that are conspicuous in their noncompliance to a white, male, heterosexual, Christian norm” (9; emphasis in original).

notion of *Leitkultur* was being reconsidered, with scholars, politicians, and the media alike starting to challenge and reframe the wider societal understanding of the immigrant experience in Germany. Postmigrant discourses portray the contemporary redefining and questioning of the notions of migration in German society, which “[encompass] the understanding that the ramifications of migration and the consequent conflicts and struggles affect not only those who have immigrated but every member of a society shaped by immigration” (Heim 165). Furthermore, the usage of the terminology relating to migration in the twentieth century in Germany often had negative connotations¹¹ which placed works of “minoritized groups outside the German literary landscape and canon” (Rezgui et al. 19). Today, scholars and authors who engage with postmigrant discourses largely have migrant backgrounds themselves and utilize these in a way which alters the discussion, “[overcoming] the often polemical and pejorative distinction between Germans with and without the so-called background of migration” (Cha 131). *Ellbogen* and *Ausser sich* both center around protagonists who are part of the postmigrant demographic and heavily engage with themes of the twenty-first century postmigrant experience in German society. Through the engagement with postmigrant themes, both novels demonstrate an “intrinsically political” (Kontje 10) layer which affects the protagonists’ *Bildungs*-journeys. Although both *Ellbogen* and *Ausser sich* portray themes of postmigrant existence throughout their storylines, they differ in their representations of the influence of migration for contemporary coming-of-age narratives.

Ellbogen tells the story of Hazal, a seventeen-year-old girl from Berlin-Wedding, who, unsatisfied with her place in society as a German-born Turk, does not quite fit into either the

¹¹ Christian Steltz outlines the shift in societal understanding of the negative implications of the *Gastarbeiter* and *Migrantenliteratur* terminology occurred in the 1980s, with the realization: “dass die ursprünglichen ‚Gäste‘ dauerhaft bleiben würden” (156). During these times, people with backgrounds in migration joined the discussions themselves and prompted the development of terminology that was more inclusive.

German, or the Turkish circles in society. Hazal's background is similar to Aydemir's which adds an autobiographical layer to the story through a first-hand understanding of what it means to be othered in a society, even if one is born into it. Hazal's experiences of discrimination and disadvantage as a Turkish-German girl in German society are representative of the experiences of other minority demographics. Hazal is unhappy with the lack of prospects for her future and has encountered a lot of psychological and physical abuse from her strict family. She expects matters to improve upon her eighteenth-birthday celebration with her friends who are of similar migration-influenced backgrounds. However, while waiting at a subway station after the failed attempt to enter a dance club to celebrate Hazal's birthday, furthering Hazal's and her friends' convictions of not-belonging, the group gets into a physical altercation with a drunken male (white) German university student who is making suggestive comments towards them. In the heat of the moment, and as a result of the anger from the club-entry rejection, the altercation quickly becomes one-sided as the intoxicated student is overpowered and the group of girls push the student onto the train tracks. Hazal is the one who delivers the ultimate shove: "Und ich, ich stoße den Studenten. Ich stoße ihn von hinten, mit beiden Händen, dem Handy hinterher [...] Ein Stoß an der richtigen, passenden Stelle" (Aydemir 123). The girls panic and run away, leaving the student's body on the train tracks, where he dies. Afraid of the consequences of her actions and without telling anyone, Hazal flees to Istanbul to her online-boyfriend Mehmet that same night. In Istanbul, she spends a few weeks unaware of any progress on her and her friends' criminal cases back in Germany. Hazal remains afraid of getting in touch with her family or friends until her aunt Semra comes to Istanbul to try to convince Hazal to return to Germany with her. Even after hearing of her friends' arrests, Hazal refuses to show remorse and remains in Istanbul without a clear plan for the future.

Structurally, *Ellbogen* is divided into three parts, the first ending after the murder, the second after Hazal calls her aunt, and the third which focuses on Hazal's refusal to return and her conviction to remain in Istanbul. The final chapter of the novel also portrays the 2016 coup attempt¹² in Istanbul that Hazal experiences and which marks the end of her journey as a person on the run. The *Bildungs*-journey in *Ellbogen* begins about one-third into the novel, marking the latest start of the three novels. This chapter analyzes Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey by considering her flight to Turkey, her coming to terms with having murdered someone, and learning about what it means to have a political existence in the world. In terms of the conclusion to Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey, this chapter will consider her choice of staying in Istanbul, which is marked by her lack of remorse and lack of maturation. This will be followed by a discussion of why a protagonist such as Hazal is not able to have a proper *Bildungs*-journey, which will highlight the status of *Ellbogen* as a reimagined Bildungsroman.

iv.1 *Ellbogen* Bildungs-journey

Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is characterized by the disadvantages she has experienced throughout her life, and which led to the night of the murder. This causes Hazal to begin her journey as a consequence of running away. Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is not something she chooses to embark on, nor is it something she is particularly interested in once it begins. Similar to Helen, Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey happens in the background of different, more formative events in her life. Hazal's maturation happens as the result of her being essentially thrown into the independence of adulthood for the first time in her life, following her flight to Turkey.

¹² On 15 July 2016, a small group of the Turkish Army attempted a coup on state and government institutions, including the media. This coup attempt was not successful and resulted in many casualties across Istanbul and Ankara where most of the unrest occurred (Yapp, "Turkey").

Before the murder happens, the issue which Hazal experiences most notably in her tight-knit Berlin-Wedding community is feelings of being stuck in a life without many prospects for her future. She describes the frustration she has with her unsuccessful job search: “Wie viele Bewerbungen habe ich dieses Jahr denn schon geschrieben? Fünfzig? Sechzig? Und wie viele Jobs habe ich? Einen halben, und der ist schwarz und im Laden von Onkel” (Aydemir 41). Conversely, she is also not interested in higher education, declaring that she has “[k]eine Lust, mein Leben lang bei meinen Eltern um Geld betteln zu müssen. Außerdem müsste ich dann jeden Tag mit einem Haufen Vollidioten abhängen. Leute, die Abi machen, labern alle nur Scheiße und haben fettige Haare” (21). Hazal’s attitude towards life and her future deviate heavily from the self-motivated wish for the improvement of one’s personal identity required of a historical Bildungsroman protagonist. The burden of being a second-generation immigrant in Germany weighs heavily on Hazal and creates a negative lens through which she views the world. In addition to this, the attitudes in her family are often very old-fashioned and abusive, which creates a disconnect in the younger members of the family who do not agree with these views, such as Hazal and Aunt Semra.

Hazal’s state of mind is a critical theme in *Ellbogen* because it directly influences the decisions she makes and is closely explored through the first-person narration. The most prominent events from Hazal’s childhood illustrating the extent of her psychological distress are her suicide attempts. These are not taken seriously by her mother, who dismisses them as something that Hazal will move past with time. Hazal’s struggles, irrelevant of their seriousness, are often ignored by her traditional family. This creates a feeling of alienation in Hazal that rises inside of her and ultimately culminates in the anger-fueled attack in the subway station. The disconnect between Hazal, Aunt Semra, and the rest of their family portrays significantly

differing accounts of life following migration, with Aydemir's descriptions "[complicating] the stereotypical perception of the Turkish community in Germany as a homogenous group" (Heim 174). In terms of Hazal as a Bildungsroman protagonist in German-language works, her background certainly reimagines the notion of a middle-class, male character, and it challenges the notion of a white German protagonist. Although Hazal was born and raised in Germany, she never felt she was German enough, which deeply affects her understanding of herself. Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey represents the often-unacknowledged difficulty of coming-of-age for young people who are not typically given the room for self-exploration in society.

iv.1.1 Istanbul as an Escape and a Confinement

Hazal's flight to Istanbul marks the beginning of her *Bildungs*-journey, since it forces her to leave home and to survive on her own while confronting her identity away from the suffocating environment created by her family. The start of her *Bildungs*-journey is not traditional because it is not motivated by the wish for self-improvement but prompted by violence and the avoidance of consequences. The notion of flight is significant in Hazal's case because it influences the entire arc with which Hazal's stay in Istanbul is marked. In comparison to Helen, Hazal's journey is more voluntary since Hazal does consciously decide to leave for Istanbul; on the other hand, she makes this decision because she feels she has to flee to avoid punishment for her actions. In having Hazal quite literally flee from her original society in order to avoid punishment, *Ellbogen* subverts the genre tropes by removing the self-motivation behind a *Bildungs*-journey, as well as underlines the political themes traditionally present in the genre. By having Germany be the society Hazal flees from, Aydemir creates an additional layer to the postmigrant discourse in this text and urges readers to consider what flight from such a country may entail. While there have

been many narratives about flight and Germany in the past few decades due to the Middle Eastern refugee crisis, these narratives tend to be about people fleeing *to* Germany to seek a safer environment.¹³ Even Hazel and her friends encounter refugees before their night out and comment on them negatively: “Fluchtis sind voll pervers!” (Aydemir 97). Hazel and her friends let their prejudices influence their understanding of the world, and this scene alludes to the fact that Hazel herself will become a ‘Fluchti’ of sorts in only a few hours’ time. In this regard, Aydemir flips the narrative on its head and portrays her non-white German-born protagonist fleeing from Germany as a type of escape.

The effects of Hazel’s family background of migration also play a part in her choice to go to Turkey. Hazel repeatedly outlines the difficulties she encounters in her life as someone who has a Turkish name and appearance, even though she was born in Germany and speaks German fluently. One of the most notable instances of the prejudices Hazel experiences in Germany is during an encounter with a store detective who accuses Hazel of stealing without explicit reasoning, presumably due to her Turkish appearance. The store detective’s prejudice becomes visible during his interrogation of Hazel, stating “[a]ber das wirst du doch wissen. Ist ja wahrscheinlich nicht das erste Mal, dass du geklaut hast” (14). Following this, he asks Hazel: “Weißt du, dass man dafür in sein Heimatland abgeschoben werden kann?” (14) alluding to the possibility of punitive deportation to Turkey, a country Hazel has only ever visited for summer vacation and never actually resided in. In having the store detective use the word ‘Heimat,’ Aydemir creates a reference to the discourses that can be found in right-wing spaces that assume an exclusionary position and the ability to determine who belongs in a country and who does not.

¹³ A few examples include Alan Gratz’ *Refugee* (2017) which tells the story of three fictional refugee children at different times in history, one of them being a young boy fleeing from Syria in 2015, as well as the memoirs by Syrian refugees Yusra Mardini, *Butterfly: From Refugee to Olympian – My Story of Rescue, Hope, and Triumph* (2018), and Aeham Ahmad’s *The Pianist from Syria: A Memoir* (2019).

These notions are at the core of many of the debates about immigrants in contemporary German society and about who, according to right-wing rhetoric, do not fit the criteria of an expected 'Germanness.' As a result of such experiences, for a young person like Hazal, the only fitting choice is going to Turkey to investigate her Turkish ancestry in the hopes of finally finding the place where she belongs. Cho-Polizzi similarly argues that Hazal's journey to Turkey marks the negotiation of "a new positionality between the expressions of belonging and Otherness she has inherited from both lifeworlds" (98). Although Hazal may not be exhibiting self-motivated bearing in regard to her *Bildungs*-journey, she does appear to be self-motivated for the exploration of her Turkish heritage which turns out to be one of the major aspects of her coming-of-age.

While Hazal chooses to go to Turkey because of her family background, she does not use the same reasoning in her choice to go to Istanbul specifically. Istanbul fulfils Hazal's personal desire for life in the big city, as seen in her friends romanticizing the metropolis in order to escape their Berlin-Wedding realities, but also in her romanticized hopes of life with her almost ten-year older boyfriend, Mehmet. Hazal's and her friends' fantasies of Istanbul are framed in a way that shows their awareness that these are self-fabricated scenarios:

»Oh, ich wäre jetzt so gerne in Istanbul«, schwärmt Gül und fasst sich an die Stelle ihrer großen Brust, unter der sie ihr Herz vermutet. »Da ist es so schön, so warm, so laut, und alle Leute reden ständig miteinander. Niemand ist so mies gelaunt wie hier.« Sie spricht so, als wäre sie schon mal da gewesen. Typisch. Dabei kennen Gül und ich Istanbul beide nur aus dem Fenster des Busses, der uns jeden zweiten Sommer vom Flughafen in unsere stinklangweiligen Käffer kutschiert. (Aydemir 27)

Although she is aware that Gül and herself do not really know anything about Istanbul, wishful thinking and the fear of staying in Berlin play a significant role in Hazal's choice to flee to the city. Hazal has also grown up in Berlin and would therefore likely consider herself able to manage Istanbul; as an "urban youth, it does not seem entirely improbable to identify more with one's imaginary of another great metropolis [...] than with the dull realities of an ancestral village with which one has little shared experience of everyday life" (Cho-Polizzi 104). Istanbul is the perfect environment for Hazal's identity exploration, which arises as part of her *Bildungs-* journey, and is also the perfect city for a person who is on the run and wants to remain hidden.

However, even with Istanbul and Mehmet as distractions from the events she left behind in Berlin, Hazal is unable to escape the effects of the murder on her psyche. No matter how hard she tries to act as if nothing happened, she is not successful: "Ich frage mich, was Elma wohl gerade macht. Die letzten drei Tage habe ich es geschafft, fast gar nicht an sie oder an Gül oder an irgendwen anderen zu denken, den ich in Berlin zurückgelassen habe" (Aydemir 140). Even with Hazal's at times frustrating behaviour, in moments when she is not trying to act older or overly mature, it becomes clear that she is still a very young and fearful person who does not quite know what she is doing. With each passing day, aspects of Istanbul that were initially so intriguing to Hazal start making her paranoid:

Nur der Ezan erinnert mich, dass wieder Zeit vergangen ist, fünfmal jeden Tag. Und er erinnert mich an mein Geheimnis, denn er singt vom Tod, fünfmal jeden Tag. Oder vielleicht auch nicht, ich verstehe ja nur das Wort Allah, aber wer von Gott spricht, spricht auch vom Tod, das ist doch klar. Warum sollte irgendjemand beten, wenn nicht aus Angst vor dem Sterben? (158)

At this point in her life, Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is burdened with defense mechanisms, which are her attempts at ignoring the murder altogether. Hazal's personal development can only begin once she admits to herself what really transpired; only then is she able to explore aspects of her identity and personal relationships.

iv.1.2 Murder, Abuse, and Societal Disadvantages

As previously mentioned, Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is greatly impacted by her difficult family life and the disadvantages she experienced in Germany while growing up. In order to explore her identity as part of her coming-of-age journey, she needs to first face her family life and abuse. Similar to Helen, the abuse that Hazal experienced deeply affected her growth as a person, slowed her personal development, and resulted in her immaturity. Following this, she ought to face the disadvantages she experienced in Germany and how these impacted her understanding of the world. Hazal's world view is limiting and negative, reflecting her own dissatisfaction in life, which in turn directly contributes to her aggressive tendencies. Hazal was never part of a community that allowed for an open-minded approach to life and its troubles, which results in her impulsivity. The societal exploration needed for her *Bildungs*-journey is only possible in an environment that removes Hazal from the original society that restricted her development.

Hazal's Berlin-Wedding life acted as an isolated community that did not allow her to properly deal with her negative experiences, since they were typically mostly ignored by her family and friends. This results in Hazal developing a set of coping mechanisms that help her stay calm, namely her daily tea rituals and her escapes to Hazalia. Hazalia refers to an imaginary world in Hazal's mind to which she escapes from everyday life and that serves as her safe space away from the world. She describes Hazalia as: "[meine innere] Welt, aus der diese Stimme

dringt, mit der ich oft rede [...] In Hazalia ist immer Nebel, in Hazalia riecht es immer ganz leicht nach Gas” (Aydemir 127). The tea ritual is Hazal’s task and part of her daily routine that occurs after family meals. It temporarily distances Hazal from her parents and helps her avoid some of the comments and discussions she would typically be subjected to at the times the family is gathered. Hazal describes that she is not able to be herself in her parents’ company, with the tea ritual allowing for a much-needed safe space: “Ich mache immer dieselben Bewegungen, muss auf nichts achten und kann einfach der Stimme in meinem Kopf zuhören. Wenn ich bei meinen Eltern sitze, höre ich die Stimme nie. Weil ich dann ständig so tue, als wäre ich jemand anderes” (33). The escapes to Hazalia and her daily tea rituals demonstrate that Hazal, even while in Berlin, needs some sort of escape to get in touch with her inner self. This need for escape arguably escalates after the murder and takes shape with Hazal’s escape to Istanbul.

Istanbul acts as a physical distancing and removal from the environment that affected Hazal for so many years. This distance allows Hazal to engage with her past from a different perspective, which can help her start moving towards some level of closure. However, Hazal’s opinion of her parents and the ramifications of the abuse remain the same throughout her *Bildungs*-journey, preventing the layer of closure needed for maturity in this regard. Hazal is limited by her abusive past and is not able to widen her understanding of the possibilities for family relationships. She admits to being afraid of her parents, stating “[d]as war keine Rolle. Ich habe nicht das weinende türkische Mädchen gespielt, das Angst vor seinen Eltern hat, vor der Abschiebung, vor sich selbst. Dieses Mädchen, das bin ich” (120). Although the admission of fear is an insight into the gradual growth of Hazal, a person who would arguably not have admitted any limitations to her personality at earlier points in the novel, her lack of empathy and wish for reconciliation with her family limits her *Bildungs*-journey at this point in her life. Hazal

is not able to look past other people's mistakes in order to start examining her own, which hinders a comprehensive identity exploration required of a Bildungsroman protagonist.

The societal disadvantages Hazal experiences, including discriminations such as in the previously mentioned theft interrogation scene, have made her disillusioned with her identity. Whereas the example of her aunt Semra makes Hazal realize that there are ways to improve one's life and prospects, she herself does not have the tools and maturity to find a way in which she could also exist in society in a satisfying way. The disadvantages portray systemic issues within German society in which individuals like Hazal are not given the same access to resources as white Germans, for instance (Heim 171). Through the years of obstacles and discrimination, Hazal's disillusionment and anger with her existence as a Turkish-German person in Germany gradually grow and culminate in the attack in the subway station the night of her eighteenth birthday. Her anger is described as follows:

Es ist so da und es ist so heftig, dass man es fast anfassen kann. Wut. Meine ist so groß, dass sie nicht in mich hineinpasst. Sie droht meine Haut zu sprengen, mich von innen aufzuessen und wieder auszuspucken und wieder aufzuessen. Meine Wut berührt Elmas Wut, kocht und wuchert gemeinsam mit ihr, lässt sich von ihr immer weiter anstacheln.
(Aydemir 114)

This instance shows a communal anger and dissatisfaction which Hazal shares with Elma, who also has a background of migration, which acts as a sort of bonding experience between the two. This shared anger, however, results in the murder of a young man, which serves a symbolic purpose in the discussions of belonging in Germany. The drunken student, whose name is later revealed to be Thorsten, represents everything Hazal feels disadvantaged by in her life. Ethnically, he is a white German and presumably does not experience the same disadvantages

that Hazal does. His being male is also an aspect which Hazal feels discriminated by through her family's differing treatment of her and her brother. Furthermore, Thorsten provokes the group of girls with sexually suggestive comments that trigger their attack on him. Although it is only later revealed that Thorsten was a university student, at the time of the attack this is presumed by Hazal because of his appearance with her "projection of him being a student [epitomizing] the systemic educational inequities affecting Hazal's prospects" (Heim 176). While Thorsten's provocative comments trigger the attack by the already upset friend group, they are arguably not cause enough for the degree of violence they enact, which makes it clear that this attack is largely fueled by the negative experiences from their lives, rather than his comments alone. One can argue that the attack represents a reversal of power in which Thorsten becomes the minority subject who is outnumbered by Hazal, Elma and Gül, and his death a symbolic execution of the oppressiveness of German society.

Although Hazal runs away to Istanbul to escape the consequences of the murder, she becomes haunted by the deed and the realization that she is the main one who committed this crime. The rational side of Hazal tries admitting to herself that she really murdered someone, her thoughts confirming "[d]enn er ist tot. Entweder er ist verblutet, oder sein Schädel ist Brei, oder die U-Bahn hat ihn zerschrammt. Wie auch immer es gelaufen ist. Der Studentenkörper ist tot" (Aydemir 127). The scared, runaway side of Hazal, however, remains hopeful and in denial until photographic evidence arises:

Vielleicht ist der Studentenkörper ja doch nicht gestorben. Vielleicht hat ihn jemand gefunden und eilig ins Krankenhaus gebracht. Vielleicht haben sie ihm den Kopf geflickt, und er geht schon wieder zur Uni und auf seine Unipartys und anderen Mädchen auf den Sack. Nein, »getötet« stimmt nicht. Ich tippe »verprügelt« und drücke Enter. (177)

The inner conflict of Hazal's in regard to the murder portrays a certain level of self-reflective behaviour, which is an improvement compared to her behaviours when she was in Germany. However, in both of these instances, Hazal refers to Thorsten as 'Studentenkörper,' demonstrating her lack of empathy towards him as the victim. Even upon finding out his name, her level of empathy does not change: "Thorsten, was ist das denn für ein Name? Warum tut man seinem Kind sowas an? Gäbe es eine Liste der hässlichsten Deutschennamen, Thorsten müsste ganz oben stehen" (212). While this way of thinking about the victim may be Hazal's efforts of detaching herself from her actions as a defense mechanism, they demonstrate a level of indifference uncharacteristic of a person of this age, showcasing another effect potentially stemming from the surroundings which shaped her understanding of the world.

Additionally, this aspect of the murder manifests itself in Hazal's subconscious in the form of recurring nightmares about the murder: "Ich dachte, ich hätte mich inzwischen an die Albträume gewöhnt" (173), and the inescapability of the murder even in Hazalia: "Und vielleicht liegen von jetzt an auch der Schädel und der rote See dort in Hazalia" (127). These instances when Hazal demonstrates a newly found degree of self-awareness and actually engages with uncomfortable topics instead of ignoring them create a new version of Hazal that seems to be heading down a path of personal growth. The insights provided into Hazal's innermost thoughts portray a protagonist who can be empathized with, one whom readers want to root for to make the right decisions. Just like Helen in *Feuchtgebiete*, however, Hazal is an unreliable and unpredictable narrator, and the world she describes is not always the most reasonable. Whereas Aydemir creates opportunities for readers to empathize and relate to Hazal in certain regards, the extent of Hazal's actions and her stubbornness make it nearly impossible for her to enjoy the happy ending of a historical Bildungsroman.

iv.1.3 Broadening of Horizons

Whereas the aspect of family issues and the experienced disadvantages in society are notions which Hazal is not able to engage with in a way that promotes her *Bildungs*-journey, she is able to broaden her horizons and reconsider some of her opinions and beliefs while in Istanbul. The new society in which she resides allows for the exploration of new perspectives and engagement with themes which were previously largely ignored within her environment or inaccessible to Hazal personally. When it comes to outside factors and broader discussions that Hazal has not considered before, she appears to be more open-minded and interested in learning about them during her *Bildungs*-journey in Istanbul. In this regard, Hazal's surroundings allow for an exploration of new parts of her identity which is aligned with the function of the new society in the historical Bildungsroman. The three people she engages with most regularly while in Istanbul are her boyfriend Mehmet, his roommate Halil, and Halil's girlfriend Gözde. Each of them serves a different purpose for Hazal's personal exploration and development in showing her the type of person she wants or does not want to be. Through this group, she also learns about political issues that affect Turkish and Kurdish people and is given context for the political unrest she witnesses while in Istanbul. These are topics she did not pay attention to while living in Berlin, but her change in perspective and, in part her interest in these people, causes her level of curiosity to increase.

Hazal's boyfriend Mehmet was born in Germany like Hazal, but was punitively deported to Turkey, a possible outcome which was alluded to during Hazal's interrogation by the store detective. Their relationship is damaging to Hazal, not only because of their age difference,¹⁴ but also because of Mehmet's abusiveness. Since Hazal does not have anyone else in Istanbul and

¹⁴ Hazal and Mehmet's relationship started on Facebook when Hazal was still underage, and Mehmet was in his upper mid-twenties.

spends most of her time there with Mehmet, she soon realizes that he is not the type of person she imagined him to be. Instead of being the fun person who she thought watched movies and listened to music, he turns out to be someone who constantly works and does heavy drugs. Hazel's disillusionment with Mehmet forms gradually but consistently, and she realizes that he is likely lying about the reason for his deportation: "Aber jetzt, nach dem Post von Miriam L., frage ich mich, ob das logisch ist, ob man wirklich für eine einzige Schlägerei drei Jahre bekommen kann. Vielleicht war Mehmet schon vorbestraft" (Aydemir 37). Mehmet serves as a representation for the worst possible outcome of Hazel's future, the type of life she is scared of having as a result of the murder. Mehmet is also not interested in the political situation in Istanbul, even though it directly affects him as a resident of this city, which makes Hazel realize that she does not want to remain unengaged with the events happening around her.

Mehmet's roommate Halil is the complete opposite of the former. Halil completely changes Hazel's views of the world in only a short amount of time and represents one of the few examples of personal growth she undergoes during her *Bildungs*-journey. Similar to Hazel, Halil also has a Kurdish background and patiently teaches her about the suffering of Kurdish people in Turkey "»[j]eden Tag fliegen Häuser in die Luft. In Mardin herrscht Krieg. Die Menschen leben seit Monaten in Zelten. Was soll daran schön sein?« [...] »Sorry«, sage ich. »Das wusste ich nicht.« »Wie, du wusstest das nicht? Wo lebst du? Auf dem Mond?«" (152). In this statement, Hazel becomes aware that her understanding of what it means to be a Kurdish Turk in Germany is not quite the same as what it means to be a Kurdish Turk in Turkey. In the moments that show the extent of Hazel's ignorance of the situation of Kurdish people, Halil persists in explaining:

»Ist ja auch egal«, sage ich und stecke mir eine Zigarette an. »Was soll das denn schon wieder bedeuten?« »Na, ob kurdisch oder nicht. Im Endeffekt macht es keinen

Unterschied, oder? Für mich sind alle gleich. Wir kommen alle aus der Türkei, also sind wir alle Türken. Fertig.« [...] »Hazal«, sagt er und überlegt eine Weile. »Natürlich macht es einen Unterschied. Wenn es keinen Unterschied machen würde, gäbe es keinen Krieg. Wenn es keinen Unterschied machen würde, würden Menschen nicht bei lebendigem Leib in Kellern verbrennen.« (153-154)

Halil and Hazal understand each other on a more serious personal level than Hazal and Mehmet. Halil challenges Hazal and provides intellectual stimulation in a way she had not experienced before, which intrigues her. He inspires a change in Hazal: “Ich will keine Angst mehr davon haben, für dumm gehalten zu werden. Seit ich denken kann, sehe ich dabei zu, wie meine Mutter oder meine Oma oder irgendwelche Tanten, [...] immer nichts sagen, wenn sich Männer über Dinge unterhalten, die sie nicht verstehen” (152). Halil represents young people who are politically engaged and involved in efforts for the greater good. Hazal had not been exposed to such people in her Berlin environment, which is perhaps why she takes such a liking to Halil. However, it is not just in a positive manner that Halil challenges Hazal. He is the only one who questions Hazal’s motives for being in Istanbul and staying with someone like Mehmet “»[d]u rennst vor irgendetwas weg, Hazal.« [...] »Vor wem versteckst du dich, Hazal?« (171). This breaks Hazal out of her fantasy world in which she believes to have successfully run away from her crime: “Seit Halil mich an jenem Abend zur Rede stellte, bröckelt etwas in mir. Es ist, als ob sich eine Schicht von meinem Geheimnis gelöst hat” (173). Halil acts as the mentor character found in the historical iterations of the Bildungsroman whom Hazal is unable to deceive. Even though, in the later parts of the novel, Halil gets arrested for his political activism and for taking part in a petition in Kurdish people’s interest, Hazal’s resolve to know more about the world remains and contributes to her life as a citizen of the world.

Halil's girlfriend Gözde is the only girl Hazel meets in Istanbul, and she represents a similar contrast to Hazel as the one between Mehmet and Halil. Gözde reminds Hazel of a group of allegedly rich and privileged young women, dismissively labeled 'Ärztetöchter,' with whom Elma and she got into an altercation in Berlin. The assumed similarity between the 'Ärztetöchter' and Gözde result in Hazel wanting to dislike Gözde; however, Gözde is very kind to Hazel and helps her after Halil's distressing arrest, which causes conflicting feelings in Hazel. The insecurities she holds become apparent around Gözde, and she starts comparing herself to her new acquaintance: "Gözdes gesamtes Leben ist wie eine Schablone, an der ich millimetergenau abmessen kann, was in meinem alles schief läuft" (199). Because Gözde is a university student from a wealthy family and less Turkish-looking than Hazel, she considers Gözde's life to be unattainable, which only increases her insecurities. However, Hazel's immaturity shows itself in these instances because Gözde never cared for these aspects of Hazel's life or the differences between them, she is kind and helpful to her regardless. Gözde arguably resembles Aunt Semra both in character and in terms of the life paths they have chosen. However, Hazel does not want to see this and only focuses on the parts through which her own insecurities are projected. At this stage in her life, Hazel is not able to see the similarities between Gözde, Semra, and herself, because she is not able to look past her emotions and insecurities. Through the experiences she gains with Mehmet, Halil, and Gözde, Hazel begins to consider alternative ways of thinking to what she learned in Berlin-Wedding and becomes warily empathetic towards other people's problems and their life circumstances.

Through the people Hazel meets in Istanbul, even if only briefly, her eyes are opened to the vast possibilities that exist in the world for her outside of the community in which she grew up. Hazel realizes that the social status of people which she once entirely rejected, such as higher

education or a background of privilege, are not the sole defining factors of a person's identity. This consideration could help Hazal realize that she also is not defined by the crime she committed and that she could have a happier life if she faced the consequences; however, at this point in time she does not think in this manner.

In terms of her personal growth, these encounters with Halil and Gözde illustrate that Hazal greatly benefits from being away from Berlin-Wedding. This environment had been weighing her down and preventing her from developing productively. In terms of her *Bildungs*-journey, the society she encounters in Istanbul does exactly what the historical genre's new society is supposed to achieve, namely broadening the protagonists' horizons. Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is partly successful in promoting her maturation, with the inability to work past family issues and abuse still preventing a holistic maturation for Hazal. In this regard, Hazal is similar to Helen because they are both deeply burdened by their family issues and unable to fully address the aspects needed for a conclusive coming-of-age. In light of the difficult discourses, as well as the different political layers portrayed in *Ellbogen*, having a developmental journey in its straightforward and uncomplicated manner as is seen in historical Bildungsromane would have arguably been impossible and ill-fitting for a text of this nature. *Ellbogen* portrays the difficult sides of coming-of-age amidst a whirlwind of issues a young person is not able to deal with on their own.

iv.2 *Ellbogen* Conclusion

The conclusion to the *Bildungs*-journey portrayed in *Ellbogen* is the least definitive of the novels analyzed in this thesis. In comparison to *Feuchtgebiete*, in which Helen has some level of closure with her childhood trauma and at least a vague plan for life after her discharge from the hospital,

Hazal experiences neither. Hazal's personality at the end of the novel is seemingly less complete than when she initially arrives in Istanbul. Her lack of plan for the future and the lack of a substantial acknowledgment of her errors, or at the very least an indication that this might occur soon, significantly distances Hazal from the expectations for a successful Bildungsroman protagonist. Hazal does not demonstrate a "recognition of personal limitation" (Hirsch 301) in any regard following her *Bildungs*-journey, remaining defensive of her choices and unwilling to admit wrongdoing. While the chapter on *Ausser sich* will show alternative representations of postmigrant protagonists in Bildungsromane who are able to have conclusive endings, *Ellbogen* is an apt example of a novel in which a postmigrant protagonist is unable to exist within these genre tropes. With all the progress Hazal has made in terms of her perspectives and understandings of the world with the help of her community in Istanbul, the ending of the novel demonstrates a sort of regression within her level of maturity, and the story ends with Hazal being at essentially her lowest point of the entire novel. Hazal's ending represents how the traditional coming-of-age as seen in the historical Bildungsroman is not realistic for protagonists who have difficult lives like her. The conclusion aspect of Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is overall difficult to define as the progress that takes place during the formative journey is subtle, making the results thereof not clearly apparent. Rather than a reimagination such as is demonstrated in *Feuchtgebiete* and *Ausser sich*, the conclusion to the *Bildungs*-journey portrayed in *Ellbogen* represents a rejection of genre tropes and the notion of *Bildung*.

iv.2.1 Rejection of Return and Remorse

Hazal's impression of life in Istanbul changes drastically once she realizes that she does not fit in in Turkey, similar to how she did not fit in when she was in Germany. The romanticized version

of Turkey, which she has been imagining with her friends throughout their lives, is a wishful interpretation of a place they hoped would solve the problems they had in Germany. A factor of Hazel's maturation is this very realization that Istanbul is not the magical solution to her Berlin-Wedding problems and that her identity questions run deeper than it seemed when she was considering them from back home. Hazel's disillusionment with the world increases once she feels she does not belong in Turkey, stating: "ich weiß doch überhaupt nicht, wohin ich gehen soll. Ich gehöre nirgendwohin" (Aydemir 214). Cho-Polizzi outlines the different ways in which Hazel feels like an outsider in Germany as compared to Turkey:

In Berlin, it is largely the physicality of her personhood – appearance, dress, and socio-economic class – which mark her exteriority as Othered, in Turkey it is the more intangible attributes recognized through close interaction that continue to define her as outsider – accent, language use, cultural cues, and social conduct. (104)

Hazel does not realize that, similar to the differences she recently learned exist between Turkish and Kurdish people, Turkish people who reside in Turkey and Turkish diaspora elsewhere are also different demographics and develop differing cultural attributes depending on where they live. Unsurprisingly, Halil is the one who brings this difference to Hazel's attention when he gets into a fight with Mehmet, declaring sarcastically: "Diese armen, kulturlosen Deuschtürken haben eben alle ein Identitätsproblem" (Aydemir 168). The discrepancy between the group Hazel has considered herself to be part of her whole life and the reality that her Turkish passport does not quite equate her to a person who has lived in Turkey their whole life is an unpleasant fact she must accept. Whereas these aspects influence her personal identity and the formative journey she is undergoing, they also impact her insecurities as a person on the run. Hazel's paranoia of being discovered follows her throughout the story: "Ich weiß nicht, woran, aber sie merken, dass ich

nicht von hier bin" (138), and: "Hier falle ich auf. Obwohl kein Mensch auf diesem ungewöhnlich breiten, chaotischen Fußgängerweg dem anderen gleicht, bin ausgerechnet ich es, die auffällt" (175). The disillusionment Hazal feels in Berlin with her identity, as well as the paranoia of her family discovering her secrets, mirrors the same feelings she has in Istanbul, albeit with different circumstances. Hazal's escape from Berlin leads her to a city which, to her now, acts as a different version of that same environment. This forces Hazal to realize that she cannot escape her personal issues by a change of geographical location, and that she will have to stop avoiding her past and her crime. For Hazal's identity, her German and Turkish heritages act as pillars that make her the person she is. For her *Bildungs*-journey, both aspects of her heritage, "die, in die sie hineingeboren wurde, aber auch die aus der Ferne verklärte" (Galter 57), have to be engaged with in order for a well-rounded identity exploration to take place. The opinions that Hazal develops and her changing feelings towards the new society in the form of Istanbul, mark a more mature view of the world and her place within it, signifying the ending of her *Bildungs*-journey.

Similarly, with Halil's arrest and Gözde's decision to separate herself from all connections she had with him, Hazal is left on her own with Mehmet. She provides glimpses into the fact that he had been sexually abusing her since she arrived in Istanbul, with her developing a trauma response: "Ein paarmal bin ich nachts aufgewacht und habe gemerkt, dass ich meine Hände schützend zwischen meine Schenkel presste" (Aydemir 150). This abuse, along with the other parts of Mehmet's personality that Hazal dislikes, is the reason she ultimately leaves him. She realizes: "Was habe ich hier verloren, vor seinem Haus? Was soll ich mit so einem? So einer kann doch niemals lieben" (220). With this decision, Hazal breaks the seemingly constantly present generational curse from her family in which her female relatives stay with their husbands

regardless of the way they are treated. Hazal's departure marks her taking a stand and gaining agency over her life in terms of companionship.

The turning point for Hazal's story and the climax of the novel are defined by a visit from Aunt Semra that occurs as the main event of the novel's third part. In a particularly lonely moment, after having left Gözde and Mehmet, Hazal calls her aunt, revealing her location, and Semra immediately comes to see her niece in Istanbul. This action portrays Hazal genuinely asking for help for the first time, showing vulnerability and how much she cares for her aunt's opinions: "Ich frage mich, was sie denkt, über mich. Und über die Sache" (229). Hazal and her aunt have always enjoyed a close relationship and understood each other in a unique way, which is evident in Aunt Semra's approach to their conversation:

Okay, Hase. Ich bin nicht hier, um dich zu verurteilen. Ich bin hier, weil ich dich liebe und dir helfen will und weil ich nicht anders kann. [...] Ich spreche hier als deine Freundin. Freunde helfen einander, stimmt's? Aber um dir helfen zu können ... Um dir zu helfen, muss ich dich verstehen. Du musst mir jetzt alles erzählen. Und du musst ehrlich sein. (230)

Aunt Semra's cautious approach reads as a carefully thought-out opening statement of a social worker but, crucially, also shows her awareness of Hazal's temper. Soon after, however, as the events of the night are being recounted by Hazal, the aunt and niece duo begin disagreeing with one another, with Semra declaring: "Nur weil dich jemand provoziert, kannst du ihn nicht vor die U-Bahn schmeißen" (243). Hazal reverts to her personality in Berlin and she responds: "Wir sind nicht auf ihn losgegangen, weil es ein schlechter Abend war. Sondern weil er es verdient hat" (243). This interaction portrays an insurmountable disconnect between Hazal and Semra, who tries to reason with her. Even Semra, who had always been able to get through to her, is being

blocked by Hazal's stubbornness and the wall she built around herself to shut out anyone who may try to help her. Although Hazal's statements to her aunt are immature and apathetic, her personal thoughts show an improved level of self-reflexivity: "Ich merke, dass ich überreagiere, dass ich wütend werde. Das will ich nicht. Ich will ruhig bleiben, superruhig" (233). It is difficult to determine which aspects of Hazal's progress remain because of her unreliability as a narrator, or the emotionally charged situations she finds herself in, complicating the *Bildungs*-journey conclusion aspect in *Ellbogen*.

Aunt Semra, on the one hand, represents a dose of reality and reason in a similar manner to Halil and Gözde; on the other hand, she also represents Hazal's Berlin-Wedding life and her family. The topics which Semra raises and represents, such as higher education, are very similar to what Hazal had discussed with Halil and Gözde, which at that time she mostly found intriguing. However, because Semra is too close to home for Hazal, her bringing up similar topics scares Hazal back into the same person she was before coming to Istanbul. Hazal withdraws again into her own world and ignores her aunt's efforts of explaining that she too suffered disadvantages in German society, as did her parents and other relatives. However, Hazal is not interested in hearing these arguments, similar to how she is not interested in returning to Germany to reform her life. This leads to Hazal's ultimate declaration: "Du verstehst mich nicht. Ich will keine Reue zeigen! Auch nicht, um meinen Arsch zu retten. Das mach ich einfach nicht" (248). Hazal's refusal to show remorse for the violent subway attack represents her rejection of her *Bildungs*-journey and any maturation which may have transpired thus far. Hazal is evidently still fueled by the injustices she has experienced throughout her life, which is why she does not express any guilt about the murder; rather, "she despises the entitlement and the unearned privileges of the dominant part of [German] society, epitomized by the young man she has

killed” (Heim 177). Her lack of remorse is also part of an issue larger than her *Bildungs*-journey, which ties into the societal understandings of what is right and what is wrong. Hazal rejects basic rules of morality and ethics which are needed for societies to function. She also abandons her friends, who are at this point already incarcerated in Berlin for being accomplices to Thorsten’s murder. Hazal runs away, this time literally, from her aunt and in so doing definitively abandons her family. By turning on her aunt, the only link to her parents and family, she cuts ties with them entirely which also means that she will not be able to address or gain closure on her family issues in any way. Hazal rejects the possibility of returning home and rejects the only safety net she had left. This also means that Hazal is never going to be able to fully complete her coming-of-age because her family issues and the murder are going to remain unresolved and will burden her in life for the foreseeable future.

Following Aunt Semra’s visit, the political unrest in Istanbul reaches a peak with the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey being included in the storyline of *Ellbogen*. The lack of Hazal’s awareness regarding the political climate in Istanbul and her mediocre Turkish language skills force her into a dangerous situation with no real safety skills or escape plans. This moment solidifies Hazal’s understanding that she is from this point forward left entirely to her own devices in life. This fear prompts the revelation of the actual reason for Hazal’s choice of rejecting remorse and the return to Germany: “[Tante Semra] weiß es ja nicht besser, sie ahnt nicht, dass Scham viel beschissener ist als Angst. Dass Scham einem den letzten Verstand rauben kann” (Aydemir 270). Hazal’s shame reveals itself as the common factor between all of the most distressing moments in her life: the thefts, the motivation behind both suicide attempts, the rejection of the club entry, to name a few. More so than fear, Hazal is driven by shame, a feeling she so desperately wants to overcome when it is pushed upon her by her parents but is not able

to. What Hazel does not realize yet is that the feeling of shame will follow her even in Istanbul. She will be confronted with feeling the shame of abandoning her family and friends and eventually also the shame of having committed murder.

Hazel's stubborn choice of staying in Istanbul, even amidst the coup attempt, demonstrates an absolute confirmation that her *Bildungs*-journey has ceased. This type of ending is the complete opposite of what a historical Bildungsroman protagonist would have undergone to conclude their story. Hazel's final thoughts reveal an escape to Hazalia in which Istanbul "fängt an, komisch zu riechen [...], ein bisschen wie in Hazalia, wo das Messer liegt, mit dem mein Vater immer das Fleisch geschnitten hat, und meine langen schwarzen Locken, und auch der Studentenkörper und der rote See, aber wo keine Angst sein kann, weil es nämlich in Hazalia immer warm ist" (270). Even though Hazel does not mature in a traditional sense, she appears to be more conscious of the struggles in the real world, and she seems ready to tackle life on her own. The novel ends with Hazel seemingly ready for her future, "[i]ch öffne die Augen, sehe ein Stück Nacht und lächle mir selbst zu" (271). This ending is reminiscent of Helen's departure from the hospital in which she screams as a physical release; for Hazel, this release is an ambiguous smile, discernible as an out-of-body experience. This smile acts as a moment of comfort for Hazel that things will work out, and as the demonstration of uncertainty that has become an inescapable companion for her future. Hazel's unresolved ending, similar to her incomplete *Bildungs*-journey, contributes to the literary canon of the Bildungsroman by broadening the idea of what a coming-of-age narrative can look like in the twenty-first century.

iv.2.2 The Rejection of *Bildung* in *Ellbogen*

Ellbogen represents a paradox as a contemporary Bildungsroman without a discernible level of *Bildung* for its protagonist. This is because protagonists like Hazel, who are part of minoritized groups, are incompatible with the self-optimization-focused Bildungsroman. Self-optimization, as a goal for a young person to strive for, is a privilege that marginalized members of the public often do not have because they are mostly focused on survival. Lea Laura Heim, while referring to Hazel's position in society, describes that "exclusion and oppression significantly restrict Hazel's chances in life" (173), which can be related to her *Bildungs*-journey as well. *Ellbogen* can be read as a statement on the still-present difficulties of existence for postmigrant subjects in German society. Hazel, being a young person with a migration background who is prevented from achieving *Bildung* or closure, shows that the Bildungsroman in the traditional sense only really works with German protagonists who have some level of privilege in society. Helen's ability to manipulate her journey in a way in which she achieves *Bildung* to a certain degree is partly the result of the space she is given in fighting for agency during her journey. Hazel, in contrast, is not given this space as a result of her position in society.¹⁵ Her entire life is influenced by external factors, either through her background, family, or friends, to name a few. The same can be said about her choice of staying in Istanbul; while it appears to be a choice that she voluntarily makes, it is guided by the inability to return to Germany for fear of getting arrested, similar to the reasoning for going to Istanbul in the first place. One of the constants in the novel is Hazel's awareness of the disadvantages she is subjected to: "Wegen der Ellbogen, die uns das Leben reingerammt hat, immer wieder, und immer noch. Überall nur Ellbogen von

¹⁵ Hazel describes the murder as having given her some level of agency over her future, stating: "Und nach der Nacht war alles plötzlich anders. Vielleicht nur für ein paar Tage, aber es hat sich so angefühlt, als sei nicht schon jeder Stein auf meinem Weg vorherbestimmt. Als gäbe es da einfach noch eine andere Möglichkeit vor mir" (245).

denen, die stärker sind als wir” (Aydemir 237). These ‘Ellbogen’ signify the experiences Hazal has with people such as the store detective and the club doorman who treat people like her unfairly because of their background. These characters represent the rhetoric in German society which remains prejudiced against people who are not considered part of the majority. In an unexpected way, Helen’s realization about the disadvantages she experiences in society brings forth Hirsch’s description of the endings of traditional Bildungsromane: “each novel ends with a precise stand on his part, with *his assessment of himself and his place in society*” (298; emphasis in original).

Mehmet’s story acts as another example of the difficult experiences of German-born people who are considered not German ‘enough’ and the effects which this can have. His story shows the instances of postmigrant subjects being explicitly excluded from society for actions that white Germans would often receive more leniency for. Mehmet’s experience is described by Hazal:

Er nannte es ein »Missverständnis des Universums«, dass er in Deutschland geboren worden war, als Mehmet. Weil da gar kein Platz war für ihn. Weil alle Stühle besetzt und alle Lücken ausgefüllt waren. Keine Jobs, keine Kohle, nur unerträgliches Gelaber bei irgendwelchen Behörden. (Aydemir 113)

This articulates an experience similar to Hazal’s, which may help explain why the two initially got along so well. Mehmet is an example of the road Hazal is also headed on, as a result of the unfeasibility of *Bildung* for them.¹⁶

¹⁶ When considering Mehmet’s life in Istanbul, one has to wonder if it serves as a productive account of an alternative type of *Bildung*. Whereas he does seemingly have a somewhat stable life, job, and place of residence, as is noted by Hazal – he seems to be coasting through life and consistently living under the influence of drugs.

In analyzing *Ellbogen* through a Bildungsroman lens with consideration of the historical context of the genre within German society, it soon becomes apparent why the Bildungsroman does not work for protagonists who are marginalized in society. The notion of *Bildung* was not developed with diverse demographics in mind, but shaped for the aristocratic, bourgeois, mostly male, and otherwise privileged groups. Kyung-Ho Cha further describes that the historical Bildungsroman “represents a society from which the protagonist, who is not a privileged bourgeois subject, is excluded [with the] traditional idea of education [not including] the postmigrant experience” (135), additionally the female postmigrant subject more specifically “[experiencing] discrimination because of her gender, race and social background” (135). This substantiates the previously mentioned weight that the societal disadvantages have on Hazel and the role they play in slowing down her maturation journey. Postmigrant subjects inherently subvert the Bildungsroman because of their exclusion from the notion and processes of gaining *Bildung*, but also because the core idea of a completed *Bildungs*-journey includes the return and reintegration into the protagonists’ original society. Hazel cannot be expected to reintegrate into a society in which she never truly belonged and which was actively trying to push her away her entire life. Aydemir’s choice of the Bildungsroman for Hazel’s story, in which the main ending is established through the rejection of reintegration into German society, reinforces the postmigrant elements of the story and constitutes “a deintegrative rewriting of the genre” (Heim 168).

Some scholars argue that Hazel does have a conclusive ending, noting:

Ihre bisherige Naivität ist gewichen, die Wut kanalisiert und in positive Energie umgewandelt. Sie ist buchstäblich nicht länger „Opfer“, die gängige Bezeichnung für schwache, herumgeschubste, „gemobbte“ Personen, sondern „Täterin“, nicht nur

wörtlich, sondern auch in dem Sinne, dass sie ab nun ihr Leben tatkräftig in die Hand nehmen will. (Galter 65-66)

Although such arguments can be considered suitable, at least in terms of Hazal's transformation from 'victim' to 'perpetrator,' the confidence in Hazal having changed to this extent is arguably a different case. Hazal's very rejection of return with her aunt demonstrates that she is still unable to accept her faults as a person. During the conversation with her aunt, Hazal declares "mich interessiert das nicht, dass er tot ist. Echt nicht. [...] Mir tut es überhaupt nicht leid. Wenn ich die Sache wieder erleben würde, würde ich es vielleicht nicht wiederholen. Weil der Typ uns das Leben versaut hat, uns aller dreien. Aber nur deswegen" (Aydemir 244). In this moment, the way in which Hazal is clinging on to a feigned level of conviction to persuade both her aunt and herself that Thorsten had deserved to die, underscores that she has neither overcome her naivete nor channeled her anger into productive endeavours. The illusion of an escape that Hazal had upon arrival in Istanbul has disappeared, and now, especially after the coup attempt, she is confronted with the potential reality of never again being able to leave the country. Only after realizing that she is also a type of prisoner within Istanbul, Hazal, for the first time in a while, considers her incarcerated friends as a means of having someone she can relate to:

Ich denke an sie und an Gül und an Elma, und vielleicht fühlen wir alle ja dasselbe, vielleicht bin ich doch nicht ganz allein, vielleicht sind wir irgendwie miteinander verbunden. [...] Und ich, ich sitze ja auch in einer Zelle wie Gül und Elma, nur dass meine viel größer ist. (251)

This statement acts as a characteristically Hazal-like declaration, equating her experience of being 'imprisoned' in a city as large as Istanbul to her friends' literal imprisonment and awaiting consequences for a murder largely of Hazal's own doing. Hazal is, until the very end of the

novel, caught in-between immaturity and growth, reason and impulsivity, which clouds the possibility of any consistent progress.

In conclusion, Aydemir's playing with genre conventions of the Bildungsroman, and the ultimate rejection of these, create an unpredictable reading experience and understanding of the protagonist. Although Hazal fails to achieve *Bildung* in the traditional sense, the way in which she smiles to herself in the last sentence of the novel demonstrates that, in her own considerations, she arguably seems to be content. In terms of contemporary Bildungsroman iterations, the reimagination aspect portrayed in *Ellbogen* is only one layer within the overall statement being made about Germany as a postmigrant society. Hazal's story, along with the others shown in the novel, represents the often-ignored members of German society and allows for critical discourse regarding belonging and non-belonging in the twenty-first century. Aydemir utilizes a genre with a longstanding reputation and historical ties to German *Leitkultur* to challenge its own structures from a postmigrant perspective. Texts such as *Ellbogen* and *Ausser sich*, which follows in the next chapter, are tools with which critical discussions of societal structures are being encouraged.

v. *Ausser sich*

Sasha Marianna Salzmann's debut novel *Ausser sich* (2017) uniquely reimagines the Bildungsroman by diversifying the structure of a coming-of-age narrative and centering the protagonists' family history to highlight its influence on their formative journey. *Ausser sich* was well received upon its release and praised for the representations of gender transitioning, generational trauma, and the influence of heritage on a person's identity.¹⁷

The reimaginings apparent in *Ausser sich* place the novel between the two previously analyzed texts by portraying new approaches to traditional genre tropes, such as the transcension of narrative boundaries, and by including themes not seen before in this genre, such as gender transitioning. *Ausser sich* invites the reader to join protagonist Ali's search for their brother and their identity throughout their journey. Similar to *Ellbogen*, *Ausser sich* contains a fictionalized autobiographical layer resulting from the protagonist and Salzmann sharing a few similar characteristics, creating additional nuance for the story and protagonist's struggles.

One of these autobiographical aspects is the gender identity and gender struggles of Ali, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Like Ali, Salzmann is a non-binary person themselves and is arguably able to provide a more descriptive insight into Ali's struggles with their gender identity and dysphoria than an author who is cis gender. *Ausser sich* is the only novel featured in this thesis in which there are representations of queer bodies, non-cis gender identities, and non-heterosexual relationships. This is a reimagination of the heteronormative narratives that are most commonly present in historical iterations of the Bildungsroman, as well

¹⁷ Examples of scholarly response include: "*Ausser sich* reads as a commentary to transformative experiences" (Albiero 57); it "re-negotiates identity by imagining subjectivity as formed via multiple attachments and as fundamentally mutable" (Jochens 270); "Salzmann's queer, German Jewish stance provides an opportunity to recalibrate established discourses on minority (writing)" (Roca Lizarazu 2), and "Salzmann's novel offers a productive platform for articulating these new queer in/human realities, taking readers to where laws fail" (Albé 233), to name but a few.

as an expansion of contemporary novels since the extent of Ali's queerness and their relationships is central for the entire storyline.

The protagonist Alissa – Ali¹⁸ was born in Russia and emigrated to Germany in the mid-1990s as part of the *Kontingentflüchtling* wave. This was a unique wave of immigration in which “Deutschland den Juden aus Ländern der ehemaligen Sowjetunion [importierte], um die ein halbes Jahrhundert zuvor entstandenen Lücken zu füllen, und gab ihm das Prädikat »Kontingentflüchtling«” (Salzmann, “Sichtbar” 23). As a result of this, “more than 90 percent of the Jews in Germany now stem from the former Soviet Union” (Stone 59). This is an aspect of Ali's identity inspired by the author's own experiences, having been part of this wave of emigration themselves in their youth.

Ausser sich, at its core, portrays Ali's journey in looking for their twin brother Anton who runs away to Istanbul. Ali's journey to Istanbul initiates their *Bildungs*-journey, which implicates various aspects of the protagonist's familial relationships. The novel follows Ali's family history throughout four generations (the parents, Valja and Kostja, maternal grandparents, Emma and Danja, and maternal great-grandparents, Etja and Schura) which helps Ali piece together their own identity. Furthermore, the scenes in which Ali learns about the various antisemitic and abusive experiences their relatives were subjected to throughout their lives, help Ali better understand the instances in which they were a victim of such attacks themselves. These insights into the family history “[cover] the entire history of the Soviet Union and its impact on the Jewish population” (Buehler-Dietrich 5), ranging from family members' experiences of being

¹⁸ Alissa is the given name of the protagonist Ali, used mainly by their parents. Ali refers to themselves with the shortened version of the name, which will also be used in this thesis. Additionally, this thesis is going to utilize the pronouns they/them for Ali because their pronouns change alongside their gender identity throughout the novel. Most of the scholars writing on this novel have their own preference for Ali's name and pronouns, which is why their usage in secondary literature quotes may differ.

university students, practicing medicine, being married and divorced, city-life compared to country-life, and living as a Jewish person in the context of the Soviet Union.

The temporal setting of the novel, taking place between 2013 and 2016 in Istanbul, is one of the few exact dates that are provided. This is only apparent because Anton describes being present at the 2013 protests in Gezi Park¹⁹ in the chapters told from his perspective, and through Ali who experiences the 2016 coup attempt which occurs near the end of the novel. Other timelines can be deduced due to contextual clues; however, no explicit information is given. Most of the family members encounter some sort of political unrest during their lives which directly affect them, reinforcing the “continuities of oppression through forced normalization and violence against those marked as Others” (Balling 102). This reconfirms the historical Bildungsroman’s “intrinsically political” (Kontje 10) nature within contemporary texts as well.

The novel’s structure heavily affects the portrayal of Ali and their family members’ stories and eschews the typical chronological approach of a Bildungsroman. While Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey and search for Anton remain the focus of the novel, the storyline gets interrupted with various chapters in which Ali learns about and ponders upon the stories they hear from family members. The novel alternates between the present and the many pasts which transport the reader through about a century-long period of family history. Whereas each parent has a dedicated chapter and the two sets of grandparents have shared chapters that are focalized through Ali, Anton becomes the homodiegetic narrator for three entire chapters. Apart from Anton’s chapters, the narrative voice throughout the story is an “allwissende Erzählinstanz in der dritten Person [welche immer wieder] von einer autodiegetischen Erzählinstanz unterbrochen

¹⁹ The protests in Gezi Park were attempts of resisting the “planned conversion of Gezi Park into a shopping complex” (Britannica Editors, “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”) which evolved into larger-scale protests and resistance to President Erdoğan’s rule in Turkey.

[wird]” (Goggio 27). Furthermore, Annette Buehler-Dietrich describes the structure of *Ausser sich* as allowing “plot elements to be assembled according to contiguity instead of chronology, to reoccur across long timespans and to appear without notice” (13). This is a direct reimagination of the “sequential and chronological” (Hirsch 305) historical Bildungsroman which remains close to, and dependent on, the protagonist’s natural development. The sporadic appearance of themes, which Ali reflects on throughout the novel, often feels as if a random memory is recalled in the moment, thus mimicking natural thinking processes. In these passages, the reader is taken alongside Ali and explores these themes and processes following their lead. The unpredictable instances of memories, however, can also be explained through the grief and trauma that Ali is trying to process throughout the story, making them an unreliable narrator and resulting in audiences “[not being able to] determine for certain which components of the story have been invented” (Roca Lizarazu 9) and which have not. *Ausser sich*, in comparison to both *Feuchtgebiete* and *Ellbogen*, modifies the structural aspects of the genre the most, in terms of the non-chronological sequence of events and the unique narratological aspects.

The relevance of family relationships and history for Ali’s coming-of-age is apparent not only because family members have chapters dedicated to their experiences, but also because the most impactful changes for Ali’s identity and understanding of the world occur after Ali’s conversations with their mother. Due to the relevance of the “Valja” chapter and the ever-present themes of family in the novel, one could label *Ausser sich* a family novel. However, Maria Roca Lizarazu outlines that “[*Ausser sich* is a] deliberation on the failure of the family novel [which explains] the novel’s lack of a clear chronology, of linear connections between cause and effect, or of an authoritative story that is more than merely one possible version of events” (10). Put differently, while Salzmann plays with aspects of the family novel, *Ausser sich* at its core

remains a Bildungsroman, with its reimaginings expanding the genre into one that can include various narratological and structural types of narratives.

This chapter analyzes the reimaginings of the Bildungsroman found in *Ausser sich* by looking at the way in which the *Bildungs*-journey and the conclusion thereof are portrayed. The *Bildungs*-journey section will look at Ali's coming-of-age and travels to Istanbul, the initial confrontations with their identity, the search for (and relationship to) Anton, and family history. The conclusion section will look at Ali's choice of staying in Istanbul, their new understanding of their gender identity, chosen family, and the stopping of the search for Anton.

v.1 *Ausser sich* Bildungs-journey

For an analysis of Ali's *Bildungs*-journey to be comprehensive, Ali's background before their journey ought to be outlined. Similar to how *Ausser sich* reimagines various tropes of the Bildungsroman, Ali's background is also partly reimagined and fitting of a historical protagonist. Before their journey, Ali is a typical Bildungsroman protagonist who is young and dissatisfied with their life. Ali is very unhappy because of the constant disadvantages they experience as a result of their Jewish background. Before the family's move to Germany, Ali experienced antisemitism and was looked down upon for being Jewish, which does not change following the move. In addition to being exposed to antisemitism, in Germany Ali is increasingly targeted because of their Russian background. The German citizenship Ali gains through the *Kontingentflüchtling* status is an aspect of their background that lies between the reimagination and the expectation for a protagonist. This is because, even though Ali is technically German, they were not born in Germany and do not quite identify with this nationality. Analogous to Hazel, Ali can be read as a postmigrant subject, a lens through which they question their place in

the world and the society in which they belong. Just like in *Ellbogen*, Ali being a postmigrant subject affects their *Bildungs*-journey and the “fluidity of the narrative and its text” (Albiero 61). Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey is not heavily focused on the search for their place in society, but more so on their gender identity exploration, personal fulfilment, and coming to terms with their family’s migration to Germany. Ali’s background reimagines the historical protagonists’ characteristics and, in so doing, provides a glimpse into the concepts they will struggle with during their journey.

Another crucial aspect of Ali’s identity and their journey is Ali’s relationship to Anton. The relationship between the twins is one of the biggest mysteries of this novel because it causes Anton²⁰ to run away, with his motivation only being revealed near the end of the story. Ali’s love for Anton is the reason why they leave everything and travel to Istanbul to look for him without hesitation. Since the journey to Istanbul also marks the beginning of Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey, this reimagines the self-motivation aspect a protagonist typically has for their coming-of-age. The start of Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey is defined by Anton, similarly to how their identity had been defined by Anton their entire life. Through the portrayal of Ali’s dependence on Anton for their understanding of their identity, hints of the other family members’ relevance are also visible from the very beginning of the novel, such as Ali’s interests in boxing (similar to Danja), and in life-stories (similar to Schura). The unpredictability in terms of which aspects of Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey are going to be reimagined, and which are not, is an aspect of the novel that keeps readers intrigued by Ali’s journey. The approach to the genre reimaginings in *Ausser sich* portrays the possibilities for contemporary coming-of-age narratives.

²⁰ Some scholars believe Anton does not really exist, arguing “Anton sei nichts als eine Wunschphantasie, ein Alter Ego der Hauptfigur” (Goggio 24).

v.1.1 Istanbul as Ali's Playground

The physical journey that Ali undertakes in order to find Anton motivates their *Bildungs*-journey and establishes that these two are not separable from one another. Istanbul becomes an actor of its own during Ali's journey and creates the space needed for them to explore their identity. Ali's decision to travel to Istanbul in search of Anton further highlights the closeness of the twins' relationship and the effect their brother's disappearance has on Ali. Anton reveals his location by sending a blank postcard of Istanbul to Valja, who calls Ali to share the news. Upon seeing the postcard, Ali is shocked to the point of hearing loss: "Ali hörte nicht, was die Verwandten sagten, sie hörte nicht mal, was Valja sagte, sie sah nur ihr Gesicht auf stumm gestellt [...]" Zuerst war es nur ein Druck im linken Ohr, dann breitete er sich aus, ging unter ihrer Stirn auf wie eine Blume und platzte" (Salzmann 97). The physical manifestation of the shock of Anton's disappearance introduces the "bodily fragmentation[s]" (Balling 106) that accompany Ali throughout this novel, in which Ali's sense of shock, grief, and trauma present themselves in mental and physical ways. The Istanbul postcard marks the beginning of Ali's *Bildungs*-journey as the introduction of the new society in which Ali is going to explore their identity. This reimagines the "humanistic ideal [...] of self-cultivation" (Mendes-Flohr 26) which is meant to motivate such journeys in the historical Bildungsroman, because Ali's journey is not motivated by a personal wish for *Bildung*, but by the search for Anton.

The significance of Istanbul as the location for Ali's *Bildungs*-journey is characterised by different reasons compared to Hazal's since Ali does not have Turkish heritage or particular ties to Turkey. Ali experiences Istanbul supposedly without any prior knowledge and with a fresh perspective, noticing already at the airport, the diversity the city represents:

Die ganze Welt stand hier Schlange. Miniröcke, Burkas, Schnurrbärte in allen Schnitten und Farben, Sonnenbrillen in allen Größen, aufgespritzte Lippen in allen Formen, Kinder in Kinderwagen, Kinder auf dem Rücken [...] die Menge hielt Ali von beiden Seiten fest umschlossen, so dass sie nicht umfallen konnte. (Salzmann 14)

Istanbul represents a novelty for Ali within which they can focus on the things that matter to them in that moment. Ali's confidence in finding Anton in a city of about fifteen million people, without any sort of leads represents the connection between the twins and the "Unvereinbarkeit und zugleich unüberwindbare Interdependenz" (Goggio 23) which defines their relationship.

As an actor in Ali's journey, Istanbul is in and of itself portrayed in a way which makes the city appear to readers as if they are walking down the streets alongside Ali. Visual details, scents, weather, and inanimate objects are described and interwoven into Ali's personal thoughts. The level of detail can, in large part, be attributed to Salzmann's residing in Istanbul while writing *Ausser sich*, and therefore being able to create the world they see in the text they write.²¹ Robert Tally Jr. describes the approach to narrative world-making where authors "weave together disparate elements in order to produce the narrative, [these may include] descriptions of people or places, images derived from first-hand observation as well as from secondary reports, legends, myths, and inventions of the imagination" (49). These layers create an engaging portrayal of Istanbul which stimulates the imagination of the reader. Istanbul, because of its geographical location and sociopolitical context, encourages the blurring of the lines of Ali's identity, because "the Turkish city offers a liminal site that seems

²¹ Salzmann describes residing in Istanbul and being a fellow at Tarabya Academy while working on *Ausser sich* ("Where I Come From"), and it being their love for Istanbul which caused them to write prose for the first time ("Interview with Sasha Marianna Salzmann").

particularly ready to host queer in/humanism, where dividing lines [...] between humans and non-humans begin to fade” (Albé 239). Ali greatly benefits from this novel environment and the space which it provides for their identity exploration.

Whereas Ali’s family has travelled from Russia to Germany, this is Ali’s first time embarking on a border crossing on their own. Ali’s experience throughout this novel is characterized by border crossings of various kinds. On the one hand, the geographical journey to Istanbul marks a physical border crossing for Ali; on the other hand, the *Bildungs*-journey constitutes a different type of border crossing, namely to maturation. These crossings are tied to one another and represent the inherent dynamic core that is present in most events of Ali’s life. Similar to the fluidity of their identity and relationship with Anton, Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey is characterized as “dynamisch, [fließend, und intersektional erfasst]” (Goggio 22). The only way Ali could begin their *Bildungs*-journey is by embarking on this journey on their own, to a new place, “eine Stadt voller Widersprüche und Möglichkeiten der Grenzüberschreitung” (Lamberti 6). This aspect of Istanbul is also evident in the temporal context of the novel. The significance of placing Ali and Anton in Istanbul during periods of heightened political unrest underlines the political themes of the text, aligning it with the broader historical genre themes. The brewing political tensions in Istanbul are brought to Ali’s attention a few times throughout the novel, such as when their best friend Elyas’ uncle Cemal warns them about the potential dangers for a young person: “die ganzen Roma und die Kurden und die Transvestiten, und die ganze Welt ist böse, weißt du doch” (Salzmann 19). These scenes portray a transformative time for the people in Istanbul as well as the characters in the novel. Whereas Ali was not in Istanbul during the Gezi Park protests, Anton, his partner Aglaja, and Ali’s partner Katho all were, and presumably at the time of the coup attempt as

well. This underlines the inescapability of the political existence of young people in contemporary times and creates a community where the focus is “the fight for freedom and against oppression” (Buehler-Dietrich 14). Since one of Ali’s major activities after moving out of their parents’ apartment is their involvement in the political group ‘Schwarzer Kater’ in Berlin, it can be deduced that Ali’s own identity development is tied to their fighting against oppression. This further motivates their *Bildungs*-journey and creates a more understanding perception of their family as they fought similar battles, signifying a joint fight for freedom that stretches across generations.

v.1.2 Multitudes of Belonging and Ali’s Exploration of their Identity

As previously mentioned, Ali’s close relationship to their brother Anton influences their journeys to Istanbul and towards *Bildung*; however, soon after arriving there, Ali begins to be haunted by the complexities of the twins’ relationship. These feelings demonstrate that their bond may not have been as healthy as it initially seemed, while also alluding to the fact that Anton’s role within Ali’s continued identity exploration will remain significant. This manifests itself in a few different ways, namely in Ali being forced to figure out which part of their identity is really their own, how to exist as an individual, but also Ali starting to realize their fear of finding Anton. While these aspects are partly connected to the development of Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey, they are also limiting their full exploration of the society in Istanbul and encounter with new people and experiences. In a similar fashion, a further straying away of Ali’s from the historical protagonists’ identity at the beginning of a *Bildungs*-journey is the “precise values, standards, and expectations” (Hirsch 301) which they are meant to have internalized before being able to truly explore society and their identity. Ali does not quite

have these values formed because they have been existing alongside Anton for most of their life. The only time Ali had begun forming their own values was after moving to Berlin following their parents' divorce, which is when they became depressed and consequently avoided going out. In order for Ali to fully embrace their *Bildungs*-journey in Istanbul, they have to first get past the hurdle of the complicated twin relationship. This section will therefore approach the twin aspect of Ali's identity first before going deeper into Ali's own developmental journey.

The twin motif in *Ausser sich* is an aspect which fits the blurring of lines between the human and non-human that can be seen during Ali's time in Istanbul. This manifests itself in various ways for Ali, and acts as a sort of guide for their identity exploration, since Ali is aware of these moments and tends to evaluate their meaning themselves. Brief insights showing the effect this has on Ali are provided with frequent episodes in which they are haunted by a chicken taste in their throat, symbolizing a trauma response from their childhood. Such instances demonstrate that Ali is involved in a non-human realm, facing their identity exploration from an abstract perspective, even more in Istanbul. During the first outing of Ali's to a club with Uncle Cemal's friend, Ali sees Anton's reflection in the mirror first as a separate person: "Ali schaute in Antons Gesicht neben sich und lächelte, und Anton lächelte in exakter Spiegelung zurück" (Salzmann 35), and a few scenes later as Ali's own reflection: "[Ali] schaute noch mal im Spiegel nach. Anton schaute böse zurück" (38). These moments symbolize Ali's own insecurity in their identity and perhaps the fear of being truly separated from Anton for good. Francesco Albé argues that these episodes suggest Anton to be Ali's Other in Lacanian terms (240), thus furthering the themes of (non)humanisms in this novel

and alluding to the discussions that perhaps Anton does not exist, or that he only exists as an entity within Ali.

During their childhood, the twins were inseparable with Ali typically following Anton's lead during the most difficult moments, such as during their first years in Germany: "Ali orientierte sich an Anton. Wenn er anfing zu packen, fing sie auch an zu packen, wenn er anfing, rumzuschreien, brüllte sie auch los" (Salzmann 103). This codependence is noticed by their classmates: "Die anderen Kinder hatten Angst vor den Zwillingen, hatten Angst vor der Bestimmtheit, mit der sie aufeinander losgingen" (104). During their lives until this point, they "[formed] a unity against others" (Buehler-Dietrich 7), and this joint presence is all Ali has known. The effects of this hyperdependency are showing themselves to Ali to the point where they become disillusioned with their existence and fall into a depressive phase with Anton being gone. Perhaps to find comfort from these insecurities, Ali remains in the realm of non-humanism and begins to fantasize about "subjective decomposition" (Roca Lizarazu 9) where they are being eaten by bedbugs: "Sie wachte gegen acht auf mit immer größer werdenden roten, juckenden Punkten an den Unterarmen und im Gesicht" (Salzmann 19), which escalates to them imagining the bedbugs sucking the blood out of them entirely: "Sie drückte sich in das Sofapolster, versuchte, so tief einzutauchen, wie es nur ging, und redete den Wanzen zu, sie mögen sie vollends aussaugen und nichts von ihr zurücklassen" (20). This crisis, during which Ali wishes to disappear, is merely a transitional stage to the identity exploration that commences once they feel more comfortable in Istanbul. The delay to Ali's *Bildungs*-journey is not typically seen in historical Bildungsromane and creates a reimagined sort of introductory space in which the reader is able to truly get to know Ali and their struggles before accompanying them through their coming-of-age. Once Ali begins meeting

new people in the new environment of Istanbul, they become curious about other ways of life and begin creating a new sense of self.

The identity exploration which Ali undergoes as part of their *Bildungs*-journey begins with, and is greatly influenced by, their love interest, Katho. Katho was born Katüscha and has started his transition not long before meeting Ali. Ali injects Katho with testosterone soon after they begin their relationship, with Katho explaining his life before coming to Istanbul and the impact that his transition is going to have on his job as a dancer. Gender identity is an aspect of Ali which has caused them to remain in a sort of limbo, unable to mature any further and leaving them stuck in a period of self-destructive behaviour since their time in Berlin. The gender identity portrayed by Katho, shows Ali the possibilities of existence in a gender nonconforming body, as well as the existence of trans bodies. After Katho comes out to Ali, the chicken taste appears again in their throat, signifying an anxiety-ridden feeling (Salzmann 45-51). By that point, Ali had already changed their appearance significantly: “Sie sah nicht mehr so aus wie auf dem Passfoto, die Haare waren ab, und auch sonst hatte sich einiges in ihrem Gesicht verändert” (15). However, transitioning seemed to be far from a possibility. Ali is still dealing with familial and societal expectations as to what they should look like, as shown by a conversation with Valja: “»Und was ist, wenn ich keine Frau bin?« »Was bist du dann, ein Elefant?«” (89) where their dysphoria was dismissed as being something unserious. Katho represents the first person with whom Ali can feel safe in exploring other variations in gender expression beyond the heteronormative binary. The role of Katho in broadening Ali’s horizons is one which would be present in a historical Bildungsroman, typically in a character who is some sort of mentor to the protagonist. The protagonist is expected to be guided by, and to learn from, the mentor’s experiences. The broadening of horizons demonstrated by Katho is

paired with dangerous encounters, namely with Katho being attacked in the club, presumably due to their increasingly masculine appearance. This shows Ali that the existence in a gender nonconforming body can result in being a target of violence, something Ali has experience with, albeit for different reasons. The insights Ali gains through Katho leave a lasting mark on them and further the identity search of their *Bildungs*-journey, fundamentally changing their understanding of who they want to be as a mature person.

Furthermore, an element of Ali's *Bildungs*-journey identity exploration which also causes them significant unease is their national identity and relationship to languages. Although Ali can be considered a postmigrant subject like Hazal, their experiences within this realm vary significantly. Not only are their experiences different as a result of their appearances, religions, gender identities, sexual orientations, and the sociocultural connotations of a Turkish versus a Russian background, they also differ in the way each character sees themselves in the context of German society. Ali, along with their family, is suffering from the effects of their migration to Germany. For Ali, this manifests itself in the reappearing phantom chicken taste which initially occurs on the very day the family moves to Germany. Ali and Anton had eaten chicken that they could not properly digest, which Ali ended up vomiting on their uncle upon arrival at a German train station. This chicken-flavoured trauma response characterizes something that Ali as a young person can "literally not digest, a loss that it cannot acknowledge because there was no time and space to process it. [This response] reflects the disorientation and disempowerment that accompany [the] forced migration" (Roca Lizarazu 5) of Ali's family. This seems to have been a decision made quickly, with Ali emphasizing, "ob man wollte, wurde nicht gefragt" (Salzmann 53). Ali's anxiety and disillusionment with their life in Germany is amplified by the effects that

migration has on their parents, Valja and Kostja. They are both so heavily affected by their new German life that they decide to divorce, marking the start of the fracture in the family's relationships. Following the divorce, Kostja falls into a deep depression and desperately wants to move back to Russia. Ali describes that Kostja "[nicht wusste], dass es so etwas wie ein Zurückgehen nicht gab" (253), which leads to Kostja's suicide and Valja's ominous statement to Ali in which "[sie sagte], Migration tötet, es klang wie eine Warnung auf einer Zigarettenschachtel" (297). These events culminate in Ali expressing to Valja how unhappy they are in their life and Germany:

Ich bin nicht wie du, ich bin kein Tier, das vor sich hin grast und alles hinnimmt, wie es kommt. Ich will nichts von diesem Leben, in dem es alles gibt, aber niemand etwas will. Ich will nichts von diesem Schnickschnak, den ihr für die Erfüllung eures Lebens haltet, weil ihr sonst nichts habt, woran ihr glauben könnt. (118)

With this explosive declaration, Ali's disillusionment with life in Germany portrays a different type of postmigrant experience than Hazal's. Whereas Hazal's dissatisfaction results in outward violence, Ali has a more inward effect, which lands them in the above-mentioned depressive state in Berlin, from which only Anton's disappearance can rescue them. In a similar manner, *Ausser sich* provides a commentary on 'Germanness' like *Ellbogen*, albeit with different outcomes. Whereas Hazal arguably remains afraid of Germany and the potential consequences of going back, Ali takes their migration experiences and applies them elsewhere with their move to Istanbul, giving themselves agency by making their own migration decision.

Even in Istanbul, however, Ali cannot escape their struggles with their Russian-German identity. In Istanbul this reveals itself through Ali's relationship with languages. Multiple times throughout the novel and usually when talking about family history, Ali

declares their distrust of the Russian language: “ich misstraute der bildreichen Sprache, in der er erzählte, weil ich meiner Muttersprache grundsätzlich misstraue” (167). However, even with Ali being of this opinion, in moments they yearn for Russian, even if ironically, “[d]ie Lücken füllte Ali stumm im Kopf und wünschte sich die Zeiten zurück, in denen sie noch kein Türkisch konnte. Und auch kein Deutsch. Sie fragte sich, ob es nicht einfacher wäre, verblödet und sprachlos in Russland zu sitzen und Lieblingslieder auf den Präsidenten zu singen” (29). This statement demonstrates another aspect of life as a postmigrant subject; Ali is simply not able to exist with the understanding and usage of only one language. While this at times manifests itself negatively for Ali who wishes for an anchoring linguistic identity “[d]ass Ali keine Sprache hat, um sich selbst zu benennen, akzentuiert ihre Desidentifikation” (Lamberti 12) it also “reinforces the rejection of fixed notions and expectations about the self” (Albiero 66). Ali’s kaleidoscopic relationship with languages reflects their relationship with their own identity which emphasizes that Ali is a fluid being who is not definable by just one language or nationality.

Ali’s exploration of their identity reimagines the traditional *Bildungs*-journey because of the wide variety of discourses that make up Ali’s being. The journey that Ali undergoes is not so much about their place in society and how they will fit into society after their *Bildungs*-journey is over, but it is more about their gender identity exploration, their own personal fulfilment, and their coming to terms with their family’s migration to Germany, which seemingly haunts every member of the family. The inclusion of gender identity as a key aspect of Ali’s being is a contemporary phenomenon that would not have been possible in the historical Bildungsroman because of its non-heteronormativity, but also because such terminology had not yet existed. The fact that Ali is being shown how queer bodies can exist

and how transitioning can work in a positive manner is also something that would not have been possible even a few decades ago, signifying the contemporaneity of the discourses in *Ausser sich*. The themes of forced migration, not-belonging/identifying with a national identity, and the dissatisfaction with life in Germany are themes which would not have been included in the historical Bildungsroman due to the sociopolitical context of the times in which pride in Germany was a key aspect of literature. The graphic descriptions of how unhappy Ali's family is in Germany is only possible due to the discourses created by postmigration, which create a space for the portrayal of negative migration experiences.

v.1.3 Family History, Farewell to Anton, and the Finalization of Formation

The final aspect which influences Ali's *Bildungs*-journey is their family history. The chapters dedicated to family members are dispersed throughout the novel between the chapters of Ali's journey in Istanbul. This structure allows for the gradual reveal of the family history and mirrors how Ali themselves learn about it. The sheer scope of the family history signifies the relevance it has on Ali's identity, as well as their relationships with the family members who are alive in the present. The family history is not separable from Ali's *Bildungs*-journey and is an aspect that they have to come to terms with before being able to truly begin their adult life. Put differently, Ali needs to critically engage with who their family members were to figure out who Ali themselves want to become as a mature person. In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk.de*, Salzmann states that their path to writing *Ausser sich* began with the family history: "Ich muss wissen, wo ich herkomme, um zu wissen, wo ich hinrenne. Und dann habe ich gedacht: OK, Ali, dann müssen wir jetzt eben deine Familiengeschichte aufarbeiten" (Schröder, "Wenn sich das Ich auflöst"). The exploration of family history is one

of the only constants in Ali's *Bildungs*-journey and anchors them throughout the novel, since the other elements explored are temporary, including the search for Anton, and Ali's own identity.

The "continuities of oppression" (Balling 102) demonstrated through the layers of Ali's family history are, most frequently, represented through the antisemitism experienced by this Jewish family throughout the century. This is not the only type of oppression outlined, however, as there are also themes of domestic and sexual violence, misogyny, and the Second World War that plague the family history. Each of these experiences of marginalization and the trauma that undeniably results for the family, in some way relate back to Ali, thus manifesting as generational trauma. In learning about the marginalization that their family members had gone through, Ali is pushed to consider their own understanding of these experiences and their impact on the family members.

The family memories passed down to Ali are a crucial part of their identity building during their *Bildungs*-journey. Salzmann highlights the relevance of memory for *Ausser sich*, stating: "Ich habe so ein vages Gefühl, dass Erinnerung das zentrale Thema des Romans ist. Das Umschreiben von Erinnerung, diese Fetzen, die angeblich etwas Ganzes ergeben sollten, was unmöglich ist" (Schröder, "Wenn sich das Ich auflöst"). Most of these traumatic events happened before Ali was born, placing Ali in Marianne Hirsch's generation of postmemory, namely the generation that comes after the occurrence of traumatic events. Members of this generation have to experience these events via first-hand accounts from their ancestors, with such accounts being "transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 107; emphasis in original). Ali's attempts at understanding the memories of their family members are complicated further due to them

being shared as ‘Fetzen’ of memories as Salzmann calls them, passed down through “hearsay, ever-changing stories and anecdotes, transmitted in an inter- and transgenerational game of Chinese whispers” (Roca Lizarazu 9). While the notion of postmemory is most commonly used in conjunction with memories of the Holocaust, in Ali’s case, the concept is connected more broadly to the family’s migration, antisemitism in the Soviet Union, Russia, the Second World War, domestic violence, mental health issues, and alcoholism. Brangwen Stone argues Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory²² to be fitting in this case as well, noting that “memories of different traumatic histories can coexist and resonate with each other” (63). The portrayal of memories in this novel demonstrates a contemporary understanding of the complexities of memory and their existence at the intersection of various historical events.

Memories and the act of remembering are also directly addressed by characters in the novel, most notably by Ali, who demonstrates a distrust of their memory: “Alis Erinnerungen legten sich aufeinander wie Folien und verrutschten. Sie ergänzten und widersprachen sich, ergaben neue Bilder, aber sie konnte sie nicht lesen, auch Kopfschütteln brachte nichts” (Salzmann 138). Ali’s struggles with their memories could be regarded as another manifestation of their trauma, with certain memories only coming to them when triggered by sight or scent of something familiar. Valja warns Ali about the danger of memories later on, stating “[d]ie Erinnerung ist ein Parasit, fang ihn dir lieber nicht ein, sonst geht es dir wie mir, kannst gar nicht aufhören” (274). The significance of family memories for Ali’s

²² Rothberg outlines multidirectional memory as “a concept meant to capture the dialogic emergence of hybrid memories in transnational and multicultural contexts” (125), while defining memory as a “dynamic process of dialogue, contestation, and exchange that renders both memories and groups hybrid, open-ended, and subject to renegotiation” (126).

understanding of their identity is made most explicit by the impact that reading Schura's personal memoirs has on Ali's sense of self:

Ich weiß nicht mehr, wie dieser Sichtwechsel kam [...] aber ich kann mich an den Zeitpunkt erinnern. Das war, als mein Urgroßvater, zwei Jahre bevor er starb, eine dünne Mappe aus seinem Sekretär zog und vor mir auf den Tisch legte. Oder nein, falsch, es war, als ich anfang, darin zu lesen. (142)

Another instance of the influence their family has on Ali's identity formation can be found in Ali's decision to begin using he/him pronouns, which occurs during the "Valja" chapter. This chapter includes a particularly revealing and emotional conversation between Ali and their mother in which they discuss difficult topics that are normally left unaddressed by the pair, such as the abuse by Kostja and the move to Germany. The relevance of family for Ali's identity exploration is palpable at all major points of their *Bildungs*-journey that are in some way tied to a family member.

In a similar fashion, the novel's structure places Anton's chapters as a divide between Ali's *Bildungs*-journey and its conclusion. It is in these chapters that the reason for Anton's running away to Istanbul is revealed, along with the reason why Ali is anxious about their relationship and about finding him. Anton's chapters uncover an incestuous encounter between the twins in Berlin, not long after Kostja's suicide. Although Ali never describes this first-hand, it is made clear that Ali knows this encounter is the reason Anton left, reminiscing in an earlier part of the novel: "Antons und ihr Körper unter dem Laken berührten sich nicht, sie starrten beide an die Decke. [...] Anton war damals gekommen, um ihr etwas zu sagen, geredet hatten sie nicht" (139). Although Ali shares doubts about finding Anton throughout the novel, it is only after his chapters that Ali argues not to have believed in the possibility of

finding Anton to begin with: “Daran hat nie wirklich jemand geglaubt” (353). At this point in Ali’s *Bildungs*-journey, this revelation gives a glimpse into their newly matured personality since maturation requires the “recognition of personal limitation [and] the pain of renunciation (*Entsagung*) constitutes an essential part” (Hirsch 301; emphasis in original). The novel’s imaginative approach to the genre is demonstrated through these aspects, with the reimaginings providing examples of flexibility within genre structures. The reimaginings portrayed in the *Bildungs*-journey of *Ausser sich* create a unique portrayal of coming-of-age in contemporary times and the various discourses which are part of it.

v.2 *Ausser sich* Conclusion

In a similar fashion to the *Bildungs*-journey portrayed in *Ausser sich*, the conclusion section of the novel reimagines the genre by combining tropes from the historical genre with contemporary plot devices. The conclusion section of *Ausser sich* can be placed in between *Feuchtgebiete* and *Ellbogen*, analogous to the *Bildungs*-journey section. *Ausser sich*’s conclusion is similar to *Feuchtgebiete* in terms of the protagonist’s personal satisfaction and growth at the end of their *Bildungs*-journey, sharing with *Ellbogen* the protagonist’s decision to remain in the new society and not return to Germany, like Hazel. The difference between Hazel’s and Ali’s identities at the end of their *Bildungs*-journeys is significant and perhaps unexpected, since both protagonists are considered postmigrant subjects.

In terms of the protagonists’ personal growth and maturation, Ali’s identity at the end of the novel displays a level of closure most befitting of the historical Bildungsroman. The characteristics of the conclusion for a Bildungsroman protagonist, as outlined by Hirsch, state “each novel ends with a precise stand on his part, with *his assessment of himself and his place*

in society” (298; emphasis in original). This is certainly the case with Ali, who emerges from their *Bildungs*-journey a much different person compared to before. The conclusion to Ali’s coming-of-age is characterized by aspects which similarly influence their *Bildungs*-journey, namely Istanbul, family, and their new gender identity. This chapter analyzes how Ali manages to overcome the questions that cause them the most worry throughout their *Bildungs*-journey and how they begin to resolve these as an accepted part of their identity.

v.2.1 Last Stop: Istanbul

The significance of Istanbul for Ali remains noticeable until the very end of the novel, with Ali’s choice of staying in the city long term. Istanbul is not merely a temporary part of Ali’s life but becomes their new home, complementing the new aspects of their identity. With the decision to stay in Istanbul, Ali’s geographical and *Bildungs*-journey comes to a conclusion. Through the society which Ali experiences in Istanbul, their horizons are widened, thus tying them to the atmosphere of the city, and the safety which Ali feels there in exploring their existence as a queer person. Earlier in the novel, when Elyas tries to convince Ali to return to Germany with him, he appears aware that he is failing because he describes the way in which “Istanbul ansteckend ist” (Salzmann 221). For the first time in their life Ali puts their own happiness first and stays in a place where they finally feel they belong. The feelings of belonging to a place have not been a part of Ali’s life until this point, as Ali only felt belonging with a person when they were with Anton. The fact that Ali did not feel a sense of belonging in Russia or in Germany is arguably because Anton served as a sort of buffer which allowed Ali to suppress their disillusionment with life in these countries, instead of confronting their feelings.

After the twins' big fight and separation in Germany, Ali's depression results in their having no sense of belonging in the world, either to a place, language, or person. This is magnified by Ali's increasing gender identity struggles and the lack of room to explore the possibilities of existence in a queer body. Istanbul becomes the anchor Ali needs in order to find a sense of belonging again. This feeling of belonging seemingly overshadows any worry that Ali may have about the political unrest they witness in Istanbul. Whereas Ali's family left Russia due to similar types of unrest in society, this does not prevent Ali from staying in Istanbul. Valja attempts to convince Ali to return to Germany to no avail, providing an outsider's perspective on the situation in Istanbul and a much needed reality-check for Ali, "[b]ei euch wird entweder gebombt oder geschossen, wo soll man da landen? [...] Es ist nirgendwo sicher da. Das verstehe ich nicht, Alissa, wie kannst du glauben, dass es mir egal ist, dass du in einem Land bist, wo ständig Bomben explodieren oder Verrückte am Flughafen hundert Menschen erschießen?" (342). While Ali surely knows that Valja is afraid for them because she has lived through similar types of unrest before, "als Anfang der neunziger Jahre Panzer auf den Roten Platz rollten" (65), this does not convince Ali to return, maintaining their rejection of Germany: "Zurückkommen, wohin zurück" (344). This disagreement between Valja and Ali is reminiscent of the disagreement between Valja and Emma about the family moving to Germany in the first place, displaying generational conflicts in the family in terms of the appropriateness of Germany as a place of residence.

A Bildungsroman protagonist's choice of remaining in the new society instead of returning to the original society is a major reimagination of the genre. This reimagined aspect is similar to Hazel's choice of not returning to Germany. Whereas Hazel's choice is influenced by judicial consequences awaiting her return, Ali's choice is purely influenced by

their own will to remain in Istanbul. This aspect is also an example of the various types of postmigrant experiences in Bildungsromane, and the differing opportunities available to postmigrant subjects. Whereas scholars such as Cha argue that postmigrant subjects simply do not fit the Bildungsroman genre, as previously outlined in the *Ellbogen* chapter, Ali demonstrates that they very much do, albeit in a more subversive way.

The historical Bildungsroman emphasizes the return to the original (German) society due to idealized portrayals and understandings of Germany. The choices made by authors such as Salzmann and Aydemir to resist these tropes for their postmigrant protagonists are arguably statements on and acts of resistance to the notion of Germany as a place of salvation and belonging more broadly, as well as resistance of the traditional German literary canon. Furthermore, Ali's reticence to reintegrate back into the German society can be considered as another example of their not being able to fit in in a place which they never truly belonged. Ali's lacking sense of belonging to either Russia or Germany can be seen as the result of their forced migration, the trauma they associate with it, and the various instances of marginalization and violence they associate with both countries. Istanbul marks a new chapter in Ali's life and a new understanding of what home means to them as a person; in this sense, a "liminal site" (Albé 239) bridging Europe and Asia and the two countries that have formed Ali's identity.

v.2.2 Influence of Family History for Ali's Understanding of their Personal Identity

The conclusion of the identity exploration part of Ali's *Bildungs*-journey is only possible after Ali comes to terms with their family history and the influence that it has on them as a person. In terms of the Bildungsroman, it is not typical that a protagonist's conclusion and maturation

outcomes are defined by factors outside of their identity explorations to the extent which can be seen in *Ausser sich*. However, as indicated with Salzmann's statement quoted above about the need for one to know where they come from in order to know where they are going, it would not have been possible for Ali to separate their family history from the person they ultimately want to become. In a similar manner, Ali would arguably not have been able to become the mature version of themselves had they continued to search for Anton.

While the admission to the unlikelihood of finding Anton does indicate maturity on Ali's part, the true test of maturity is how Ali will manage to build their new life and identity entirely separated from Anton. Whereas a reunion with Anton may at first glance be the most satisfying ending to this story from a reader's perspective, in terms of Ali's growth as a person and their becoming a mature individual, Anton's location remaining unknown is perhaps the most productive. It forces Ali to expand their horizons and to confront their insecurities about their identity. Ali decides to start taking testosterone, starts using he/him pronouns, and adopts the name Anton. They take on an entirely new gender identity, which marks their transition into maturity. Although the decision to take Anton's name is by scholars argued to be Ali's "[decision] to recreate her brother in her own body [thus becoming] Ali-Anton" (Buehler-Dietrich 4), it is still a decision which gives Ali agency as an individual, not as part of a set of twins.

The notion of postmemory is apparent in the conclusion to Ali's *Bildungs*-journey as well, resulting from Ali's need to understand their relatives' experiences. Because the experienced oppression and disadvantages from each generation of the family are being passed down to Ali, they feel more ready to share their own experiences and changes in identity. The novel demonstrates this through the chapters providing family members'

personal histories. These chapters most commonly end with a realization of Ali's within their own identity, like mentioned above. This is portrayed initially in the great-grandparents' Etja and Schura, after they reveal the antisemitic attacks which they endured in the Soviet Union, resulting in many offensive "Schmierereien" (Salzmann 180) on their house walls. After this revelation, Ali has a sudden moment of intimacy with Etja:

Wir sagten eine Weile nichts, dann nahm Etinka mein Gesicht in die Hände und fuhr mit den Daumen über die Bartstoppeln an meinem Kinn und auf der Oberlippe. Sie schaute lange in meine Augen, ich sah, wie sie versuchte, irgendwas zu verstehen.

Dann fuhr sie mir durchs Haar, streichelte meinen Nacken, stand auf, und in der langen Zeit, die sie brauchte, um aus dem Zimmer zu gehen, sah ich ihre fast hundert Jahre.

(181)

This scene portrays vulnerability and attempts of understanding the existence and lives of two people from two different generations. Ali is trying to understand the life and antisemitic experiences which Etja and Schura had gone through, and Etja is trying to understand Ali's life and the apparent changes to their body. Etja is the first person from Ali's family who does not automatically reject the corporeal signs of Ali's transition from taking testosterone but embraces them and gently tries to empathize. This moment signifies that between these two family members, there is "an understanding not only of the shared experience of oppression but also the need to fight it" (Balling 104). In Etja and Schura's case, this is the painting-over of the wall with antisemitic graffiti; and in Ali's case, it is the choice to exist in a body that does not conform to heteronormative expectations. Whereas Etja's efforts of passing the family history down to Ali are for the most part verbal, Schura reveals his memoirs to Ali immediately following this conversation between his wife and grandchild. Although these

memoirs are rather short, “[z]ehn Seiten nur” (Salzmann 181), they leave an impression on Ali, who studies Etja and Schura’s experiences and starts understanding the decisions they made from a new perspective.

In Emma and Danja’s chapter, Ali feels a similar wish to reveal parts of their new identity after hearing about their grandparents’ experiences. Ali states:

Diese distanzierten, höflichen Menschen, mit den breiten, offenen Gesichtern und den stechenden, verunsicherten Augen, mit denen ich aufgewachsen war, die ich über Politik habe weinen sehen und über die Zahlungen des Sozialstaates auf ihr Konto, hatten etwas von sich preisgegeben, hatten mir Pfade gelegt und saßen nun nackt vor mir, während ich mich fühlte, als würde ich mich verstecken hinter dem, was sie glaubten von mir zu wissen. (209)

The grandparents’ sharing of personal experiences denotes a level of vulnerability which Ali recognizes, and this encourages them to share their own most sincere feelings about their identity: “Ich wusste, ich konnte nicht verlangen, dass sie diese Geschichte verstanden, aber sie hörten mir zu, als ich ihnen von Ali erzählte und wie sie zu Anton wurde” (210). This statement is the first time in which Ali comes out to someone and mentions their transitioning and name change. The fact that they reveal it to their grandparents, instead of to Katho or Elyas, is significant because it reflects Ali’s deep need to be accepted by their family members, which is the key wish they have for their maturation. Ali shares their hopes, “ich [hoffte], dass sie mich aus meiner Entrückung wieder an sich heranziehen, mich drücken oder mich wenigstens ansehen würden” (210), defining Ali’s ultimate wish “for affective proximity and physical relation in return for her storytelling” (Buehler-Dietrich 6). The acceptance from family members helps Ali place herself in society and understand their own role within it.

Ausser sich portrays the ebbing and flowing of one's identity in relation to the experiences of those around us, and how belonging and having a home "means knowing where someone comes from through the stories their community tells" (Albiero 70). Thus, the stories told to Ali by their great-grandparents and grandparents act as supporting structures for the most influential chapters which follow.

The chapter which ultimately concludes Ali's *Bildungs*-journey is the chapter "Valja," the final one in Part One of the novel, and the direct precursor to Anton's story. While it provides insight into Valja's experiences and the answers to many mysteries such as whose idea it was to immigrate to Germany, what her and Kostja's marriage was like, her relationship with her in-laws, Ali and Anton's birth, and so on, Ali's thoughts repeatedly interrupt the storytelling and portray the personal changes that Ali is undergoing. In this scene, Ali is so overwhelmed with the information they learn, that they worry about experiencing hearing loss, similar to the shock-induced hearing loss from Anton's disappearance. To prevent this, Ali goes out of their body "[u]nd bevor etwas platzen konnte, in mir, in meinen Ohren, haute ich ab. Ich ging raus aus mir. Mein Körper blieb starr vor Valja sitzen, während ich aus mir heraussprang, nach draußen, ich war außerhalb, das Zuhören konnte mir nichts mehr anhaben" (Salzmann 263). Ali figuratively leaving their body is arguably another instance of a trauma response, with Olivia Albiero suggesting that Ali's out-of-body experiences are tied to the effects of their forced migration (69). This out-of-body experience connects to the title of the novel, *Ausser sich*, revealing that all of these stories of family history ultimately make Ali uncomfortable to the point of them being *Ausser sich*

before they are able to return and conclude their maturation.²³ Furthermore, Ali declares: “Ich dagegen fühle mich unfähig, verbindliche Aussagen zu treffen, eine Perspektive einzunehmen, eine Stimme zu entwickeln, die nur die meine wäre und für mich sprechen würde. Ein festgeschriebenes Я”²⁴ (Salzmann 275). This connects back to the aspects of non-humanism which Ali is exploring during their *Bildungs*-journey, with Albé arguing that this “queer in/human constellation [...] reorientates the ‘I’ and generates a liberating feeling, creating a new point of view” (245). However, for Ali this final expression of non-humanism also declares their crossing of the final hurdle into becoming a person who is mature and comfortable with their identity.

Valja’s final appearance in the novel occurs in the previously outlined scene in which she begs Ali to return to Germany. Although Valja does not accept Ali’s gender identity in a conclusive way, Ali finds it in them to be vulnerable with Valja for the first time, telling her: “Ich bin im Stimmbruch” (Salzmann 341). Valja ignores the remark, but Ali persists, asking “[w]illst du nicht wissen, was mit meiner Stimme ist, Mama?” (343). This stance of Ali’s is much more assertive of their identity than the last time they broached the subject with Valja, when they asked “»[u]nd was ist, wenn ich keine Frau bin?»” (89). The difference between Ali posing the possibility of a different gender identity as a question versus declaring it by describing one of the physical changes within their transitioning body, shows Ali’s growth and confidence in the path they are taking. Even though Valja still has a long way to go in terms of accepting their child for who they are, Valja and Ali both know that they do not have many relatives left,

²³ Ali’s out-of-body experience is reminiscent both of Helen’s scream upon departure from the hospital, as well as Hazal’s smile during the coup attempt. Each scene represents a moment in the protagonists’ lives where they cross the deciding threshold of their *Bildungs*-journeys – either towards maturation, or away from it.

²⁴ Ali explains the meaning of ‘Я’: “»Ich« ist im Russischen nur ein Buchstabe: Я. Ein einziger Buchstabe in einem dreiunddreißigstelligen Alphabet” (274).

and should therefore attempt to work out their relationship, as complicated as it may be. The level of closure which Ali is able to receive from Valja, although small, allows them to piece the last remaining bits of their new identity together.

Ali's identity as a mature person is, in this sense, marked by their newly established gender identity and understanding of the stories from family members who came before them. Ali's new gender identity at the conclusion of their *Bildungs*-journey is characterized by their undergoing transitioning by taking testosterone. In so doing, *Ausser sich* strays away from the heteronormativity of the historical Bildungsroman and introduces contemporary themes to the genre. Ali's transitioning, new pronouns, and new name reinforce their rejection of the expectations pushed upon them by their family members and by society at large. One worry which Ali has with their new identity, however, is their fear of becoming like their abusive father, Kostja. Ali describes:

Und es mag seltsam klingen, aber die einzige Angst, die sich von da an einstellte oder an die ich mich am klarsten erinnere, war nicht die vor den Spritzen oder dem Stimmbruch, dem Haarausfall auf dem Kopf und dem Haarbefall auf dem Rücken, den Blicken auf der Straße und den Blicken innendrin. Die einzige Angst, an die ich mich deutlich erinnere und die bis heute nicht nachgelassen hat, war, dass ich jetzt, wo ich ein Sohn war, werden würde wie mein Vater. (235-236)

Due to Kostja's suicide, Ali is clearly not able to have any sort of closure or reconciliation with their father, which causes them to be haunted by their inability to understand the reason for his suicide and previous behaviours. Kostja's abusive behaviour throughout the years towards Ali, Anton, and Valja causes a strain in their relationships that ultimately leads to the parents' divorce. However, Ali's deep wish to understand their family members remains even in Kostja's

case, despite their feelings of frustration towards him. Ali admits: “genauso ist mir bewusst, dass auch ich niemals wissen kann, wer er gewesen ist und vor wem genau ich so eine Angst hatte” (236). The investigation into Kostja is a journey which Ali will remain on for the rest of their life, and something they will never have a conclusive answer to.

Even though Ali has essentially become a whole new person, undertaking a new name, gender, and place of residence, their journey with maturation is not entirely concluded, as would be the case with a historical protagonist. While this newly matured identity of Ali’s seems more assertive and conclusive compared to the struggles they had before, this identity is “not presented as stable, sovereign and clearly bounded, but as open, porous, fluctuating and transforming” (Roca Lizarazu 12). This is demonstrated in the final chapter of the novel in which Ali has a fight with Katho, stating “[w]as willst du hören? Dass ich jetzt plötzlich weiß, wer ich bin, was das alles soll, mir den Sinn des Lebens injiziere in Testosteronform?” (Salzmann 353). This declaration portrays the fact that Ali is still a young person who is developing their identity. It underlines the fluidity of identity and existence in today’s world and makes Ali’s experience more relatable for audiences and young people in the twenty-first century. In terms of the family history and Ali’s new identity, Ali realizes that they exist as a combination of their family members’ experiences, interests and personalities. In other words, Ali exists as a mixture of their family’s past and their own present, thus bridging the gap between the generations. Ali, as a person, has become as colourful as the city in which they reside; both being the result of a long history. This combination of discourses is a characteristic of contemporary stories which allow for intersectionality and more multidimensional representations for audiences, and in the Bildungsroman case, the broadening of the canon.

v.2.3 Coup Attempt, Chosen Family, and Cautiously Looking Ahead

One of the most pivotal moments for Ali occurs in the very last chapter of the novel, in which the coup attempt of 2016 is described. Ali finds themselves on the street, unaware of what is happening and not understanding the words people are screaming around them. They are frightened and overwhelmed with the unrest around them: “Ali hörte Hundegebell, er hatte das Gefühl, am ganzen Körper zu bluten, er sah an sich herunter, aber er war heil, nur voller Staub, und sein Arm schmerzte” (Salzmann 359). This moment portrays the final theme in this novel that characterizes Ali’s mature identity, namely chosen family.

Ali’s best friend and Cemal’s nephew, Elyas, calls Ali from Germany to help direct them back to Cemal’s house. Elyas’ care for Ali demonstrates that these friends feel more than just platonic love for one another, they see each other as family. Ali feels immense gratitude for Elyas: “Du hast mich immer beschützt, kann es sein, dass du immer da bist? Dass du immer für mich da bist, und ich kriege es nicht mit” (357). Elyas has been supportive of Ali on their gender identity journey, even if he did not understand it at times, and has bravely defended Ali from Kostja’s attacks. Elyas is an anchor and safe space for Ali, even more so with Anton gone. Balling argues that Elyas’ relevance for Ali “echoes Salzmann’s vision of a ‘community of others’ for whom ‘[n]ormal is not an authority’ and where mutual support and empowerment create alternative bonds” (108), utilizing themes described by Salzmann in their essay “Sichtbar.”²⁵ For Ali, their chosen family does not emerge due to their biological family being uninvolved or estranged. For them, these two families are both needed and loved, and they represent the conjunction which makes up their new identity. This

²⁵ In “Sichtbar,” Salzmann describes their life at the intersection of being a queer, Jewish, immigrant person in Germany, outlining experiences of homophobia, antisemitism, islamophobia, and misogyny, to name a few. They outline the need for community within minorities, sharing their mother and Muslim friends bonding over asylum homes.

is represented by Ali's declaration which interrupts Elyas' directions over the phone: "Wenn ich das überlebe, dann gehe ich zu Mama, ich will mit ihr reden. Sie weiß nichts von mir. Und ich nichts von ihr. Und zu Emma und Danja und Schura und Etja, zu allen, die noch leben, ich will sie so viel fragen" (Salzmann 358). Ali's blended family of sorts characterizes a common type of family seen within queer communities, ones created with love, safety, and compromise.

Similarly, Uncle Cemal is another member of Ali's chosen family. Not only does Ali reside with Cemal the entire time they are in Istanbul, but the two also develop a very close relationship. Cemal is the most supportive person for Ali in terms of their search for Anton: "Er glaubte an die Liebe, und er glaubte, dass Ali Anton wiederfinden würde in einer Stadt mit fast fünfzehn Millionen Einwohnern" (23). Cemal is the first person Ali meets on their *Bildungs*-journey, and also the very last person they speak with after the conclusion of their maturation, highlighting the presence he now has in Ali's life. In a similar manner to Ali's biological family, Cemal also shares his personal and his family histories with Ali, creating a similar sense of vulnerability Ali has strived for throughout their journey. During their bonding, Ali grows to realize how similar they are to Cemal in that they both choose to stay in Istanbul. Ali explains: "Cemal hatte einen Ort, von dem er nicht wegzubringen war [...] Cemal war ruhig wie bei sonst nichts, wenn es um die Frage ging, sein Land zu verlassen: Wenn man eines hat, kann man es nicht verlassen. Das schleppt man immer mit. Also, was soll das" (361). This line of thinking shows Ali's intentions in remaining in Istanbul with Cemal for the foreseeable future; creating a new sense of home for Ali, since for them "home does not signify a fixed location" (Albiero 69) in either Russia or Germany. Furthermore, this implicates that Cemal is now the anchor in Ali's life along with Valja and Elyas, something

formerly embodied by Anton. Cemal also represents a fatherly figure to Ali, a role which has become vacant since Kostja's death, and a role model of masculinity which is much needed for Ali during their transitioning. The caring, patient, and understanding type of masculinity embodied by Cemal is also vastly different compared to the abusive, violent, and reactive type embodied by Kostja. This causes Ali to feel comfortable with Cemal, with him being the first person to which Ali expresses their wish to be referred to as Anton, "[d]ann möchte ich, dass du mich ab jetzt Anton nennst" (Salzmann 233), which he ultimately does in the final statement of the novel "Anton, ich habe Çay aufgesetzt" (365).

The final aspect which reimagines the genre is Ali's path after their maturation. While the historical Bildungsroman typically provides insight into the protagonists' upcoming endeavours such as an engagement or a work opportunity, Ali's future is left entirely open. Ali's final thoughts of the novel reveal: "Ich lächelte, und einen Moment dachte ich, ich gehe nie wieder irgendwohin" (365). Although Ali has a significant level of closure in terms of their identity and relationships to others, there remain a few open-ended aspects for Ali to explore. Since Ali and Anton never reunite, his whereabouts and future plans remain unresolved. Similarly, everything about Ali's life, other than their choice of staying with Cemal in Istanbul, remains unresolved. The novel maintains an open and fluid core even in the end, which retains the themes of reimagination by avoiding the historical Bildungsroman's propensity for perfectly resolved endings.

In summary, *Ausser sich* portrays a coming-of-age narrative realistic to audiences of the twenty-first century, marked by intersectionality and fluidity. This novel reimagines the historical Bildungsroman not only by means of the contemporary discourses with which it engages, but also by the structures that make up the protagonists' journey. The author's

engagement with sociopolitical, issues such as migration and violence, lie at the narrative's core, influencing every aspect of the storyline and characters. This is demonstrated in Salzmann's "'fluid writing' [which] weaves together pressing questions of identity, gender and migration, and resists binary classifications" (Albiero 58). The protagonist's decisions are political statements on their own which highlight that existence is political in today's world. In Ali's case, as a young person who is a Jewish *Kontingentflüchtling*, immigrant, trans and queer person, life is not something which comes easily. Ali's queer and transitioning identities reject the "hetero-normative notions of temporality and ideas of monolithic identity, manifests in an embodied utopia – turning the body into an agent of utopian resistance" (Jochens 273). Not only do Ali's existence and their actions signify resistance and subversion, but they also imply the inherent openness of the genre to protagonists of other backgrounds and identities.

Although *Ellbogen* and *Ausser sich* were both released in 2017, they serve a different purpose for the meaning of contemporary Bildungsroman reimaginations. While *Ellbogen* seemingly portrays the genre to be not fitting for protagonists with migration backgrounds, *Ausser sich* arguably portrays the opposite side of this argument. The approach to Bildungsroman tropes in *Ausser sich* creates a contemporary vision for the genre and the possibilities for postmigrant and queer protagonist stories. Authors such as Salzmann continue the German tradition of the Bildungsroman in creative ways, while adapting it to a contemporary lens and making it appealing for current audiences.

vi. Conclusion

Despite the fact that the Bildungsroman is often considered to be closely tied to the socio-historical context of the eighteenth century, this analysis has shown how it can be reframed in ways that fit contemporary contexts through the reimagination of genre conventions by contemporary authors. The defining aspect of the genre is the coming-of-age processes of the protagonists. Other genre conventions that are present alongside these formative journeys are part of the genre's tradition, but not defining factors needed for a text to be considered a Bildungsroman. This thesis has demonstrated that even novels that significantly subvert genre conventions can still be considered examples of the Bildungsroman, as long as there is an attempt made toward the *Bildung* of the protagonist. Indeed, each of the novels interprets the notion of *Bildung* differently, expanding the literary canon and allowing for a unique representation of the way a Bildungsroman can exist in the twenty-first century. Additionally, the texts' engagement with specific themes prevalent in society at the time of their publication establish a link to the sociopolitical zeitgeist in Germany, thus creating a representation of growing up amidst these debates.

The analysis of *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich* demonstrates distinctive methods of reimagination in which the protagonist's background, *Bildungs*-journey, and conclusion to their *Bildungs*-journey are uniquely subverted. *Feuchtgebiete* portrays a coming-of-age narrative that expands the literary canon of the Bildungsroman by reflecting on themes such as trauma, rebellion, healing, and sexuality. Charlotte Roche utilizes the Bildungsroman to playfully challenge societal expectations for young women by showing the protagonist Helen taking the resistance of expectations to an extreme and evoking reactions of disgust in readers, as noted by scholars such as Bartel and Er. Even though most of the historical genre tropes that are

portrayed in this novel are in some way reimagined, the protagonist still manages to achieve a level of maturation. Helen's *Bildungs*-journey is complex and non-linear, subverting the historical protagonist's relatively straightforward journey to maturation. Similarly, the *Bildungs*-journey conclusion portrays her as having achieved a level of maturity. However, the difference between Helen before and after her coming-of-age is not as distinct as the historical Bildungsroman would have shown. *Feuchtgebiete* is a Bildungsroman in which the personal identity struggles of the protagonist are considered with equal prominence as the physical ones. This demonstrates that twenty-first century *Bildung* may not explicitly separate the psychological from the physical struggles often encountered alongside one another during a person's coming-of-age. Helen acts as an example of the complex relationship between rebellion and coming-of-age, portraying a protagonist who must determine the balance between the two in order to develop a new, matured identity.

Ellbogen, on the other hand, portrays a coming-of-age narrative that takes place alongside the consequences of criminal activity committed by the protagonist. This storyline of crime, its effects, and the deliberation regarding the protagonist's remorse are already examples of subversion of the traditional Bildungsroman. In the historical iterations of this genre, stories of protagonists who reject societal rules, in this case by committing crime, are inherently not suitable for the overall atmosphere of narratives which require "the individual [to discover] his authentic self and [realize] his personal destiny in the assumption of social responsibility" (Hirsch 302). Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey is not conclusive because of the moving parts she is forced to deal with, such as her family issues, abuse, and inner conflicts regarding the murder, which reimagines this genre trope. This is a further demonstration of the subversion of the core themes of the Bildungsroman, namely the consideration of what the notion of *Bildung* means for

young people in German society who are not white and are forced to deal with the implications of societal injustice and discrimination. *Bildung* is not a concept Hazal can properly consider as a result of having to deal with issues and disadvantages at this stage in her life. The outcome of Hazal's *Bildungs*-journey, and the stories of other characters in the novel with similar backgrounds, represent the experiences of overlooked members of society and the added difficulties they encounter due to their backgrounds and social statuses. Fatma Aydemir utilizes a genre with a longstanding reputation and historical ties to German *Leitkultur* to challenge its structures from a postmigrant perspective, and to allow for deliberation regarding belonging and non-belonging in the twenty-first century. Contemporary authors like Aydemir challenge longstanding traditions of society and literature by reimagining the notions of canonical genres.

Ausser sich portrays a contemporary coming-of-age narrative that reimagines the Bildungsroman by means of the discourses with which it engages, such as migration, family, and violence. These themes lie at the core of the narrative, influencing every aspect of the storyline and characters. Especially when considered after the analysis of *Ellbogen* and the argued ill-fittingness of the Bildungsroman for postmigrant protagonists, the contrasting outcomes of Hazal and Ali's *Bildungs*-journeys force a reconsideration of the adaptability of this genre. Sasha Marianna Salzmann's approach to the Bildungsroman in comparison to Aydemir demonstrates a fluidity that is present in most aspects of the novel, allowing for Ali's maturation in the end. The difference between the texts of these two authors highlights the nuance of Bildungsroman reimaginings: whereas Aydemir's reimagination is largely aimed at subversion and resistance of the societal expectations for Turkish women, Salzmann's demonstrates the effort towards adaptability. Ali's identity is the most removed from the historical protagonist compared to Helen and Hazal; their identity represents contemporary fluidity of gender identity and expression,

sexuality, and cultural identity. Ali's *Bildungs*-journey portrays reimagination by utilizing genre structures in a flexible manner, with the tropes containing both modified and unaltered aspects from the historical iterations of the genre. Despite having a journey quite different from the historical protagonist's, Ali has the most conclusive *Bildungs*-journey when compared to Helen and Hazal. This implies the inherent openness of the genre to protagonists of other backgrounds and identities. The conclusion of Ali's *Bildungs*-journey demonstrates intersectionality and fluidity within the traditional growth process aimed towards maturity. The reimagination of Bildungsroman tropes in *Ausser sich* creates a contemporary vision for the genre and the representational possibilities for postmigrant and queer protagonist's stories. Authors like Salzmann creatively continue the Bildungsroman tradition in our present time, making it appealing for contemporary audiences.

Despite the different ways the Bildungsroman tropes are reimagined in the three novels under discussion, it is also important to note the similarities that these texts exhibit in this regard. *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich* all subvert the self-motivated aspect of the historical *Bildungs*-journey, triggering the start of the protagonist's journeys through an urgent surgery, flight from a murder, and the search for a missing sibling, respectively. The impact of these events on the protagonists carries over to the way in which they engage with their journeys once they start. For all three protagonists, personal development is not necessarily a process they focus on. The notion of personal identity exploration as a passive secondary journey within the main challenges the protagonists are dealing with, urges a consideration about contemporary Bildungsromane; namely whether the search for personal *Bildung* for young people is a sign of privilege in the twenty-first century. Perhaps the reason why each of the novels engages with contemporary discourses to such a large extent, most commonly the negative influence thereof

on the protagonist, is because in today's world it is impossible not to. Coming-of-age today is oftentimes complicated, painful, and for many burdened by the ever-present sense of dread as a result of the ongoing world-issues. This feeling results from the largely unrestricted access of information available to most of the public either through personal devices or public access venues such as libraries or free newspapers. The accessibility of information in the twenty-first century through, most notably, the internet and Social Media, heavily impact youth and their morale, directly influencing their growth and formation. Historically, in the context of Western Europe in particular, access to information was more difficult with the public receiving a largely filtered version of reality as a result of censorship. This arguably made for a more communal and perhaps hopeful sense of the world, with the wish for societal improvement appearing as a common motivation also in the context of *Bildung*. This is in contrast to today, a time in which the societal outlook is more individualistic, and people are more focused on personal issues and development. The same is apparent in contemporary representations of *Bildung*, where reasons for *Bildung* are more personal and the wish for learning and bettering oneself for the greater good are rarely the main goal. Contemporary authors largely create coming-of-age narratives with protagonists as average members of society, which means the motivation for *Bildung* has to be redefined for each protagonist. This results in the historical core motivation behind *Bildung* perhaps not being possible in the same way as it had been in the past.

Another similarity demonstrated between the novels that arguably creates a defining feature for coming-of-age in the contemporary context are the conclusions to the protagonists' *Bildungs*-journeys. Each novel has a relatively open ending, in which the protagonist has only a few issues which are resolved, leaving the majority of the outcomes undefined for audiences. In Helen's case, her departure from the hospital alongside the confrontation of her parents are the

only conclusive aspects of her story, with her future plans remaining open. For Hazal, the only conclusive aspect is her remaining in Istanbul and leaving her boyfriend. Hazal's future, both the consequences of the murder and her relationship with her family remain open for interpretation. Ali, who arguably gains more maturity in comparison to Helen and Hazal, also has a relatively open ending with the questions about Anton and their future path in life remaining unanswered. The openness of the endings for the three protagonists demonstrates the desires of contemporary audiences for non-conclusive endings, in this way urging audiences to consider their own interpretation of the protagonist's future.

Furthermore, an additional detail common within the open endings of these novels is the fact that none of the three protagonists return home to their previous society. Whereas the historical protagonist would be expected to return home and reintegrate into the society in which they resided prior to their *Bildungs*-journey, this convention is reimagined in each of the novels analyzed in this thesis. Hazal and Ali both remain in their *Bildungs*-journey societies in Istanbul, with Hazal moving out of Mehmet's place and Ali remaining with Uncle Cemal. Helen, on the other hand, departs with Robin to a third, new, and unknown location, introducing a new option for the outcome of a Bildungsroman protagonist. In Hazal and Ali's case, their choice of not returning home to Germany acts as an added layer to the wider societal postmigrant discussions about belonging and not-belonging. This would not be possible with a character such as Helen, for instance, who did not have to consider her place in Germany in this way. Their conclusions highlight contemporary notions of what home often means for young people with minoritized backgrounds and queer identities, namely the existence of the chosen home and the chosen family as alternatives.

When considered more broadly, genre reimaginings such as the ones in *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich*, create compelling interactions between seemingly outdated genre conventions and contemporary themes. They reinvent the historical Bildungsroman protagonist through a contemporary approach and create a link between its literary tradition and the twenty-first century. However, as with any modern approach to a historical concept, the reimaginings of Bildungsromane also have certain limitations worth noting. The contextualization chapter of this thesis mentioned scholars who disagree with the genre being able to truly exist in modern contexts, as a result of the close relationship of the historical *Bildung* to the eighteenth century in Germany. Scholars of this view consider contemporary iterations of this genre to be departing from its historical tradition, making the text not fit to be considered a Bildungsroman anymore. Such concerns highlight the inherent weakness of this genre, namely the lack of clear-cut genre definition. Most limitation arguments formed by scholars result from the persistent genre definition debate and are not likely to ever be truly resolved. This limitation, however, is something that will not prevent this genre from existing and from evolving with the times. As can be seen in the years between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, the Bildungsroman persists, and authors continue to adapt the genre and its conventions to fit the discourses present at their respective times.

Coming-of-age is part of the human experience, and the creation of narratives that portray it is, therefore, arguably inevitable. Due to the universality of this experience, Bildungsromane are immensely popular with adults and youth alike, acting as a fitting medium through which awareness for societal issues can be raised through literature. This is why it is important to center on protagonists who demonstrate relatable experiences, and less-than-perfect coming-of-age outcomes that attract diverse audiences. Contemporary reimaginings of the Bildungsroman, as

demonstrated by *Feuchtgebiete*, *Ellbogen*, and *Ausser sich*, can be done productively by engaging with currently relevant societal themes, as long as the main focus of the story, in some regard, remains on the protagonist and their *Bildungs*-journey. In this way, not only are contemporary authors widening the canon of this genre to capture the feeling of growing up in the twenty-first century, but they are also creating stories that act as insights to these experiences for the years to come. The approaches to reimagination such as were analyzed in this thesis allow for the contemporary Bildungsroman to remain a prevalent genre in literature, influencing future authors to continue the evolution of the genre reimagination along with the times and the discourses that are to come in the next decades. The creative processes present in contemporary Bildungsromane create room for authors of other modern genres to consider writing stories that interact with older ones, in order to bring forward more compelling protagonists such as Helen, Hazel, and Ali.

vii. Works Cited

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