

From books and plays to slogans and #hashtags: An exploration of
German pop-cultural feminist identities from 2008-2016

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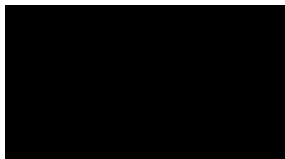
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Abstract

Current German feminist discourse emerges from complex social, cultural and political dynamics. Included in these dynamics is public debate attributing falling birth rates to feminist identities, the recurrent role of everyday sexism in German women's lives, and the persistent critique of feminist activists at the progressive and conservative ends of the political spectrum. Against the backdrop of this dominant discourse of German feminism this research, through an analysis of five selected works by German feminist authors, problematises the relationships of power relating to the ownership of feminist identities. The aim of the research is to better understand the authors' understanding of self in relation to an interpretation of their work in the media. The study also investigates how each work interprets and evidences varying aspects of feminist identities.

This thesis challenges an exclusion of the flesh-and-blood author from her work through an investigation of personal narratives and embodied experiences. The investigated works include the novel *Feuchtgebiete* by Charlotte Roche (2008), the play *Diebe* by Dea Loher (2009), the social media movement #aufschrei primarily authored by Anne Wizorek (2013) and the social media movements #schauhin (2013) and #ausnahmslos (2016) primarily authored by Kübra Gümüşay. I have filled a gap in the literature by analysing five texts from diverse politically and socially aligned progressive contemporary German women authors. This selection of works presents a fuller understanding and interpretation of popular culture and its creation of individual and collective German feminist identities.

I undertook this research as a close-textual analysis of the sources. In addition to this, I analysed public interviews with the authors, as well as personal blog posts to supplement an understanding of the authors' intentions. I utilised a popfeminist methodology, which adopts an analytical and speculative approach to reading popular culture through its relationship to feminism, and its socio-politically constructed reception in the media. I found that whilst the plurality of feminist identities in these works is reinforced and replicated through an association with contemporary feminist goals or ideals, the reception of these works in the public discourse and the authors' intentions complicate an understanding of feminism.

This research disrupts the labelling of homogenous feminist principles by positioning feminist identity as a relationship between an individual's understanding of self, and her place within the public discourse. This research is significant because it theorises the relationships of power that exist between a public, media-driven perception of a flesh-and-blood author and her work, alongside her own perception of the work and her feminist identity. This relationship exposes the exclusionary practice of discourse that does not fit the mainstream definitions of feminism. Future scholarship should therefore prioritise broader, non-traditional works to analyse under popfeminist methodology and to highlight the embodied experiences of authors alongside the perception, reception and insights of their works.

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Introduction

Discussions of feminism and feminist social movements often result in desultory proclamations of ultimate successes or abject failures. The nuance of accomplishments and forward half steps on the ladder to success are met less with practical consideration of momentum than of derision. Feminist literary theorist Shalyn Claggett considers this a “human problem,” or the difficulty between analysing “textual significance” whilst simultaneously differentiating amongst “real-world context” and its signification (Claggett, 2015: 353). Working in this nebulous space therefore affords the researcher and researched the opportunity for nuanced analysis of the varying degrees to which feminist narratives have been created, sustained and defended in contemporary Germany.

This project undertakes an appraisal of several popular pieces of work that provide a cross spectrum of German contemporary feminism and feminist expressions of identity. These works were chosen based upon the influence of their authors and their collective impacts in the popular and educated consciousness. The investigated works include Charlotte Roche’s novel *Feuchtgebiete* (2008), Dea Loher’s play *Diebe* (2009), Anne Wizorek’s social media movement #aufschrei (2013) and Kübra Gümüsay’s social media movements #schauhin (2013) and #ausnahmslos (2016). Throughout the research, I sought to answer the following questions: 1) what are the current feminist identities or narratives are evidenced through five contemporary works; and 2) how has each work shaped German feminist identities when framed through an emerging popfeminist conceptual framework.

Overall, this thesis seeks to understand the relationships of power that characterise a sense of ownership over feminist identities. The aim of the research is to better understand the investigated author’s understanding of self in relation to an interpretation of her work in the media. Further, this thesis disrupts the labelling of homogenous feminist principles by positioning feminist identity as a relationship between an individual’s understanding of self and her place within the public discourse. This research is therefore significant because it theorises the relationships of power that exist between a public, media-driven perception of a flesh-and-blood

(Booth, 2005) author and her work, alongside her own perception of the work and her own feminist identity. It advances current popfeminist research through the exploration of new authors and works alongside reinterpretations of heavily theorised authors and works.

To address this problem, I conduct a textual analysis of the author as a flesh-and-blood person and her work. This analysis is achieved through close readings of the author's expressed work as well as interviews conducted by media outlets. I also challenge the exclusion of an author and her identity from her work's meaning. I further argue that this relationship exposes the exclusionary practice of discourse that do not fit the mainstream definitions of feminism. This is achieved through a thematic and in-depth investigation of the four authors and their five works. Each substantive chapter then explores popfeminist discourse as it relates to the author, her work and the experience of feminist identity.

A more specific question posed at the beginning of the research involved the significance of analysing non-traditional popfeminist authors and texts. The results of this thesis were greatly enhanced through involving a study of Dea Loher's *Diebe*, a non-traditional popfeminist author and text. In addition, by focusing on Kübra Gümüşay, #schauhin and #ausnahmslos, this thesis challenged a perception that popfeminist meaning making and identity is dominated by white, middle class German authors.

Context

This thesis is a combination of my two passions: feminist discourse and popular culture. Ever since my advisor suggested I consider writing my honours thesis on the "provocative" erotic German novel *Feuchtgebiete*, I have been fascinated by neue Feminismus, comparing it to my own knowledge and experiences of Anglo-centred feminisms. As a young woman in 2017, personal experiences are never far removed from my research and I feel fortunate to be able to explore a politically and personally relevant topic in such depth. I can further explain my interest in pop cultural feminist production with a short anecdote. SBS, an Australian public television network, recently began airing *The Handmaid's Tale*. As I sat down to watch Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel brought to light in ten episodes, I was reminded specifically of the novel's epilogue. In the epilogue to the book, there is a

meta-narrative, where it is revealed that the story was told via a series of cassette tapes found and recorded by researchers. These academics were at a conference discussing the Gilead period, or the fundamentalist religious government that overthrew the United States government in the story. This epilogue, therefore, offered a varying vantage point of the story: one that challenged the role (or perhaps complicity) of academics in analysing events and moments in culture. That the novel has now been made into a feature of pop culture, a television series, only increases the role of the researcher in developing political analysis of pop culture. The job or duty of academics to research, report and categorise knowledge according the varying conceptual frameworks, is fraught with many polemic questions; questions that are not necessarily the purview of this thesis. Yet, this conceit at the end of an influential novel, has stuck with me.

As a researcher and participant in a social-justice driven discourse like feminism, I welcome an academic occupation with politically-charged popular culture. I am also cognizant of the role of an academic in possibly perpetuating an intellectual divide or disconnect between production of knowledge and the knowledge of production. It is my sincere hope that research continues to move forward hand-in-hand with those who are at the fore of pop-cultural, political and feminist productions. My intention with this research is to broaden the possibilities of a discourse between political, social and cultural commentary and academic engagement with it.

Contemporary German feminism intertwines with popular culture because there is no longer such a stringent distinction between high or low-brow artistic expression. My hope with this thesis and further popfeminist research is that this area of exploration becomes richer through more vigorous and widespread analysis of feminist identities and popularised expressions through literature, theatre and social media. The following section contains a brief context of each of the four authors and their corresponding works. After this contextualisation, I discuss the methodology and conceptual theoretical framework of the research.

Charlotte Roche is a well-known television presenter and author in Germany. She experimented in teenaged rebellion before eventually crafting an identity as a presenter of a well-known music show on Germany's youth-orientated

television channel Viva. Known for her provocative and controversial behaviour, Roche has cultivated a back-and-forth, give-and-take relationship with the media. This public discourse has catalogued her frequent feuds with Alice Schwarzer (dpa/memo, 2011; Tsp, 2011), her sexual proposition to then-President Wulff (Connolly, 2010) and general taking-on of political, social and cultural taboos in German culture. Her infamy as a pop cultural trendsetter and intellectual agitator was amplified by the release of her 2008 bestselling debut novel *Feuchtgebiete*. The inclusion of autobiographical details in the novel in addition to the perpetual media-campaign to link Roche as an author to the protagonist in the novel created a maelstrom of interest.

Feuchtgebiete, therefore, becomes a sort of personalised attempt “to explore the construction of female identity” (Whelehan, 2005: 111). Protagonist Helen Memel is a teenager, suffering from anal lesions after an unfortunately timed shaving accident lands her in hospital for the duration of the novel. *Feuchtgebiete* is told entirely from Helen’s unapologetically detail-oriented perspective wherein Roche champions a “feminism of the body” (Kulish, 2008). In a contemporary German climate of reticence to discuss sexism and feminism, the catapulting of *Feuchtgebiete* into a large-scale literary event created a sense of urgency around these collective issues. The novel also explores the traumatic event of Helen’s parent’s divorce and what appears to be a burgeoning romance between herself and Robin, a nurse on the ward. Helen interlaces an exposition of the current action with memories of her past exploits, detailing drug binges with her friend Corinna and the many ways she’s experienced sexual pleasure.

The second author I explore is Dea Loher. Loher is a well-known German dramatist and her works are praised for their courting of controversial issues such as migration and racism. She has been presented with many awards and commendations for her work and is a highly-respected commentator of the disadvantages people face through political, social and economic means (Haas, 2007a: 270). Loher is also famous for her provocative and emotionally charged plays, rife with violent imagery (Künzel, 2007: 360) and characterised by “eine Absage an die postmoderne Ästhetik” (Haas, 2007a: 270). Yet Loher resists being labelled a feminist and challenges the assertion that her work engages in feminist

themes. This obvious tension between an author's paucity of self-identified feminism and the illustration of the opposite in her work is most strongly evident in Loher's example. I have chosen to analyse her work through a popfeminist lens in order to clarify the themes of feminist discourse that are often neglected within her work. While Loher herself is not feminist, the reception and methodology of the work make a popfeminist reading productive. The reproduction and re-examination of this text from a popfeminist perspective rewrites the concept of popfeminist identities.

Loher's 2009 play *Diebe* provides a series of vignettes, of "twelve human destinies [who] weave a web at the outskirts of a big city" (International, 2017). The six women and six men of the play share varying degrees of connection and alienation from one another, and the play eschews a typically linear plot structure. The characters range from a young pregnant woman and her much older lover, an insurance agent and his day-dreaming sister, to a female supermarket employee who wishes to become a manager and her increasingly estranged police officer husband. The intricacies of the relationships between the characters as well as the characters themselves provide a microcosm of Loher's perspective of gender relations in particular and feminism in general.

Diverging from literary examples, Anne Wizorek is a digital activist, social media consultant, public speaker, author and blogger who instigated the #aufschrei movement. A regular contributor on her collectivist blog *kleinerdrei* and Twitter handle (@marthadear), Wizorek's work in feminist spaces propelled her to popular recognition with the #aufschrei social media campaign in early 2013. A self-styled "Nerdette", (Wizorek, 2013a) Wizorek creates memes, uses social media and generally wields knowledge of pop culture and social events that typifies millennial social and cultural milieu. After her instrumental involvement in #aufschrei, Wizorek became increasingly known in the public sphere, even publishing her own book about the movement and its effects, called as *Weil ein #aufschrei nicht reicht: für einen Feminismus von Heute* (2014).

On January 24, 2013 blogger Maïke Hank (2013) posted "Normal ist das nicht" on *kleinerdrei*. In the post, she writes: "...überall auf der Welt werden Frauen belästigt – auch in Deutschland." Later that day, Wizorek's friend and colleague

Nicole von Horst (@vonhorst), wrote the following: “Der Arzt, der meinen Po tätschelte, nachdem ich wegen eines Selbstmordversuchs im Krankenhaus lag” (@vonhorst, 2013). Feeling inspired by Horst’s words, Wizorek, under her Twitter profile @marthadear, responded to the tweet with: “wir sollten diese erfahrungen unter einem hashtag sammeln. Ich schlage #aufschrei vor” (@marthadear, 2013e). The next morning, over 20,000 Tweets had been posted under #aufschrei and a campaign against sexism began. Coincidentally, on the same day Laura Himmelreich, journalist at *Stern* magazine, published a story about her sexual harassment at the hands of politician Rainer Brüderle. Both of these events launched the eventually-termed Sexismus-Debatte, involving a wide-spread public discourse of sexual harassment and assault in Germany.

The last author this thesis examines is Kübra Gümüşay, a prominent Turkish-German journalist, blogger and activist. Gümüşay is particularly active in anti-racist and anti-sexist feminist movements, wherein she critically and analytically discusses the role of Islam in contemporary German feminist identities. Gümüşay’s complex engagement with feminist principles and popular culture has elevated her role in contemporary feminist meaning-making. Her most recent activity involves the website and Ted Talk *Organisierte Liebe*, (2017) which champions a loving response against Internet and real-world based vitriol. I focus primarily on her role as significant author and instigator in both the #schauhin and #ausnahmslos movements. Both movements have been chosen due to their involvement with problematising feminist narratives.

#schauhin was originally conceived as the anti-racist iteration of #aufschrei. It was envisaged by Jamie Schearer, Gümüşay and Sabine Mohamed as they participated in a panel on “Rassismus & Sexismus ab_bloggen” (Gümüşay et al., 2013). While #aufschrei commented on the everyday sexual harassment and assault of all women, #schauhin proposed to highlight everyday instances of racism. This movement also incorporated a distinct reflection on the role of women of colour in anti-sexist campaigns. In this regard, an entirely new social media movement was instigated to draw attention to race, as #aufschrei did not overtly highlight the complex negotiations that racial and religious difference added to instances of everyday sexism.

The final online campaign I explore is the social, cultural and politically focused #ausnahmslos. This campaign was precipitated largely by widespread sexually-based attacks against women at the main Cologne train station on December 31, 2015. The men allegedly perpetrating the attacks were described as North African or Arab in appearance. Similar attacks on the same evening were also reported in Hamburg and Stuttgart (BBC, 2016d). News outlets and mainstream media, however, began to depict the occurrences of sexual assault as a result of Germany's lack of multicultural integration and acceptance of refugees. #ausnahmslos was therefore created as a reaction against this association of sexual assault with the racial backgrounds of the alleged perpetrators.

This thesis prioritises the analysis of four distinct authors and their primary work: *Feuchtgebiete* (2008) by Charlotte Roche, *Diebe* (2009) by Dea Loher, #aufschrei (2013) by Anne Wizorek and #schauhin (2013) and #ausnahmslos (2016) by Kübra Gümüşay. I will now briefly discuss the methods and rationale I used before explaining the conceptual framework that guided the research. The methods for this research include a close-textual reading of primary works and interviews. The author's personal words are consulted in the form of interviews, blogs and social media posts. Through mining this publically available data, it is hopeful that a clear public construction of the author has been collected. In addition to this, each of the sources analysed, including books, a play and social media movements, are their own primary source materials.

This thesis adopts a popfeminist approach. A nascent and growing conceptual framework, popfeminist analysis is part of an overall trend in German feminist research towards evaluating politically-minded popular culture. Yet popfeminism is not necessarily a German-specific methodology. Scholars such as Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle have been the primary facilitators in creating this framework, especially in the 2016 book *Awkward politics: technologies of popfeminist activism*. In particular, the framework encompasses an understanding of cruel optimism of attachment and awkwardness. These elements of popfeminist discourse characterise the German environment of neoliberalism, or individual choice above collective good and the prevalence of commodification. A popfeminist conceptual framework allows for a reflexive and agile approach to

cultural and embodied explorations, that isn't found in more rigid methodologies.

This narrative therefore maintains the relationship between the individual and society through an association of attachments. One of these attachments is the neoliberal reification of consumerism as identity making, or the theory that the consumption of certain products or ideas fulfils an individuals' complex sense of self. Lauren Berlant coins this phenomenon the cruel optimism of an attachment (Berlant, 2011). Smith-Prei and Stehle describe this concept in that "such objects/scenes as liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom (of expression), choice of sexuality, or economic equality" in that they may "promise clarity of meaning (goals, intent) and productivity (success, failure)" (2015: 135).

Awkwardness refers to the multi-faceted expression of political, social and cultural confluence of events, media or messages that create a sense of dissonance between feminism and popular culture. It is "always retreating from view" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133) and allows for a more complex and diverse understanding of latent feminist identities.

Restatement of the problem and response

This thesis engages with four German women who have produced fiction or social works deemed significantly feminist in scope. My study of each woman focuses on the relationship with the creation of her work in addition to her own relationship with feminist identity. Each work and individual author highlights contemporary German feminism's universality of equality-driven issues. I am therefore prioritising a study of popfeminist thought, which is often critiqued based on assumptions of its triviality and lesser occupation with social justice. Yet supposed issues of cultural triviality still warrant academic analysis due to their ubiquitous role in German feminist politics. My choice of works (a novel, play, and social media movements) directly challenge this sense of triviality as it is within these spaces that political opinions and actions are formed today. I have chosen to read each of these texts as popfeminist in order to directly compare the fluid engagement with feminist narratives each of the authors and resulting participants have. Additionally, literary texts and social media movements should be brought into the conversation between feminist narratives intent and resultant identities. Contemporary feminist actors task themselves with uncovering various meta narratives that influence

broader society, such as sexist language and women's inferiority to men. This thesis addresses the importance of popular digital culture in identity politics and in gender politics and the formulation of feminist positions and identities.

Digital media must be clearly defined as it complicates an engagement with feminist identity through form, function and accessibility. In the examples of #aufschrei and #ausnahmslos, the digital nature of these works leads to more of a fluid engagement with its feminist identities. The digital space allows for a more holistic connection from author to participants, creating a wider sphere of influence. However, *Feuchtgebiete* and *Diebe* also involve a mixture of multi-modal presentations and performances. As a written novel, *Feuchtgebiete* can be experienced digitally and non-digitally yet Roche's public readings move the experience of the text into a performance space. Similarly, *Diebe* can be read as a play but it can be argued that as a piece of theatre the true experience of the work is through performance. While there are defined spheres of influence between the digital and non-digital, this thesis introduces the notion of an unfixed or delineated boundary between these spaces. In turn, the flux and flow of digital media is represented within a constant renegotiation of feminist identities and gender politics within the works themselves.

My work seeks to understand who owns the presentation of feminist identities. This analysis prioritises the discussion of attachment to objects and the awkwardness of literary events as tools for analysing the cultural and political effects of individual works on contemporary feminist identity. I argue that the analysis of heavily theorised alongside as-yet-to-be untheorised popfeminist texts allows for a richer understanding of this conceptual framework. This research increases the exploration of popfeminism involving new works and authors from 2008 to 2016. This time period is significant because it captures the period directly before and after the Sexismus-Debatte. The Sexismus-Debatte is significant because it highlights a period wherein the public discourse directly focused on discussions of women, feminism and feminist identities within Germany.

To answer these problems, I contextualise a study of women and how their works directly construct feminist identity using a popfeminist approach. Analysing the flesh-and-blood author is important because there has been a tendency in

research to forget or not take seriously the author's perspective of her own work, thereby distorting the resulting political, cultural and social messages of her artistic production. Contextualising a study of flesh-and-blood women within their work, requires a focused and close examination of interviews, blogs or any medium in which the author speaks in her own words. In addition to this, I prioritise the author's words in relation to the public discourse about her and her work. This process entails a meta interpretation of how the author represents herself, how she is represented through media coverage and what the work then evidences about feminist identities.

By focusing on the self-identified aspects of feminist identity as well as the public discourse's assumptions of the author's identity, this research creates a more complete thematic understanding of self and public presentations of feminism. In addition, this thesis problematises the association of feminist identity as a relationship between an individual and her understanding and experience of a collective association within a group. In other words, the persistence of a feminist identity as a collective expression of views is challenged through the individual expressions of feminist identity espoused by authors and their works.

Roadmap

The first chapter of the thesis is a review of the literature entitled "Feminism, literature and social media: a review of theory and scholarship." This chapter gives an overview of German feminism, taking into consideration the flux and changes of its contemporary movements. I then explore a popfeminist framework and illustrate my understanding and use of it throughout the thesis. Finally, I conduct a review of research on literary and social-media based feminist identities. Chapter two considers Charlotte Roche and her novel *Feuchtgebiete* and is titled "'Frauen sind aber total masochistisch': *Feuchtgebiete* and Charlotte Roche." Within this chapter, I explore the neoliberal narratives of self-actualisation and pop-consumption as well as the awkwardness of politics of power, perception (or reception) and relation.

Chapter three concerns Dea Loher and her play *Diebe*. It is called "'Literatur ist für mich androgyn, ich versteh nicht, wie man eine Ästhetik des weiblichen Schreibens überhaupt wollen kann': *Diebe* and Dea Loher." In this chapter, I focus

on the context of Dea Loher as an author and the role of gendered identity within her play. I also consider the narratives of feminist identities and the awkwardness of politics of power, perception and relation through the use of prominent symbols throughout *Diebe*. Chapter four examines Anne Wizorek and the social media movement most associated with her, #aufschrei. This chapter is called, “Ich bin da, und ich gehe nicht weg’: #aufschrei and Anne Wizorek.” Departing from the prior two chapters, this latter half of the thesis begins the analyses of social media movements. In this chapter, I focus on popfeminist narratives of identity and success and reading for awkwardness.

Chapter five analyses Kübra Gümüşay and #schauhin and #ausnahmslos. It is called “Gegen sexualisierte Gewalt und Rassismus. Immer. Überall’: #schauhin, #ausnahmslos and Kübra Gümüşay.” This chapter further focuses on the racialisation of Muslim women of colour, neoliberal cruel optimisms of attachment and reading for awkwardness. Finally, the conclusion explores the individual findings of each chapter before providing an overarching conclusion about the research. I finish the thesis with a rumination of the limitation of the study and areas for further scholarly study.

1) Feminism, literature and social media: a review of theory and scholarship

Power speaks here in this moment of hesitation. Do you go along with it? What does it mean not to go along with it? To create awkwardness is to be read as being awkward. Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies “go along with it”. To refuse to go along with it would be to be seen as trouble, as causing discomfort for others.

— Sara Ahmed, “A sinking feeling,” 2014

This literature review prioritises the understanding of the two central questions of my thesis: 1) what are the current feminist identities evidenced through five contemporary works; and 2) how has each work shaped German feminist identities when framed through a popfeminist methodology? These questions are framed through an exploration of the socio-political and theoretical elements that characterise the current German feminist discourse in five contemporary works. The investigated works include *Feuchtgebiete* (2008) by Charlotte Roche, *Diebe* (2009) by Dea Loher, *#aufschrei* (2013) by Anne Wizorek and *#schauhin* (2013) and *#ausnahmslos* (2016) by Kübra Gümüşay.

The first section presents the evolution of contemporary German feminist identities. I will begin with a brief discussion of second wave feminism before moving on to new feminism, or the German equivalent of the widely-used Anglo third wave feminism. From then, I highlight popfeminist identities through their relationship to postfeminism. My aim is to create a specific understanding of German feminism from 2008 to 2016. The second section unpacks popfeminist methodology as it is currently theorised and shows how I interpret it in the analysis of each work. The final section applies my analysis of popfeminism to the creation of feminist identities in literature and social media. I further analyse previous research on each of the works analysed in the thesis’s body main chapters, thereby highlighting the gaps that my research fills.

Throughout this thesis, I prioritise the study of a subjective element (the author’s work or social movement) with empirical text-based analysis alongside the embodied experience of the respective author herself. This approach accounts for the individual distinctions of choice, a non-stereotyped analysis of feminist

identities and the assumption that contemporary feminist activism is intimately related with popular culture and consumption. By the end of the literature review, I will have illustrated the richness of the current research on popfeminist works and feminist identity creation. I will also have shown the lack of scholarship analysing non-traditional texts with a focus on a nuanced analysis of individual experiences alongside collective identities. Ultimately this literature review highlights a current lacuna in academic analysis that privileges collective association with group identity without a corresponding nuanced assessment of an author's individual participation.

German feminism: from second to third wave, post to pop

A discourse of German feminism, while similar to its Anglo counterparts, has developed in a distinct fashion and in accordance with the second wave and third wave women's movements. To this end, contemporary German feminism has been "premised on the political assumptions that stress social justice, family values, and state responsibility for the common good" (Ferree, 2012: 2). These liberal values favour social and political collective will alongside individual rights and gains. Yet the new feminist movements in Germany have created a dialogue that highlights differences between old and new and the categorical distinctions of identity within feminist movements. These divisions have resulted in an overwhelming association of feminism as a movement that exclusively "privilege[s] liberal individualism and equal rights" (Ferree, 2012: 2).

The evolution of German feminism is therefore a confluence of outside influences and internal, culturally German initiatives. Second wave German feminists dealt primarily with peace movements and violence against women, partial abortion already having been legalised (Douglas and Plogstedt, 1982: 8). Public terrorist attacks in the 1970s, such as those by the Baader-Meinhof group, fostered a "public climate of instigation against intellectuals, left-wing activists and feminists" (Kulawik, 1992: 74). In the German Democratic Republic, general policy directed towards women concerned their roles as mothers and their traditionally gendered role in society (Kranz, 2005: 70). As women realised that they were not gaining equality in the socialist state, they began to organise themselves and connect to a certain extent to feminists in western Germany and the rest of Europe.

The most influential of these movements included Frauen für den Frieden, lila offensive and the UVF (Unabhängiger Frauenverband der DDR) (Kranz, 2005: 70). As a repressive state, the GDR would not have tolerated a traditionally organised women's liberation movement (Roy, 2006: 36).

Prior to reunification both eastern and western national movements were fractured and divided according to smaller interests. Sibylle Plogstedt, prominent German feminist, of West Berlin magazine *Frauenzeitschrift Courage*, argued that "we really have to get into discussions to work out our differences" in order to effect a more dynamic and successful movement (Douglas and Plogstedt, 1982: 10). The development of the movement resulted from the "universality and longevity" of male dominance in all forms of political and social activities (Millett, 2000: 58). Older feminism's ultimate goal was to therefore reverse women's total social and political disenfranchisement. A majority of the players in the old or second wave feminist movement spoke for the collective woman, a voice whose identity was assumed to be homogenous in race if not social status. A significant challenge to the white paradigm during these years came from the influence of Audre Lorde, a black American feminist who lived in Berlin from 1984 to 1992. She "challenged white women to acknowledge the significance of their white privilege and to deal with difference in constructive ways" (Schultz, 2013). This association bears relevance to the new feminist movements, which faced similar criticisms of division and dissension. At this time in 1991, lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw argued for an intersectional approach in "exploring the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991: 1241).

In 2006, the "Ursachen und Folgen des demographischen Wandels und damit verbunden [...] Familien- und Frauenpolitik" reignited national interest in women's social and political welfare (Klaus, 2008: 176). The "Auslöser" of this debate was popular news personality Eva Herman's 2006 book *Das Eva-Prinzip: Für eine neue Weiblichkeit*. Her "verquaste Mischung aus biologistischen und religiös-fundamentalistischen Positionen zu Familien- und Frauenpolitik" (Klaus, 2008: 176) inspired so much dissent that two years later, several book releases prompted what poised itself as the "neue Feminismus" (Senner, 2009: 41). Thea Dorn's *Die neue F-Klasse*, Meredith Haaf, Susanne Klinger and Barbara Streidl's

Wir Alphamädchen and *Neue Deutsche Mädchen* by Jana Hensel and Elisabeth Raether became manifestos for women in this century (Senner, 2009: 43). This moment is a demarcation of what is referred to as the period of new feminism.

The distinctions between old and new feminism were also exacerbated due to the digital disruption of the Internet, which provided new platforms and opportunities for German feminist identities to flourish. Antonia Kurz maintained in a *Süddeutsche Zeitung* article, “Das Internet kann helfen, die Welt zu verändern” (Kurz, 2011). She further insisted that feminists rest their “Hoffnungen seit einiger Zeit auf die Digitalisierung” (Kurz, 2011). *Neue Alpha Mädchen* authors insist that bloggers have “eine Initiative gegen das vergiftete Klima gestartet” (Haaf et al., 2009: 135). Online activists and their activities are characterised as “[sie] machen mit Texten und Videos auf das Problem aufmerksam und versuchen durch Netzwerke, sich gegenseitig bei chauvinistischen Attacken zu unterstützen” (Haaf et al., 2009: 135). In their parting sentiments, Haaf, Klingner and Streidl assert: “Bei uns selbst müssen wir anfangen mit einer feministischen Haltung, die gegen Ungerechtigkeit und für ein besseres Frauenleben ist” (Haaf et al., 2009: 246).

Hester Baer’s article “German Feminism in the Age of Neoliberalism” charges neuen Feminismus with shifting feminism’s focus “toward issues that matter in the private, individual lives of middle-class, white, ethnically German, heterosexual women like themselves” (Baer, 2012: 356). The trajectory from the second wave’s classical liberalism to the new movement’s supposedly insular feminism of individual gain is missing an analysis of the thread that creates this ideological split. New feminists are concerned with dissociation and renunciation rather than relationship building after the demography debates of the early to mid 2000s. These debates concern the blaming of feminism for Germany’s falling birth rate (Baer and Hill, 2015: 3; Ferree, 2012: 214). In the anthology *What is Feminism?*, editors Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley remark that “the boundaries between...[feminism’s] ‘past’ and its ‘present’, are not necessarily that clear” (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986: 25). *Neue deutsche Mädchen* authors Raether and Hensel argue their book provides “keine Handlungsanweisungen” and their ultimate aim is to show a way “‘raus aus dem feministischen Wir-Kollektiv’” (Martin, 2008).

Neuer Feminismus is therefore not far removed from postfeminist ideologies. Yet postfeminism is best understood as a sensibility, and the postfeminist mediasphere as the “critical object” of study (Gill, 2007: 148). This stance renders feminism as “informed by postmodernist and constructionist perspectives” and pursues the analysis of gender in contemporary media examples (Gill, 2007: 148). Gill further argues postfeminism as a sensibility that entangles anti and pro feminist stances, in discernible yet contradictory patterns. Whelehan argues postfeminist thought engenders “the language of culture, politics and the mass media that is quite simply anti-feminist and anti-equality” (Whelehan, 2000: 3). Gill’s analysis emphasises the individual and choice-driven narratives of postfeminist and neoliberal thoughts, in which “women are required to work on and transform the self, regulate every aspect of their conduct, and present their actions as freely chosen” (Gill, 2007: 164).

Similarities and contradictions exist between conceptions of post and new feminism. The prominence of individual choice and subsequent backlash against older feminist activism are prominent features of both movements. The “independence from a collective identification with...feminism” is as much a part of new feminism as it is the broader third wave discourse (Budgeon, 2013: 288). An example of this is the engagement with the various “contradictions” and the reappropriation of “negatively coded terms” such as “bitch” or “slut” (Budgeon, 2013: 280). Prominent American third wave feminists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards emphasise, “Feminism isn’t about what choice you make, but the freedom to make that choice.” (Gilley, 2005: 190). While second and third wave feminisms refuse “to deploy straightforward codes to designate contemporary gender ideals,” postfeminism relies paradoxically heavily upon these constructs (Budgeon, 2013: 280). Themes of “Sexualität und Körperlichkeit” feature prominently in postfeminist discussions under neoconservative frameworks (Senner, 2009: 50).

The construction of individual identities and choice is further explored through consumerism. The connection between postfeminist consumption of women-centred products as it relates to popfeminist consumption of radical political material illustrates the evolutionary relationship between these two

movements. Whilst it is argued that second-wave feminism gave way to an era of political inactivity (Mack-Canty, 2004: 158), there is less analysis of the complex interplay between post and pop feminist modes of political activity through consumerism. An example of this is chick lit as it compares to popfeminist literary events. Chick lit is commonly analysed as a retrograde popfeminist literature that engenders stereotyping through associations with feminine attributes, such as affection for the colour pink (Wolf, 1997: 10), shopping or neediness in romantic relationships. Popfeminist literary events, however, are characterised by the political proclivity of authors or protagonists against a backdrop of feminising characteristics. Cris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell note how they initially coined the term chick lit to signify “depth of what women writers can produce rather than what they’re expected to produce” (Mazza and DeShell, 1995: 8). This original signification bears relevance to a current understanding of popfeminist literary events. The relationship between these two terms illustrates the interplay between popular consumption of women’s literature within feminist frameworks.

In *Interrogating Post-Feminism*, Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker analyse postfeminist fiction’s combination of a “deep uncertainty about existing options for women” against an “idealized, essentialized femininity” (Negra and Tasker, 2007: 10). This analysis applies to understandings of popfeminist literary events as it does for chick lit, which Stephanie Harzewski characterises as “an intermediary between the pure escapism of the Harlequin and the compulsory progressiveness of feminist polemics” (Harzewski, 2011: 7). Both chick lit and popfeminist events constituted a “breath of fresh air” (Harzewski, 2011: 7) that “more directly connected” to women’s experiences (Smith, 2008: 6). Yet the political discussions in popfeminist literature and events, harken to the old-feminist period of what Erica Jong called “so much blood and guts in women’s writing that one wondered if women writers did anything but menstruate and rage” (Whelehan, 2005: 218-9). Popfeminist cultural productions reaffirm the relationships between feminist political activity and individual self that postfeminist chick lit “ineffectively disguises” (Whelehan, 2005: 219).

While this analysis partially accounts for the attraction of postfeminism, it fails to engage with the concept of othering that these movements contribute to.

Wir Alphamädchen seeks to involve men in the female discussion of representation and struggle, but to do so creates the problem of individuation. If women are the same as men, their perceptions should interrelate when in fact, as postfeminism supposes, they don't. Ariel Levy's book *Female Chauvinist Pigs* concludes that women are harbingers of an internal desire to be just one of the guys (Levy, 2005). This desire to be equal is reinforced by third wave feminist principles of "dualistic thinking" or the refusal to divide "the world into hierarchical dichotomies with one aspect regarded as superior and the 'other' regarded inferior" (Mack-Canty, 2004: 158). In this case dualistic thinking refers to the notion of women being one of the guys whilst also portraying her femininity. This dualistic thinking forges the link between Levy's female chauvinist pig and the postfeminist who exploits her femininity.

In conclusion, the shift from old to new and second-third wave feminism in the contemporary German discourse is more focused on the interplay between feminist identities than the supremacy of one particular form. Post and popfeminism are thus iterations of feminist narratives. In a German context, these iterations are characterised by an engagement with digital technologies, opposing cultural and political positions and a willingness to explore both individual relationships to feminism and the collective importance of a wider social movement. Popular culture therefore emerges as a critical space of analysis for feminist expression. The next section explores pop culture's role in feminist productions through popfeminist conceptual framework. This methodology is characterised by the interplay of political, social and cultural resignifications in literature and social media explored in the latter half of this literature review.

Popfeminism as a conceptual framework

Popfeminist theory explores the relationship between popular culture and feminist social, cultural and political beliefs. It is a recent term with a history explored in contemporary German scholarship, and as a feature and extension of Anglo Riot grrrl and third wave feminisms. The following section interrogates the popular conception of a popfeminist theoretical framework as it chiefly relates to the analysis of a subjective element (an author's work or social movement) alongside an empirical analysis of the author's embodied experience. I prioritise an awareness

of intersectional approaches that dominate contemporary feminist scholarship by problematising the association of categorical group identities without a corresponding nuanced assessment of individual participation.

The term popfeminism was first used by Sonja Eismann in the 2007 collated anthology *Hot Topic: Popfeminismus heute*. Sonja Eismann is a journalist and editor of *Missy Magazine* in Germany. The book contains visual imagery and written articles on subjects defined as Sexualität/Identität, Körper/Bilder, Medien/Arbeit, Do It Yourself/Aktivismus, Feminismus/Alltag, and Musik/Repräsentation. Eismann explains in the introduction:

Das Dilemma der Popkultur, das so alt ist wie die Popkultur selbst, hat nun auch den Feminismus erreicht, nachdem der es endlich geschafft hat, durch seinen zähflüssigen Einzug in die Popkultur ganz andere RezipientInnen zu erreichen. (Eismann, 2007: 9-10)

Eismann notes pop culture's insistence as a broader and more colloquial understanding of societal feelings and impulses, and feminism's ability to engage with this entanglement. Contemporary culture has proliferated the dichotomies between the "portokompatiblen Pseudo-Empowerment der Pussycat Dolls" and the "lahmen Gleichstellungs 'feminismus' bürgerlicher Medien und Institutionen" (Eismann, 2007: 11). Eismann and the contributors in the *Hot Topic* collection sought to provide less didactic responses to popular culture and feminism.

Popfeminism is also largely informed by a sense of neoliberalism, commonly seen in postfeminist works. In this instance neoliberalism refers to a preoccupation with an individual's success as it relates to the public good. For instance, an individual must participate in economic activities (such as purchasing and consuming) in order to fulfil their role in the global marketplace. This focus on neoliberalism complicates the inherent social justice arc of feminist and popfeminist discussions. Associating feminist action with neoliberal ideals of consumption presents a complication of both ideals. Is popfeminism promoting global market participation through individual and collective consumption or the lauding of feminist ideals through digital actions? The majority of this thesis grapples with the following questions through the lens of Smith-Prei and Stehle's work on popfeminism and cruel optimism.

Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle formulated a theory of popfeminism in part from Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*. Berlant explains that cruel optimism exists "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011: 1). She explains that attachments "become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (Berlant, 2011: 1). Berlant explains this theory in greater detail:

Whatever the experience of optimism is in particular, then, the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. But, again, optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming. (Berlant, 2011: 2)

Prei-Smith and Stehle confirm that:

feminism creates a relation, or in Berlant's words 'an attachment,' to such objects/scenes as liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom (of expression), choice of sexuality, or economic equality, all of which cruelly promise clarity of meaning (goals, intent) and productivity (success, failure). (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 135)

Within this framework, consumption of popular culture is another kind of attachment formed by capitalistic pursuits that promise personal fulfilment and collective belonging (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 135).

Popfeminism is characterised by its approach to second-wave German feminism that emerged in the politically and socially charged decades of the 1960s and 1970s along the pre-unification East/West divide. Issues of "uniting gender issues, women's rights, and body politics" (Smith-Prei, 2011: 23) intersect with interest in popular culture, making these "attachment[s]... a structure of relationality" (Berlant, 2011: 13). Resistance to the mainstream neoliberal definitions of femininity and feminist identity become a hallmark of popfeminist approaches to subcultures defined by gender and not restrained by it (Smith-Prei,

2011: 19). German popfeminism is also “subversive” while American and British counterparts tend to be less so (Smith-Prei, 2011: 23). The former is less open to a success/failure binary and therefore demands participation instead of acceptance (Smith-Prei, 2011: 21). It incites the feminist traditions of artistic enterprises as well as decoding their failures in a contemporary setting (Stehle, 2014).

Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle in their article “The awkward politics of popfeminist literary events,” explain popfeminism’s use of “feminism to draw from, disturb, and rewrite popular culture” inasmuch as it uses “popular culture to draw from, disturb, and rewrite feminism” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 132). In their titular assertion of “awkwardness,” they posit that this circular discourse contains an “inherent awkwardness” with political capital (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 132). This indicates that movements and moments that inspire awkwardness in German feminism are ripe with political discourse. This is evident in physical as well as literary events. Popfeminism is subject to “the manner in which both feminist politics and pop culture are reliant upon globalized economic mechanisms, even as these are radically rewritten, manipulated, or clashing in popfeminist works” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 134).

As such, popfeminism as a conceptual framework has a multivariate role for both researcher and activist responsibilities. As Smith-Prei and Stehle describe, its first function is to place academics “within a political discourse that is popularized” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133). This is in reference to the pop culture aspects of feminist movements that are moved beyond the scope of purely political attention and are instead engaged as well as with popular consumerism. The second function of popfeminism denotes a particular event or product that has “been consumed in masse, produced in tandem with popular response” or coalesces “the popular into their conception” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133). An event or circumstance is only termed to be popfeminist if it has interaction with popular culture. In this instance, popular culture is taken from the current trends and movements within broader society. The third function of popfeminism is as a “perspective,” one that incorporates the “personal investment” of researchers “in approaching creative work that emerges out of or engages with popular culture” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133). The literary and political events typically analysed in the purview of

popfeminism engender mass appeal, which are at times disavowed by an academy preoccupied with literary and historical canon. Engaging with popular culture and analysing its effects on German feminist culture is vital to exploring contemporary attitudes towards feminism.

As a characteristic of popfeminism, awkwardness is difficult to define due to its transient, ever-changing nature. Smith-Prei and Stehle explain that awkwardness can be found in the “narrative or poetic collision of media or material” and that it is “always retreating from view” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133). This speaks to the relativity of the term and the role that an author plays in creation of said awkwardness. If awkwardness is displayed in reference to either the author’s own personal body or the reader’s body, these are nebulous and ever-readjusted elements. In fact, the very concept of awkwardness is almost completely analogous to its subject. A popfeminist conceptual framework bears relevance to the new understandings of case study analysis by Lewis, Lang and Damousi in their book *A history of the case study: sexology, psychoanalysis, literature* (2017). Much like Lewis, Lang and Damousi explore the “undecidability” or stickiness of analysis in case studies, a popfeminist conceptual framework prioritises uncertainty and for the “ever-shifting nature” of investigation (Lewis et al., 2017: 3).

I chose “awkwardness” as an analytical starting point because it “draws attention to normative representations of sexuality, gender, and race, and to the power of prescriptive regimes of representation” whilst simultaneously “representing the collapse of standard discursive frameworks that might easily describe these representations.” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133). It evokes a precarious imbalance of social and political capital. Smith-Prei and Stehle insist that theorising “the awkward” may elucidate the complexities and “unstable positions of the political” inherent in popfeminist events (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133). Smith-Prei and Stehle write about the nebulosity of awkwardness as a term:

is always on the move within or in between texts, sometimes within the content, sometimes in the narrative or poetic collision of media or material, sometimes at the level of reception of theorization, sometimes inherent to the author’s or reader’s body, and always retreating from view. (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133)

Those who utilise awkwardness are released from reliance on the “failure/success binary” that colours so many social and political movements. Using awkwardness as a theoretical starting point, “embraces the ambivalence of effectiveness in feminist creative work” that is less about clarifying meaning and making simple complexities, than it is about illustrating a political position (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 132-3).

In addition to political resignifications, popfeminism also seeks to, as Maria Stehle explains, reframe bodily awkwardness (Stehle, 2014). Peaches’ song “Free Pussy Riot” features many unclothed or nude images of women and men in an illustration of sex positive feminism. These become representations of awkwardness through engaging with body explorations and performance practices, using concepts of performativity. The body becomes awkward through provocative movements, performance and its clashing within the frameworks of neoliberal culture (Stehle, 2014). Mihaela Petrescu explores this in her article “Popfeminism, Ethnicity, and Race in Contemporary Germany.” She follows the work of Hatice Akyün in her autobiographical works *Einmal Hans mit Scharfer Soße* (2005) and *Ali zum Dessert* (2008). In the novels, Akyün reclaims old and second wave feminist principles of body acceptance. This, in the form of not shaving, a “political statement against male hegemony over women’s bodies and an expression of liberated female sexuality,” became a politicised act in its telling (Petrescu, 2015: 118). The performative practice of shaving, of behaving in a traditionally and normative feminine fashion, becomes the fertile ground for feminist political dissention. This is also significant because Akyün’s writing is termed by academic Karin Yesilada as “chick lit alla turca” (Petrescu, 2015: 115). Yesilada is a Turkish-German journalist, using popular tropes such as sampling, remixing, and resignification to present an independent, career-oriented woman who enjoys consumer empowerment and sexual agency while, significantly, she is also critical of the sexism and racism that operates in German society (Petrescu, 2015: 113).

The reframing of awkwardness should be further considered against the close text reading of pop cultural work and the use of an implied author. An implied author is not “a mere theoretical abstraction” invented by a reader, but an “(assumed to be)” creation “by the real author in the same way that he or she

creates characters and plots" (Rabinowitz, 2011: 103). Wayne C. Booth originally coined the phrase implied author after becoming distressed about the "widespread pursuit of so-called objectivity in fiction," (Booth, 2005: 75) and upset by students' frequent misreadings of literary texts and a "'moralistic' distress about how critics ignored the value of rhetorical ethical effects" (Booth, 2005: 76).

Research into aesthetic discourses has also been completed by Lang and Sutton in their article "The aesthetics of sexual ethics: *Geschlecht und Gesellschaft* and middle-class sexual modernity in fin-de-siècle Germany." Lang and Sutton argue that aesthetics discourses popularised a "new sexual morality" that positioned middle-class propriety alongside a reader's personal notions of sexuality (Lang and Sutton, 2015: 197). Although this argument primarily concerns an early 20th Century exploration of the journal *Geschlecht und Gesellschaft*, the insights bear true for a discussion of popfeminist texts that also seek to push political boundaries of a public sexual conversation. Rather than keep this discourse within the realm of "bourgeois respectability," (Lang and Sutton, 2015: 180) popfeminist texts expose and reinterpret the concept of respectability, wilfully defying popular and social conceptions of the term.

Reading for awkwardness also implies a discovery of feminist communities. Smith-Prei and Stehle originally associate reading for awkwardness with discovering new spaces "for feminist community and joy" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a: 93). Another facet of reading for awkwardness encompasses the pervasive "politics of power, perception, and relation" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a: 111). In this regard power, perception and relation refer to the complex and nuanced aspects of reading awkwardness. In order accurately read for awkwardness, the researcher must analyse the intersection between a subject's power, the perception of their work and the relationship their work has with their audience and the public sphere. For instance, Charlotte Roche has a different nexus of power, perception and relation with *Feuchtgebiete* than Dea Loher does with *Diebe*. Yet clarifying the intersections of these nuanced aspects allows one to more fully consider the awkwardness of a text. At varying points throughout my analysis, I re-present this concept as power, reception and relation. Reception relates to the relationship between the public discourse and the given author or work. I define relation as the

varying awkward elements between feminist identities within a given work.

When attempting to read beyond a text's given meaning to what an author might be trying to convey, the implied author becomes an even more useful tool for considering "what's involved when we're exploring the forces (political, psychological, whatever) that influence what an author can say and how he or she can say it" (Rabinowitz, 2011: 103). Rabinowitz suggests that use of the implied author as a theoretical tool is beneficial because it encourages discussion of an author's "conscious and unconscious self-fashionings" as well as externally social or political constraints of culture in which the author works (Rabinowitz, 2011: 104). The implied author becomes a valuable tool for analysis when asking particular questions, especially regarding authorial intent (Rabinowitz, 2011: 106).

Utilising the implied author, however, is not without its problems. Susan S. Lanser wrote "The implied author: an agnostic manifesto" to aggregate definable truths about the theory and problematise its usage. Lanser maintains that the concept is not "an empirical entity" (Lanser, 2011: 153). Discussions utilising the implied author refer neither to the actual, flesh-and-blood author nor to a definable narrator; it is immaterial. To explain this further, Lanser prescribes the implied author as a "reading effect;" one that occurs rather than one that is (Lanser, 2011: 154). An implied author does not exist in a theoretical vacuum; it needs a reader. Finally, Lanser proposes that those who do not take the term into account either accept that an author is fully aware of her or his "intentions for the text" or those theorists who "recognize no personified source or site of meaning beyond textuality itself" (Lanser, 2011: 155). Given the premise that authors are fully aware of their work is limited and often disproven by competing analyses, belief in the implied author is less about abstraction than about acceptance of the importance of reading conventions. Lanser contends that practical expositions on implied authorship are non-existent and without a basis for determining "how readers infer an 'author' from a work of fiction" (Lanser, 2011: 157).

A popfeminist methodology is characterised by the privileging of popular culture and its role in social, cultural and political feminist identities. As a nascent theoretical concept, popfeminism is currently utilised in relation to exploring the political awkwardness involved in the exploration of feminism, the primacy of

neoliberal notions of the individual and constant engagement/circularity with the production and reproduction of feminist principles. This methodology also contends with a theory of cruel optimism, or the idea that the closer one gets to achievement of a goal, the further they are from its actuality. A theory of cruel optimism engages with paradoxical nature of feminist identities within popular culture. Furthermore, concepts such as the implied and flesh-and-blood author should also be considered pertinent in a popfeminist methodology.

Feminist identities

The construction of feminist identity within pop cultural works is primarily understood as a function of the author and the work itself. The following section prioritises a literary understanding of feminist exploration in close textual readings, which is further explored throughout chapters two and three. Initially, I contextualise feminism's role in literary theory before further placing an emphasis on the importance of an author's lived experience as it influences her work and its reception. Throughout this analysis I critique the current literature on *Feuchtgebiete* and *Diebe* and present the gaps in research that the rest of this thesis addresses. This section critiques the role of the author and her public reception alongside a close textual analysis of her work. Subsequently, I argue for a nuanced understanding of feminist identities within literary works through a comparative analysis of a self-styled popfeminist text against as yet untheorised popfeminist text.

Social media has become a ubiquitous part of the cultural and social landscape in contemporary German feminist meaning-making. Yet the role of social media continues to be understood as trite and impermanent by critics and as a panacea to social change by its champions. This section problematises the use of social media in social justice campaigns that are further explored in chapters four and five. Initially, I explore political activism in social media movements, critiquing global feminist movements before analysing the role of the movement's primary author in relation to the movement itself. I then present specific analyses related to chapter four (#aufschrei) and chapter five (#schauhin, #ausnahmslos), illustrating the current gaps in scholarship that will be addressed. This section also complements my reading of the latter half of the thesis, which argues that the use of storytelling in relation to feminist identity formation in social media movements

creates a false dichotomy between representations of collective feminist identities and the lived experience of individuals.

Literary feminism

Judith Fetterley observes in her book *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, that “literature is political. It is painful to have to insist on this fact, but the necessity of such insistence indicates the dimensions of the problem” (Fetterley, 1978: xi). The political nature of fictive and non-fictive works therefore implores readers and researchers alike to create meaningful political discourses within texts, even if they differ from an author’s original intent. An emphasis on close-text reading and creation of individual meaning within texts can “help us escape some of the more confining effects of our culture by unmaking them” (Rabinowitz, 1987: 9). In other words, literature defies unambiguous political classification through storytelling that encourages readers to define their own political response to a given text.

The political nature of literature therefore compels a feminist-centred approach to narratological analysis. The move towards an inclusive feminist theoretical stance encompassed, for Fetterley, a sense of “survival” (Fetterley, 1978: xix). Alison Case noted in “Gender and History in Narrative Theory,” that this feminist-centred analysis is grounded in “some degree of historical and cultural specificity” (Cape, 2005: 312). I further argue that this approach must, in addition to paying heed to cultural specificity, be wary of the emphasis that narratology places on storytelling as a device to create and disseminate essential truths. Feminist narrative literary theory itself was born from an “engagement with and a challenge to” the predominantly masculine narrative theories of structuralism and semiotics. It prioritises what Robyn Warhol and Lanser highlighted as the “gender and sexuality at the centre of an inquiry about the production and reception, forms and functions of narrative texts” (Warhol and Lanser, 2015: 1). This focus on gender and sexuality allows for an in-depth critical analysis of categorical representations that were previously “reduced into essentialist and universalising generalizations” of form and structuralism (Warhol and Lanser, 2015: 2). Whereby structuralism espoused a certain essential and binary understanding of gender and sexuality, feminist literary theory sought to provide more nuanced understanding of individual

experience of gender and sexuality among other aspects of one's identity.

Feminist literary criticism insists that "textual meaning is not limited either to what an author 'intended' or to the interpretation advanced by a particular critical community" (Lanser, 1991: 4). The separate acts of both reading and writing are not "neutral" but are rather "produced through complex conscious and unconscious social processes" (Lanser, 1991: 4). Gender creates difference in "the production and reception of texts, and also in the sense that the gendering of writing and reading has its basis in - and an impact upon - lived experience in the material world" (Warhol and Lanser, 2015: 7). These principles of feminist literary criticism ground this thesis's understanding of analysing an author's embodied experience against her produced work. An analysis of the types of textual meaning derived from the chosen works within a popfeminist framework enhances the importance of collective identities that emerge from initial texts.

Warhol and Lanser further understand feminist theory as a practical form of academic activism as "it continually overturns assumptions on which have served to keep gender inequalities and heteronormative epistemologies in place" (Warhol and Lanser, 2015: 7). Whilst I agree with the power of feminist literary theory as a flexible methodology for feminist analysis, I question its lack of critical engagement with contemporary pop-cultural literature in the specific feminist realm. Furthermore, Warhol and Lanser argue that feminist literary theory is poised to shift from a comfortable definition of feminist literary theory to a "critical literary feminism." Lanser defines this as a "conscious realignment with a particular feminist politics to which literary and critical practices would be accountable" (Lanser, 1991: 11). A popfeminist methodological framework, which will be further explored in the second half of this chapter, is a critical and conscious realignment with feminist politics that feminist literary theory currently lacks. Lanser further clarifies that this realignment should encompass analysis of "cultural documents that lie outside the discipline's conventional sphere" including popularised cultural artefacts in the form of "personal narratives" (Lanser, 1991: 14).

Hashtag feminism

Jack Dorsey, founder and 2017 CEO of Twitter, asserted that "people all over the world know of the power of Twitter, but it's not clear why they should harness it

themselves'" (Dorsey quoted in Arthur, 2015). Dorsey made this comment in reference to Twitter's declining user base. Collected data, however, illustrates that Twitter's user base has grown steadily from 2010's 30 million users to 328 million users in 2017 (Statistica, 2017). Yet Anne Wizorek, Kübra Gümüşay and other German feminists who partook in discourse on Twitter, used the social media platform to great social and political advantage. Through their actions, wide-spread debates on sexism and racism in Germany flourished in the main-stream media and on peoples' individual social media accounts. Attractive to organisers and participants, social media movements allow for increased mobilisation without having the benefit of a centralised system of control. In his book, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Sidney Tarrow argues social movements' power to command the mounting of "collective action without possessing the resources that would be necessary to internalize a support base" (Tarrow, 2011: 23). The autonomy of supporters allows this base to grow relatively quickly and without physical constraint.

Twitter is a minimalistic 140-character driven social media platform, created in 2006 by Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass. Its success compounded over the years, becoming nearly as popular as Facebook (Greenwood et al., 2016). Twitter users connect with one another through the creation of online communities. In the article "A Eulogy for Twitter," LaFrance and Meyer describe Twitter's multiple spheres as concentric circles. They argue:

Sometimes it helps to picture Twitter as a network of overlapping concentric circles - made bigger by retweets, modified tweets, interactions, faving, hate-faving, subtweeting, snarking, trolling, etc., etc., until they get so big and the network gets so crowded that you can't see the circles themselves anymore. (LaFrance and Meyer, 2014)

The anonymity of the Twittersphere and its disparate communities become larger as more users interact with one another. Feminists across Germany can communicate more effectively and efficiently through digital participation than what was once achievable through grass-roots structures.

The belief in individual responses (tweeting via the hashtag) to address collective ills (widespread sexism) provides a two-fold challenge to impacting

systemic change: how can physical, real-world change be implemented from hypothetical discussion, and how to encourage the political activation of those who are not already active within the movement. The role of the individual within a movement is also noted in the proliferation of the movement's aims. In this manner, social media movements champion the individual as much as the individual is used to represent the greater whole of the collective. In other words, "followers are the new leaders: It's not the leaders alone who build movements, it's the followers" (Dimond et al., 2013). The decentralised structure of online social movements is such that it not only encourages users to become content creators, but thrives within the structure this flexibility allows.

Individual participation in social media movements must also be problematised as a function of performance. Henrik Serup Christensen and Jose Marichal argue that social media use can be understood more as a discursive political performance rather than a system of individual beliefs (Christensen, 2011; Marichal, 2013). Implicit in the assumption that social media-based activism represents more of a discursive political performance than actualised identity, is the belief that the social ties of these platforms are weak. Yet weak social ties do not equate with a lack of individual feminist identity. Breuer and Farooq maintain in their article "Online Political Participation: Slacktivism or Efficiency Increased Activism?" that "easy to perform activities that involve little transaction costs for the user constitute the core offer of popular, entertainment oriented networking sites such as Facebook" (Breuer and Farooq, 2012: 20). The participant activist is only interested, therefore, if the barrier to participation is particularly low. I argue that #aufschrei and #ausnahmslos indicate the opposite of these findings, and that the individual authors of these movements inspired a collective association with feminist communities that further inspired real world actions and change.

Speaking to the performative nature of online political identity, Evgeny Morozov, outspoken critic of the effectiveness of online engagement, postulates: whether the mere availability of the 'slacktivist' option is likely to push those who in the past might have confronted the regime in person with demonstrations, leaflets, and labor organizing to embrace the Facebook option and join a gazillion online issue groups instead. (Morozov, 2009)

Craig A. Thompson defines slacktivists as “those who derive personal pleasure out of engaging in feel-good measure” without practical effect (Thompson, 2012). This definition, however, conflates the act of participation with a false sense of discursive identity. At its worst, apathetic online political engagement “is a pointless showcasing that does more to make the activists feel good about themselves than to address urgent political matters” (Christensen, 2011). Yet the function of individual participation creates a swell of collective participation and engagement with feminist issues. Rodrigo Sandoval-Almazan and J Ramon Gil-Garcia theorise a conceptual model for the cycle of social media protests. This model includes a triggering event, media response, viral organisation and physical response (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia, 2014: 369).

Social media movements that prioritise feminist concerns are by no means unique to a German public discourse. The prevalence of these movements is widespread in nature, featuring prominently in Anglo and European feminist circles. One of these movements was #prataomdet, or in German #redenwirdarüber. This movement was created in 2010 in Sweden and focused on Julian Assange and the allegations of his sexual assault of a woman. The resulting discussion provoked debate about people’s public and private actions in addition to the awkwardness of political events (Wizorek, 2014c: 185). The UK-based #shoutingback was created by *The Everyday Sexism Project* in 2012. The project aimed to create a movement wherein women could name and shame instances of sexual harassment:

In this ‘liberal’, ‘modern’ age, to complain about everyday sexism or suggest that you are unhappy about the way in which women are portrayed and perceived renders you likely to be labelled ‘uptight’, ‘prudish’, a ‘militant feminist’, or a ‘bra burner.’ (Bates, 2017)

On this multilingual website, users are encouraged to post their experiences, whether they be “outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalised that you don’t even feel able to protest” (Bates, 2017).

#ichhabnichtangezeigt was instigated by the group Handeln gegen sexuelle Gewalt in 2012. They posted the following message on blogs, Twitter and Facebook:

Sie sind vergewaltigt worden, waren sexualisierter Gewalt ausgesetzt, und haben

dies nicht oder noch nicht angezeigt? Bitte brechen Sie Ihr Schweigen. Machen Sie es öffentlich. Schreiben Sie, warum Sie noch nicht oder niemals Anzeige erstattet haben, sehr gerne auch anonym. (Oerter et al., 2012: 3)

People of all gendered orientations were given the space to write about why they had not reported their sexual assaults. 1105 anonymous statements were collected on the blog from May 1, 2012 to June 15, 2012 and compiled into an evaluative report. The goal #ichhabnichtangezeigt was the promotion of clarity and enlightenment and “die Dunkelziffer sichtbar machen, und vor allem die Gründe an die Öffentlichkeit bringen, warum die Frauen und Männer eine Dunkelziffer geblieben sind, anstatt Anzeige zu erstatten” (Oerter et al., 2012: 3).

Anonymous statements highlighted the paucity of public discourse around the discussion of sexism and sexualised violence. #ichhabnichtangezeigt focused on more thorough and introspective accounts from participants, which were then shared on social media platforms. An example of a submitted account reads:

Ich habe nicht angezeigt, weil er mein bester Freund war, ich alleine mit ihm spazieren gegangen bin, ich eine kurze Hose angezogen habe, Ihm vertraut habe, mich vielleicht nicht feste genug gewehrt habe, nicht laut genug nein geschrien habe. Weil ich mich unglaublich beschmutzt und schuldig fühle. (Oerter et al., 2012: 5)

One of the main differences between #ichhabnichtangezeigt and the movements discussed in chapters 4 and 5, is that the former is a pointed campaign, with the goal of ascertaining why individuals in Germany do not report sexual crimes perpetrated against them. There is also the option for people to reveal their experiences anonymously. This is less so the case with Twitter. While some people have aliases, others use their real names and identities, indicating they may not be willing to engage with such a pointed and direct campaign. #aufschrei, #schauhin and #ausnahmslos sought to create a unified space for awareness-raising of specific instances of sexual harassment, assault or racist perpetuated against individuals. These movements were less concerned with ascertaining why these events had taken place.

An example of followers dictating social movement progress is illustrated in Turkish men’s role in the proliferation of social media support for women’s rights

following the brutal murder of a young Turkish woman. On 11 February 2015 in Mersin Turkey, Özgecan Aslan was repeatedly stabbed and beaten with an iron bar after attempting to thwart her attempted rapist's attacks. Earlier that day Aslan had gone shopping with a friend and boarded a minibus home. Once her friend had left the bus, Aslan was alone with the driver, who then proceeded to attack her. The driver beat her to death and solicited help in disposing of the body from his father and friend. The three men dismembered her hands to remove any evidence of the perpetrator's scraped skin under her fingernails and burnt the body in the woods before dumping it adjacent to the village of Çamalan. Aslan's body was discovered two days later but was so badly burnt that her clothes were used for identification purposes (Hollmer, 2014).

Aslan's funeral was attended by 5000 people, and women helped to carry the coffin, against accordance with Islamic tradition. In addition to this, Turkish men took to social media to express their solidarity. Men donned miniskirts and posted the pictures to Twitter with the hashtag: "#ozgecanicinminietekgiy ('wear a miniskirt for Ozgecan')"

 (Meyerson, 2015). One Facebook user summarised these actions as a provocation to those who assume specific types of clothing elicit sexual assault. The person writes that:

If a miniskirt is responsible for everything, if wearing a miniskirt means immorality and unchastity, if a woman who wears a miniskirt is sending an invitation about what will happen to her, then we are also sending an invitation! (Warren, 2015)

Users expressed their sorrow and willingness to exchange stories of assault or sexism through the hashtag #sendeanlat (you tell your story) (Warren, 2015).

Women and men also utilised Twitter to express their outrage and sadness, expressing themselves with the hashtag "#ÖzgecanIçinSiyahGiy ('wear black for Özgecan')"

 (Meyerson, 2015). The president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, acknowledged violence against women as his country's "bleeding wound" and promised to "personally follow the case so that [the accused] will be given the heaviest penalty" (White, 2015). This comes, however, after Erdoğan "scolded feminists who disagreed with his statement that men have a religious obligation to act as custodians of women and must protect them" (Aytac et al., 2015). Erdoğan further stated that "you cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is

against nature because their nature is different” while addressing the Women and Justice Summit, hosted by the Women and Democracy Association, a Turkish nongovernmental organisation (Brown, 2014). In response to this, leader of an oppositional party, Aylin Nazliaka, argued the President is “openly committing a hate crime against women” through his blatantly sexist arguments (Brown, 2014). While the president expressed sympathy with women who are killed as a result of direct violence, he did not formally make the connection between treating women as property and the eventual violence perpetrated against them.

However, not all contemporary anti-harassment movements are located primarily on social-media platforms. Hollaback began in 2005 and is a movement dedicated to “creating a crowd-source initiative to end street harassment” (Hollaback, 2015). Hollaback’s mission is to “work together to better understand street harassment, to ignite public conversations, and to develop innovative strategies to ensure equal access to public spaces” around the world. The organisation encourages people to take action “from online to the streets,” encouraging broader personal and public awareness of gender-based harassment (Hollaback, 2017). As has been illustrated, there is a rich history of online feminist activism that directly inspired the work of Wizorek and Gümüşay.

Engagement with social media was once the purview of those in-the-know and on the forefront of Internet communication. Now, however, the use of social media platforms is a firmly entrenched facet of contemporary existence. Changing the way people communicate, this digital interface has also altered the creation and proliferation of feminist social media movements. Internationally and within Germany, widespread engagement with #aufschrei, #schauhin and #ausnahmslos has bred a variance of feminist identities that are only limited by an individual’s capacity. Scholarship on these movements has focused on the explicit creation of a digital movement in #aufschrei (Sadowski, 2016; Drüeke and Zobl, 2015) and the socio-political spectrum of Islamic feminism in Kübra Gümüşay’s writings (Weber, 2016a; Winkler, 2013). Further work in chapters four and five will more thoroughly analyse each of the social media movements according to a popfeminist methodology.

Conclusions

A discussion of contemporary German feminist identities is incomplete without a thorough analysis of the contemporary feminist movements, explanation of a popfeminist conceptual framework and the role of literature and social media within feminist identity formation. This analysis encapsulates the recent and most relevant work of contemporary feminist research as it specifically relates to the theoretical frameworks of popfeminism and individual scholarship on each of the investigated works. The first section analysed the evolving landscape of the contemporary German feminist discourse, from old to new and post to popfeminism. These newer feminisms privilege engagement with digital technologies, opposing cultural and political positions and a willingness to explore both individual relationships to feminism and the collective importance of a wider social movement. The second section explored the characteristics of a popfeminist framework. This methodology uses of awkwardness and cruel optimism to theorise the circularity of pop cultural production within changing feminist identities. The last sections contemplate feminist identities as explored through literature and social media movements.

This literature review has approached the central research questions: 1) what are the current feminist identities evidenced through five contemporary works; and 2) how has each work shaped German feminist identities when framed through a popfeminist methodology? The following chapters will more explicitly address these questions as they relate to the privileging of embodied experience of authors alongside their work. By utilising a popfeminist methodology, I will present a more thorough understanding of a cross section of the German feminist discourse from 2008 to 2016 through an analysis of the changed media landscape and multimedia approach of the authors.

2) "Frauen sind aber total masochistisch":¹ *Feuchtgebiete* and Charlotte Roche

Der Feminismus der ersten Generation wusste immer genau, wie wir Frauen uns zu benehmen haben. Diese Gewissheit fehlt uns. Ich habe keine Ahnung, wo gutes Benehmen für Frauen aufhört und wo böses Benehmen anfängt. Ich möchte nur, dass Frauen die Wahl haben, den einen oder einen anderen Weg zu gehen.

— Charlotte Roche, *"Ich bin gar nicht so frech,"* 2008

Well-known Austrian journalist Thomas Osterkorn described Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* as "ein Phänomen," and "der Feminismus...ist zurück. Ganz neu, ganz unverblümt" (Senner, 2009: 5-6). Osterkorn's assessment that feminism had before this moment been absent is illustrative of the postfeminist assumptions that feminism was dead or ceased to be of social or political importance (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 1; Walby, 2011: 1). The use of literature to engage the political and economic precepts of neoliberalism became the hallmark of contemporary popfeminist discursive forms of analysis. Due to its playful engagement with issues of social and political identity, *Feuchtgebiete* gained near-immediate popularity. It claimed the number 1 spot in the Amazon.com global bestseller list in its original German language (Baer, 2015: 165). In its first several years of publication, it sold approximately 1.3 million copies in Germany and has been translated into more than 20 languages. Several years later it premiered as a film at the Locarno International Film Festival before going on to appear the Sundance Film Festival.

Roche's subversive prose and reputation of doing, as Henryk M Broder of *Welt am Sonntag* maintains, "what she wants without worrying about Simone de Beauvoir or Andrea Dworkin would say about it," (Pidd, 2011) allows her work to live in the discursive space between activism and literary meaning. This resulting messiness of the relationship between the multi-varied perceptions of feminism and the fluid nature of popfeminist engagement propelled discussions of *Feuchtgebiete* into the mainstream. As a literary event, *Feuchtgebiete* played a role "of rethinking feminism in an age of global connection, when media culture exerts a pervasive influence on gender roles, beauty standards, and conceptions of sexuality" (Baer,

¹ Roche, C. 2008. *Ich bin gar nicht so frech*. In: USLAR, M. V. & VOIGT, C. (eds.) *Der Spiegel*.

2015: 165). The assumption that Roche's novel is uncritical of the popular culture it embraces is also crucial to the overall understanding of popfeminist texts' precarious relationship with neoliberal narratives of self-actualisation.

This chapter begins with an initial consideration of the formation of feminist identities through *Feuchtgebiete's* neoliberal narratives of self-actualisation and popular consumerism. The role *Feuchtgebiete* plays as a feminist novel intensifies the distinction between the feminism displayed within the text and the popular culture it mimics and parodies. This idea is seen in the concept of double entanglement, whereby Helen affirms facets of femininity and self only to later question their authenticity. Helen's desire and goal of self-actualisation is also predicated on self-determination as it's envisaged by typified tropes of lifestyle feminism and genre-specific chick-lit.

I then explore the awkwardness in *Feuchtgebiete* within its reception as a political narrative of power, perception and relation. A consideration of the impact of Roche's narrative around *Feuchtgebiete* is just as integral to analysis of the text as the novel itself. Reading one without the other risks neglecting to unpack the various cultural fluxes attributed to this literary event. Roche's appearances in the media and commentary on the novel became extensions of the novel's influence. This section problematises the advent of awkwardness in the creation, dissemination and engagement with the text alongside the various instances of affected political awkwardness in the text itself. Awkwardness is understood to proliferate in the "multi-media circulation of such events" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a: 21). The goal is to read for this awkwardness through "uncovering disruptions of the cruel optimisms of neoliberalism, discovering new avenues for connections and relatability, and searching for new spaces for feminist community" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a: 92).

Context

The first four sections, or (sub-)chapters of *Feuchtgebiete*, create a frame of reference for the reading audience. In chapter one, the reader is introduced to Helen with the opening line "Solange ich denken kann, habe ich Hämorrhoiden" which sets up the tone and subject matter of the rest of the novel (Roche, 2010: 8). Most importantly, Helen relays in detail the events that led her specifically to the

hospital emergency room. Chapter two further introduces discussion of Helen's lack of hygienic concern, especially in relation to western ideals. The push and pull of awkwardness in *Feuchtgebiete* highlights the codified experience of sexuality and a gratuity of the human body explored through Helen's experiences. The discussion of these topics is considered awkward when their details seek to subvert the culturally normalised and acceptable emotions of lust and positivity towards the body. In effect, Helen's descriptions make a mockery of cultural expectations towards female sexuality. Her forthright comfort with the visceral and the physical intensifies the distance between her discomfort with the nuanced and emotional.

This section is also notable for the introduction of male nurse Robin, who becomes significantly more important to Helen's narrative as her hospital stay progresses. Helen awakes in recovery after emergency surgery is performed on her anus. She has cut herself whilst shaving, sustained an infection and due to immense pain and discomfort has needed instantaneous medical attention. The notion of culturally normalised female hair removal gradually plays a less standard role in Helen's life. The idea of various tensions present in Helen's worldviews is also noted with the discussion on Helen's sterility and her subsequent rearing of avocado pits to satiate the desire for children.

Chapters five to ten further present Helen's present emotional state as she retells events from her past that bear significance on her present. While Helen does not relate her experiences as streams of consciousness, or randomised sequences of narrative, there is a lack of definable structure to her recollections. Throughout these chapters she reminisces about her drug use with her friend Corinna, sexual experiences with a man named Kanell and the attempted suicide of her mother and homicide of her younger brother. Each of Helen's stories scaffolds into the eventual collated representation of herself as contradictory notions of popfeminist narrative making. The graphic depictions and discomfort produced in the reader highlights the text's "create[d] expectations around, traditional feminist questions surrounding physical norms, motherhood, sexual liberation, and sexual self-realization" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 141). This notion is further exemplified as Helen desires to see the infected tissue that was removed during the operation. She explains: "Kann doch nicht sein, dass die mir was wegschneiden, wenn ich bewusstlos bin, und ich

das gar nicht zu sehen bekomme, weil es sofort auf dem Müll landet“ (Roche, 2010: 77).

Chapters eleven to fifteen broadly and further challenge lifestyle feminism through Helen's narrative journey. This assertion is demonstrated through Robin's increasing presence in the text, and Helen's attempt to seduce him. Their relationship increases in importance to Helen and resembles a typified generic romance story. The romantic element to the novel, which is not further interrogated until the final chapters, provides a more credible explanation for Helen's desire to stay ensconced in the hospital. In order to remain, she deliberately injures herself, which she also hopes will create an imperative for her mother and father to reunite at her bedside. She ruminates:

Das wäre allerdings der perfekte Grund für meine Eltern, wieder zusammenzukommen. In ihrer Trauer würden sie wieder zueinander rücken. ...Sehr guter Plan, Helen, aber leider kannst du dann nicht mehr erleben, wie sie wieder zusammenkommen. (Roche, 2010: 176)

The final five chapters of the novel are concerned with the aftermath of Helen's reopened wound and the denouement of the narrative. Helen professes her love for Robin and tells her younger brother Toby about their mother's attempted homicide. She admits to herself about this familial revelation:

Man kann doch nicht für immer schweigen. Lügen. Für den Familienfrieden? Frieden durch Lügen. Mal gucken, was passiert. Ich mache oft Sachen, bei denen ich nachher erst über die Konsequenzen nachdenke. (Roche, 2010: 210)

The novel ends with Robin and Helen walking out of the hospital as they have decided to live together. The last line reads, "Ich drücke mit Schmackes auf den Buzzer, die Tür schwingt auf, ich lege den Kopf in den Nacken und schreie" (Roche, 2010: 220).

Prior scholarship

The critical body of work regarding *Feuchtgebiete* is largely concerned with reflections on its neoliberalism, postfeminism and relationship with chick-lit. While it includes a love story, *Feuchtgebiete* is not an example of a literary Liebesroman. As Alison Lewis notes, this thoroughly-explored genre was reimagined post-unification through the concepts of wedding and marriage (Lewis, 2017: 289).

Maggie McCarthy and Katharina Gerstenberger were among the first to critically characterise *Feuchtgebiete* as a set of “rather deeply personal accounts of individual choices and experiences” (McCarthy and Gerstenberger, 2008: x). Roche championed, as she put it, “den Menschen in der Frau” with *Feuchtgebiete* (McCarthy, 2009: 25). McCarthy analysed Roche’s statement as one that “unwittingly erases differences, particularly between men and women” (McCarthy, 2009: 25). Rather, Roche highlights the cultural and social implications of Helen’s hospitalisation against the biologically indeterminate messiness of individuals, irrespective of gender.

By 2011, feminist scholarship on *Feuchtgebiete* was becoming more politically and theoretically focused on issues of popular culture, postfeminism and neoliberalism. Carrie Smith-Prei argues in the article “‘Knaller-Sex für alle’: popfeminist body politics in Lady Bitch Ray, Charlotte Roche, and Sarah Kuttner,” that this analysis often recodes and appropriates feminist-centred “the often superficial, empty, and anti-feminist codes of market and consumer driven popular culture” (Smith-Prei, 2011: 22). The reference to a neoliberal consumer-driven marketplace centres pop and postfeminist events within a political as much as a social framework. As a recognisable feminist, Smith-Prei poses how Charlotte Roche might be viewed “as the pop-replacement for the institution of Schwarzer in contemporary feminism” (Smith-Prei, 2011: 33). Yet these designations as a neoliberal or popfeminist event do not interrogate the further social and cultural importance of Roche’s work and persona to the development of reader’s feminist identities. Christa Biswanger and Kathy Davis in their article “Sexy stories and postfeminist empowerment: From Häutungen to Wetlands” determine that *Feuchtgebiete* “distances itself from feminism” as a form of postfeminism (Biswanger and Davis, 2012: 247). Biswanger and Davis suggest that *Feuchtgebiete* employs a resistance towards feminism whereas I suggest that Roche and protagonist Helen Memel have a keen desire to redefine feminism for their purposes, not to renounce it.

Central to a neoliberal understanding of *Feuchtgebiete*’s analysis is the use of a political and sexualised female body to subvert norms of consumerism. Touched upon by Smith-Prei in “Knaller Sex,” Maria Stehle focused on the role of

rebellious speech as it relates to gender and sexuality within *Feuchtgebiete*. In “Feminist politics and the multi-media performances of Elfriede Jelinek, Charlotte Roche, and Lady Bitch Ray,” Stehle argues that the novel “cannot be separated from its reception in the media” (Stehle, 2012: 236). The close relationship between *Feuchtgebiete* as a text, its reception and the persona of Charlotte Roche is further refined in the following section as the relationship of the author’s embodied experience against the storytelling narrative of her employment. Rather than, as Stehle argues, framing *Feuchtgebiete* only as a performative text used to subvert notions of sexualised and gendered female bodies, I suggest a reading that also considers the intended readership and their responses.

Emily Spiers questions in her article “The long march through the institutions: from Alice Schwarzer to pop feminism and the new German girls,” if popfeminists’ “championing of neoliberal individualism and freedom of choice, as undergirded by market-driven consumer culture, combined with their animosity towards the second wave, ultimately divests their writing of a progressive feminist politics” (Spiers, 2014: 71-2). Spiers reasons that the *Neue Deutsche Mädchen*:

[subscribe] to the neoliberal rhetoric of individualism discourages both politicisation and collective action; paradoxically, they succumb to the postfeminist patriarchal norm even while proclaiming the need for a new type of feminism. (Spiers, 2014: 88)

I critique this assumption, instead focusing on Roche and *Feuchtgebiete*’s dedication to politicisation and subsequent categories of social and political identification.

McCarthy argues in her article “Fractured legacies and dialogical selfhood in Charlotte Roche’s *Feuchtgebiete* (2008) and *Schoßgebete* (2011)” that *Feuchtgebiete* “implicitly critique[s] a younger generation’s wilful individualism” (McCarthy, 2016: 86). I argue that this criticism of individualism maintains a larger purpose of an association with a collective feminist identity and therefore challenge McCarthy’s notion of a theoretical “shift from actual, autonomy-aspiring women to a broader, conceptual notion of gender, as well as from collective, grassroots activism to individualistic performances” (McCarthy, 2016: 84). I argue that within popfeminist literature, the opposite holds true, i.e.

that as an increased notional understanding of gender as related to performance emerged, popfeminist events translated this from individualistic performances to collective, grassroots activism.

Petra Volkhausen, with a view to female madness, argues that *Feuchtgebiete* and *Schoßgebete* illustrate “the negative ramifications of an all-pervasive neoliberal mindset and its unrealistic promise that hard work always prevails (irrespective of gender, sex, social status, or race)” (Volkhausen, 2017: 71). This analysis, whilst adding to cultural and social relevance of *Feuchtgebiete* as a novel, is too narrowly focused on the relationship between the presentation of women’s psychosis and socio-political success. The centralisation of “mothering and sexuality” explored within the article fails to contextualise the importance of Roche’s embodied experience in relation to the text. In addition to this, Volkhausen lauds the novel’s “influence of the white neo-liberal notion of an individual’s responsibility in creating the ideal, sane female self” (Volkhausen, 2017: 75). Yet this analysis does not account for Roche’s prioritisation of awkward elements to satirise neoliberal edicts of consumption.

Feuchtgebiete has been analysed according to its precepts of neoliberalism (Scharff, 2013; Baer, 2015; Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015), its associations with old and new feminisms (Spiers, 2014; McCarthy, 2011) and reflections of female madness (Volkhausen, 2017). Yet a gap remains in the critical analysis of Roche’s embodied experience of flesh and blood author against the storied fictional account of *Feuchtgebiete*. I fill this lacuna with a thorough analysis of Roche’s media persona and relationship with feminist identity discourse encouraged by *Feuchtgebiete* and its relationship with popfeminism. Furthermore, I contend that from the individual performance of author and her work, arose an association with collective feminist principles of equality and a nuanced understanding of individual identity politics.

Neoliberal narratives of self-actualisation and (pop)consumption

In a 2009 interview with *Spiegel Online* magazine Roche stated, “I hate shaving, but I shave because I want to be an attractive woman and I don’t want people to throw stones at me in the street” (Power, 2009). This was a tongue-and-cheek response to the interviewer Nina Power’s question “But do you think men who say

they prefer their women totally shaved, with artificial breasts, is it because of a kind of familiarity with porn, or is it what they want?" Roche's answer, rooted in self-aggrandisement and cultural pastiche, is typical of her relationship towards feminist identity. As Power praises Helen for being a "modern" yet "natural" character, Roche plays with this characterisation and the ensuing implication that Helen is emblematic of neoliberal principles, such as the back and forth critiques of normative female-focused social and personal behaviours. These ideas are manifested chiefly in the neoliberal construct of consumerism and ownership. Helen rebuffs "the power of prescriptive regimes of representation" whilst simultaneously "representing the collapse of standard discursive frameworks that might easily describe these representations" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 133).

Smith-Prei and Stehle have thoroughly contextualised and highlighted the novel's position as a specific popfeminist literary event. My further interrogation of Helen as a character and her inner and outer worldviews creates a richer landscape of *Feuchtgebiete's* role as a popfeminist text. The novel is presented in 20 loosely defined sections and is written from Helen's perspective as a rumination on the present and past. *Feuchtgebiete* provides a contemporary case study in the relationship between popfeminism as a sub feminist movement and neoliberalism as the dominant political and social paradigm of contemporary Germany. The rest of this section demonstrates this phenomenon through an analysis of the novel's double entanglement, self-actualisation and cruel optimism of collective belonging.

Double entanglement

Figures in the German media coined Roche as "das würdige Enkelkind von Alice Schwarzer" (Menschen, 2008). Schwarzer, who is regularly called upon as a spokesperson for old German feminism, voiced her frustrations with Roche in an open letter, penned after Schwarzer was mentioned in Roche's sophomore novel *Schoßgebete* (Schwarzer, 2011). Roche retorted, "junge Feministinnen müssen Alice Schwarzer für viel[es] dankbar sein" but that it is now time to philosophically move on (Roche, 2008). When asked in the same interview if Schwarzer was too old to be considered a good feminist, Roche responded in exasperation, "ich finde es schrecklich, dass es für so etwas Wichtiges wie Feminismus nur diese Frau gibt" (Roche, 2008). The boundaries between success and failure had summarily shifted

between a generational old and new iterations of feminism, creating tension and dissonance.

Popfeminist double entanglement will be explored through culturally-enforced beauty norms, modes of popular consumption and engagement with the role of rebellion. Double entanglement refers to the co-existence of “neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life..., with process of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations” (McRobbie, 2009: 12). The assumption that *Feuchtgebiete* rejects old forms of feminism but then colludes with anti-feminist neoliberal rhetoric of popular culture forms the basis for the neoliberal narrative of self-actualisation promoted in the novel. *Feuchtgebiete*'s overwhelming success suggested that certain acts of consumerism could lead to an individual's ability to be a better feminist. As all cultural messages are codified, bought and sold, feminism is no different to this trend. Roche's novel captured the zeitgeist of the feminist movement; the role of the individual's choice and the novel's role in directly influencing the course of mainstream feminism.

The rejection of older feminist principles, anti-male, anti-sex and anti-consumerist rhetoric, are then reified and internalised through normative cultural acceptance. Roche exemplifies this push and pull in a 2009 interview:

If I'm being really honest, on the one hand I want women to be liberated, but on the other, I have terrible problems. I think I'm too fat, although I'm probably too thin. It's really difficult, for example, to live in a society like this with small tits.
(Power, 2009)

While Roche indicates a desire to discontinue the neoliberal cycle of consumerism as a means of personal fulfilment, the pull towards participating within the framework perpetuates the cycle of self-dissatisfaction. There is a circular and awkward emphasis on the re-treading of familiar paths that lead to inequality and dissatisfaction.

These factors are also evidenced by the many entrenched and normative expectations of feminine beauty ideals that exist in the 21st century. Helen shaves her legs, applies makeup and generally presents herself in the typical, attractive way that young women are encouraged to look like. These beauty ideals are largely

a reflection of the push and pull of neoliberal individualist notions of cultural acceptance and are described by Naomi Wolf as “ideal because it does not exist” (Wolf, 1991: 176). Neoliberalism suggests that individuals are responsible for satisfactory appearance of self. The responsibility for beauty lies with the individual but the metric for rating beauty lies within society’s normative acceptance of what is deemed beautiful at any given time. Consequently, normative gendered beauty is emblematic of complex cultural practices and marketing. The illustration of specific beauty-centred norms in *Feuchtgebiete* engender a complex reading of the principles of double entanglement and the stance Helen straddles between subversion and normalisation of these ideals.

Makeup is a socially-conditioned facet of femininity and Helen’s normative participation in its display reifies pop culture’s anti-feminist rhetoric. Helen uses makeup to maintain artifice or façade but also to replicate on herself what she admires in others. Helen continually applies mascara to her eyelashes without removing the prior layer, creating an intentional build-up of full lashes (Roche, 2010: 60). This need plays in contrast to Helen’s displays of enjoyment of her natural and inartificial body, such as consumption of bodily fluids, reverence of menstruation and desire to partake in unhygienic activities. This notion, however, is subverted by Helen’s use of makeup on her inner labial lips to make the “Muschi und Rosette” appear “dramatischer, tiefer, betörender” (Roche, 2010: 124). In a mocking, playful and satirical gesture, the use of makeup on her vagina and anus reflects the popfeminist subversion of consumer culture as it relates to her desire to prove difference and self-worth in elements beyond the traditional scope of femininity.

The removal of body hair as a typical gendered beauty norm is explored through several moments in the novel. Early in the book Helen references her adherence to hair removal rituals, partly as an explanation for why she is in the hospital, an accidental fissure from shaving her anus:

Da bei mir der Arsch offensichtlich zum Sex dazugehört, ist er auch diesem modernen Rasurzwang unterworfen wie meine Muschi, meine Beine, meine Achselhöhlen, der Oberlippenbereich, beide großen Zehen und die Fußrücken auch. ...Früher war ich unrasiert sehr glücklich, aber dann habe ich mit dem

Quatsch mal angefangen und kann jetzt nicht mehr aufhören. (Roche, 2010: 9-10)

Susan Brownmiller writes that a “woman found wanting will be appraised (and will appraise herself) as mannish or neutered or simply unattractive, as men have defined these terms” of femininity (Brownmiller, 1984: 15). Helen’s chance meeting with Kanell, a shopper at the market she works at, opens Helen to the experience of shaving as sexual experience. Kanell shaves Helen’s body hair weekly (Roche, 2010: 57) in a ritualistic manner. This experience disrupts the normative depiction of shaving, a perfunctory act, and ascribes sexual meaning to it. In this way, Helen’s popfeminist iteration of shaving does not acutely subscribe to anti-feminist rhetoric of male-defined femininity, but in the creation of pleasure in this act.

While she is not viewed participating in a normative practice of consumption, such as shopping, Helen does reflect a sense of self from codified symbols of femininity. In an explicit choice to participate in culturally normative beauty practices, Helen questions old feminism’s rejection of this behaviour. Helen challenges beauty rituals but does not find a dissonance between body positivity, acceptance and participation in these rituals. Helen uses her “Smegma wie andere ihre Parfümflakons” (Roche, 2010: 19) mocking the beauty industry for its promotion of an individual yet standardised scent. She subverts this idea through peppering her body with her own scent, sending pheromones in hopes of eliciting male desire, just as perfume is regularly marketed towards women.

Helen’s relationship with her body and sex in general is couched in such positive terminology that any behaviour to the contrary feels like a direct affront to her viewpoint. The double entanglement in this scenario is that Helen is still attuned to the ingrained neoliberal rhetoric that she doesn’t fit a specific ideal, as is illustrated by her desire for larger breasts. That she feels imperfect per an internalised aesthetic is also mocked by the way Roche uses these emotions as a backdrop for Helen’s oncoming menstruation. As Helen self-interrogates why she has such a visceral reaction against Margarete, she notes that when she “jemanden ohne für mich nachvollziehbaren Grund so verachte und am liebsten schlagen oder wenigstens verbal fertigmachen würde, bahnt sich normalerweise meine Periode an” (Roche, 2010: 108). The playful and mocking nature of substituting rational thought for emotional response is an oft-conceived anti-feminist rhetoric. Pop

culture routinely trades on the trope of a menstruating woman as unstable and overly emotional.

Consumption is also explored through the lens of women as subject and their femininity as object as this relates to feminine hygiene. Tampons are an example of this relationship and one in which Helen subverts the notion of the power relations between consumer and consumption. Helen creates her own tampons from rolled up pieces of toilet paper because they are “teuer und überflüssig” (Roche, 2010: 111). She considers: “Wenn ich der Tamponsindustrie ein Schnippchen schlagen kann, freue ich mich immer sehr” (Roche, 2010: 122). The feminist movements of the ‘70s and ‘80s “interrogated the status quo surrounding every aspect of a woman’s embodied experience” including questioning the usage of conventional products like pads and tampons (Bobel, 2006: 332). More vitriolic activism against tampons was a result of the increased prevalence of Toxic Shock Syndrome, “a rare but potentially fatal disease caused by a bacterial toxin” with the use of tampons (Bobel, 2006: 332). Contemporary menstruation activism is concerned with the environmental impacts of single-use sanitation, safety of materials used, cost of such products and tampons role in “obscur[ing] the reality of menstruation” to hide its occurrence (Bobel, 2006: 334). Helen’s creation of her own tampon ties her defiance to contemporary radical feminist actions. Instead of rejecting older feminist views of consumption, she takes a logical self-made DIY approach, much like ‘90s third-wave Anglo feminism and popfeminism, thereby subverting the double-entanglement of embracing anti-feminist rhetoric.

Helen’s use of drugs is not moralised but romanticised. Her drug use reinforces a coming of age angle within *Feuchtgebiete* that is more concerned with exposition of experience than it is with casting moral judgement. In an exposition of this, Helen relates an experience she has with friend Corinna when they partake in Helen’s boyfriend’s drug stash. They take everything from pills, to cocaine and alcohol, noting “Wir fanden es unangemessen, schon morgens Speed und Koks durch die Nase zu ziehen, und haben aus Klopapier Bömbchen gebaut” (Roche, 2010: 62). This experience culminates in their regurgitation of all the drugs and eating the resultant vomit so as not to waste any. There is no moralising in the event

from Helen's perspective, only the route retelling of events as they occurred and a possible result as to why Helen has trouble remembering certain events.

The first half of this section has argued the significance of double entanglement in Helen and *Feuchtgebiete's* exploration of feminist identity. It has been explored through the neoliberally defined precepts of femininity (body hair, makeup, hygiene) alongside the coming of age narratives of rebellion. Double entanglement occurs as Helen continually reaffirms these narratives only to subsequently question their authenticity and her role in their affirmations. This circular dialogue positions double entanglement as an important feature of popfeminist identity narratives. The next segment will analyse how Helen strives for self-actualisation within a neoliberal framework.

Self-actualisation

Reliant upon "globalized economic mechanisms," *Feuchtgebiete* became an homage, or "rewritten, manipul[at]ion" of popfeminist ideals (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 134). Helen's actions develop into a neoliberal representation of what Smit-Prei and Stehle phrase "individual self-realization" promoted by the various chick-lit and lifestyle focused contemporary feminisms (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 142). This self-actualisation resembles what Margaret McCarthy cites as popfeminism's ultimate identification as "self-centred and wilfully contrary youth in need of psychic, but not actual substantive differentiation from its parent generation" (McCarthy, 2011: 59). This section investigates the self-actualisation narrative codified in individualised, choice-driven narrative of neoliberalism and typified coming of age or popularised chick-lit novels. I explain how *Feuchtgebiete* subverts these notions through critical engagement within her familial (mother, father, brother) and romantic relationships (Robin).

Angela McRobbie's suggestion that postfeminism is "retrogressive and even anti-feminist," (Genz, 2009: 9) relates to the popularity of chick lit and coming of age novels. These novels are marketed in rows of pink-patterned book covers, embossed shopping bags, high-heeled shoes and ornate script aimed at feminine gendered stereotyping (Wolf, 1997: 10). Encased therein are shelves of chick lit, a genre associated with the quest of finding the perfect man and attaining personal, professional fulfilment. As chick lit is currently defined, its association is met with

pandering and a re-signification of conditioned gender norms. It stands in direct opposition to the well-known image of a second wave feminist proudly flinging her bra into a fire, dually renouncing both the patriarchal and consumeristic notions of constraint. This image of ardent feminist protesters at the 1968 Ms. America pageant (Whelehan, 2000: 1) elicits as vivid a perception of womanhood as a neon pink book cover does, albeit for differing reasons. The stereotypical signs of what neoliberalism associates with femininity (the colour pink, shopping bags and lipstick) continually reinforce this myth, or as Roland Barthes defines it, “a message” (Barthes, 2009: 131).

Feuchtgebiete's plot revolves around Helen's plan to create a forced encounter between her divorced parents and reunite her broken family. Helen's metric of success is therefore measured against the unification of her family, both of whom have other partners. She does not pause to consider the effects this success may have or critically why she desires their reunion. By the end of the novel, however, she becomes more aware of the fact that her parents will never reunite. Embracing this failure, she begins to determine that success may in fact resemble the opposite of her initial goal. This coming of age for Helen, who at 18 has already legally come of age, is predicated on the revelation that she herself has become more of a parental figure than her parents have been to her. The revelation comes after Helen's self-inflicted wound precipitates an emergency surgery.

Vielleicht sollte ich mal damit aufhören. Die wollen nicht, dass ich mich um sie kümmerge. Und ich sollte wohl langsam mal aufhören, was von denen zu erwarten. Klarer kann der Fall nicht sein. Ich liege hier, notoperiert, die sind benachrichtigt, und keiner kommt. So geht es zu in unserer Familie. Ich weiß genau, wenn einer von denen so was hätte wie ich jetzt, ich würde nicht von seiner Seite weichen. Das ist der große Unterschied. Ich bin eher deren Eltern als die meine. Damit muss ich aufhören. Schluss damit, Helen. Du wirst jetzt erwachsen. Du musst ohne sie klarkommen. (Roche, 2010: 185)

This marks a turning point in the novel, wherein Helen grows up to the extent that she no longer fantasises about her family. Rather, her thoughts turn toward the creation of irreparable divisions in the family structure.

Instead of being the cause for bringing her family together, Helen determines

to be a catalyst for its psychological disillusionment. Helen's brother Tony goes to visit Helen in the hospital after she further injures herself on a bed. She reveals to Tony that their mother attempted to murder him, when he was younger, by sticking his head in the oven. She relates the story to her brother, who was too young at the time of the incident to remember it:

'Als du ganz klein warst, hat Mama versucht sich umzubringen. Sie wollte dich mitnehmen. Die hat dir mit dem Fläschchen Schlafmittel eingeflößt und selber Tabletten genommen. Als die nette Helen nach Hause kam, lagt ihr bewusstlos auf dem Küchenboden und Gas strömte aus dem Ofen. Ich habe euch gegen den Willen von Mama gerettet, kurz bevor das Haus in die Luft flog oder ihr erstickt wäret.' (Roche, 2010: 209)

The predilection to destroy familial ties after attempting to reinforce them indicates Helen's embracing of failure. This failure in fact became an ultimate success as she reframed the scenario against her new perceptions. Helen does this in association with her own feelings about relationships and self-worth. As she decides to form a relationship with Tony, her feelings towards her own family become more embittered and Helen gives up one idea of success (familial love) for another (romantic love).

Helen's mother is blamed for causing Helen varied instances of trauma and not fulfilling the normative role of a caring and loving mother figure. The "negative emotions and critical negativity" of motherhood "emerge[s] as the primary points of the performance" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 135). Helen's relationship with motherhood and mother figures is damaged and as a result she prefers the company of men. Helen's tolerance and compassion is exclusively extended to men in the story. Her father, whom she simultaneously pities and admires, is continually portrayed as the victim in his former marriage. Helen comments that, "Kinder, deren Vater immer von der Mutter schlecht gemacht wurde, rächen sich irgendwann an der Mutter. Alles kommt wie ein Bumerang zurück" (Roche, 2010: 43). She also admits: "Ich kann mir alles, was mein Vater mir beibringt, sehr gut merken. Für immer eigentlich. Alles, was meine Mutter mir beibringt, nicht" (Roche, 2010: 127).

Helen regularly criticises her mother's choices and remains conciliatory,

sympathetic and at worse ambivalent towards her father. This strained relationship comes as a result of Helen's deep resentment of her mother's attempted suicide and choice not to take her brother, not herself, with her. This event leads to Helen's creation of binary and opposing distinctions between her parents. One such distinction is Helen's notion of her mother as artificial or contrived and her father as of the natural world. Helen explains these thoughts through a description of her mother's many fears:

Papa hat große Freude an seinem Wissen über die Natur. Mama macht die Natur und ihr Wissen darüber Angst. Sie scheint ständig dagegen zu kämpfen. Sie kämpft gegen Schmutz im Haushalt. Sie kämpft gegen die verschiedensten Insekten. Auch im Garten. Gegen Bakterien aller Art. Gegen Sex. Gegen Männer und auch gegen Frauen. Es gibt eigentlich nichts, womit meine Mutter kein Problem hat. (Roche, 2010: 128)

Consequently, Helen embraces the unhygienic, perverse and gratuitous moments of life that her mother has rejected.

Helen's relationship with Robin is indicative of the genre-specific chick-lit novels espoused by lifestyle feminisms. These novels champion a female protagonist who overcomes obstacles (usually those of career or family) and is united with a male figure who, typically, was there all along through her struggles. Robin, the male nurse on the proctology floor of the hospital, is this figure in *Feuchtgebiete*. He appears infrequently in the novel, speaking with Helen and fulfilling a focal point for her sexual desires. Their courtship is brief and is chiefly evidenced through Helen's attempt to seduce Robin with a story of her exhibitionism at a dance club. By the end of the novel, he has agreed to allow Helen to live with him, supposedly fulfilling the genre-specific ending. This event completes Helen's self-actualisation as an adult. By this point, she has emotionally come of age through the renunciation of her desire to see her parents reunited and in finally taking care of herself through the culmination of her relationship with Robin.

Helen's emotional journey leads to this conclusion and is evidenced through her playful inner monologue about Robin. As an unreliable narrator and one whose commentary is rife with playful and mocking moments, announcements such as "Er

liebt mich. Wusste ich's doch. So schnell geht das manchmal" (Roche, 2010: 178) can arguably be read as ironic and unconvincing of her sincerity. The idea of self-fulfilment through an earnest relationship with Robin is also questioned by Helen's creation of a new snack food that she gives to Robin. She inserts a raisin in a grape that also contains her tear drops, collected after she reopened her anal wound. She offers a "tear-grape" to Robin, citing "Ich glaube, wenn ein Mann die Tränen von einer Frau isst, sind die beiden für immer verbunden" (Roche, 2010: 195). Towards the end of the novel when taking stock of her appearance Helen notes: "Ich sehe nicht gut aus. Finde ich auch sonst nicht. Aber jetzt ganz besonders. Meine Haare sind fettig und stehen überall rum" (Roche, 2010: 215). Her fear intensifies as she calls for Robin to attend her. His reaction to her unkemptness is a barometer for his affections. Journalist Sallie Tisdale remarked this as a confirmation of Helen as "a lost little girl at heart" (Tisdale, 2009).

Helen's release from the hospital, thereby thwarting her plans to find a place to live and necessitating her asking Robin, are reminiscent of a confessional style seen in a romantic comedy. This moment plays with the typified male saviour discourse typical of the overall genre:

'Robin. Ich hab euch alle angelogen. Ich hatte schon längst Stuhlgang. Ich bin sozusagen gesund. Du weißt schon, ohne Blutung. Also vorne schon. Aber hinten nicht. Du verstehst. Ich wollte so lange wie möglich im Krankenhaus bleiben, weil meine Familie hier so schön zusammenkommen könnte. Wir sind nämlich keine Familie mehr, und ich wollte, dass meine Eltern hier in diesem Zimmer zusammenkommen. Das ist aber ganz schön verrückt. Die wollen nämlich gar nicht. Die haben neue Partner, die ich so ignoriere, dass ich von denen noch nicht mal die Namen weiß. Ich will nicht zu meiner Mama nach Hause. Papa ist weg. Mama hätte meinen Bruder fast umgebracht, so schlecht geht es der. Ich bin achtzehn. Ich kann selbst entscheiden, wo ich sein will. Darf ich bei dir wohnen?' (Roche, 2010: 216-7)

Self-actualisation arises at the cost of revealing to Robin the moments she has been dishonest with him. This speech is also largely reflective of a coming of age trope of liberation and renunciation of parents. Helen is declaring herself free from their influence and more importantly, from obsession over their relationship. This issue remains, however, that while Helen conceives of her independence as physically

and emotionally complete, her age and lack of resources conclude this statement is largely metaphorical. She may go on to live with Robin, and if the end of the novel is any indication, this is a distinct possibility, but less is mentioned of Helen's ability to truly take care of herself without adult supervision.

This section reasoned that Helen's self-determination is largely influenced by a choice-driven narrative of neoliberalism typified by popularised chick lit novels. Helen's familial relationships are influenced by her desire to be represented as an individual without the constraints of a past marred by difficult interactions with her mother, father and brother. She subverts this discourse, however, through attempting to rectify the past through rewriting her narrative. If she reconnects her parents, then her certainty as an independent adult is secure. Yet Helen succeeds by reframing her association with individualisation and chooses failure when she moves on from a relationship with her family and towards a romantic relationship with Robin. The next portion of analysis will discuss feminist identity in the novel as a function of collective sisterhood and belonging.

Cruel-optimism of collective belonging

Helen is never physically described in the novel, apart from her various orifices. Roche cites this as intentional, noting "In my head, she looks like me" (Roche quoted in Caesar, 2009). Journalist Ed Caesar wrote that Helen's anonymous depiction "undermines [Roche's] greater point – that women are more than the sum of their orifices" (Caesar, 2009) yet many women identify with their perception of *Feuchtgebiete's* body positive feminism and Helen as a character. Roche noted in interviews that "'young women'" who read *Feuchtgebiete* are "'not shocked and they don't think it's scandalous'" (Roche quoted in Sehgal, 2009). She further cited:

I've done tons of readings, and the women in the audience always have a great laugh and admit that they used to be embarrassed about some body fluids or smells, but since they read the book they're not embarrassed about anything anymore. (Sehgal, 2009)

Helen also speaks of a defined female collective and notions of sisterhood throughout *Feuchtgebiete*. These desires are made explicit in her desire to share fluids with a friend, not being able to speak openly about her body to other women and not being able to experience women's naked bodies as she might like to.

There is a sense of endurance for sisterhood and collective belonging in *Feuchtgebiete*, whose feminist narratives create a “proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises” (Berlant, 2006: 20). Helen’s desire to experience a collective experience of womanhood is played with in the novel through over the top imagery of Helen sharing a tampon and of partaking in prostitution in relation to participation in a feminine collective. This section will explore the tension created by the cruel optimism of female belonging and sisterhood as represented in the novel. The tension exists between the rhetoric of neoliberalism’s prioritisation of individual success against the political precarity of a collectively and universally defined female struggle for equity.

There is an endurance in the idea of sisterhood and collective belonging in the way that Helen shares tampons with her former friend Irene, or as Helen calls her Sirene. Helen describes coming up with this – “Tolles ausgedacht” (Roche, 2010: 113) – noting that “So waren wir durch unser altes, stinkendes Blut verbunden wie Old Shatterhand mit Winnetou. Blutsschwesterschaft” (Roche, 2010: 114). This imagery is imbued with the cruel optimism of collective female belonging against the neoliberal rhetoric of pop cultural consumption. The use of a tampon to create a sisterhood is a subversion of the sorority and secret society dictated by the advertisements associated with menstruation. Helen creates a sense of belonging through the subversion of the anti-feminist reliance on disposable consumption of sanitary items.

Helen’s desire to commune with other women is further illustrated by her inability to discuss questions about her body with other women. She notes:

So hat meine ganze Unterhosenammlung genau an der zentralen Stelle einen braunen Fleck. Gewöhnt man sich dran nach ein paar Jahren. Haben das andere auch? Welches Mädchen oder welche Frau könnte ich mal fragen? Keine. Wie immer. Bei allem, was ich wirklich wissen will. (Roche, 2010: 119)

Helen expresses a desire to participate in a collective sisterhood in a very practical way. Typical of her personality and the novel in general, Helen desires to know more about the biology of women’s bodies. Rather, Helen’s definition of community and sisterhood is more perfunctory. Her relationship with her body is the dominant relationship that’s portrayed in *Feuchtgebiete* and she is more

concerned with questions regarding its normality and sexual use than she is interested in platonic female friendship.

As much as Helen's interest in collective female belonging fixates on the physical body, her association with (heterosexual) men is also similarly positioned. She remains jealous of men's ability to experience women sexually. Helen relates this by speaking about seeing her friends naked:

Darum beneide ich Männer. Ich würde auch gerne die Muschis von meinen Freundinnen und Schulkameradinnen sehen...Aber das ergibt sich so selten. Und nachzufragen traue ich mich auch nicht...Ich sehe immer nur die Schwänze von den Männern, mit denen ich ficke, und die Muschis von den Frauen, die ich bezahle. Ich will mehr sehen im Leben! (Roche, 2010: 71)

Therefore, Helen's desire to experience women is associated as much with a desire to know her own body than it is a desire to partake in a feminist community. The association with feminist identity is rooted more within a physical understanding of oneself as a woman rather than the emotional depths associated with women and sisterhood.

Helen's further desire for woman-centred belonging manifests in her desire to have children after undergoing voluntary sterilisation. She undertakes this procedure to not subject anyone else to the physical and mental duress that she grew up with. Additionally, she does not want to pass any mental health issues on to a potential child, such as the neuroses exhibited by her mother and grandmother. It is a powerful notion that Helen chooses to destroy her ability to have children or partake in the ability to join a broader biological collective identity of motherhood. Helen's choice of biological childlessness challenges the traditional paternalistic German view that women's roles are deeply entrenched in the bearing and rearing of children. Yet as Helen excludes herself from bearing children, she has not rejected the process entirely.

Helen's iteration of the culturally ingrained need for children is expressed in another way. In lieu of having flesh-and-blood children, Helen raises avocado pits; her plant-based solution to the raising of children. She lovingly creates an environment for them to thrive, giving them mineral water and special attention. She reminds herself that there are living things that depend upon her, (Roche, 2010:

151) citing “ein Avocadokern sieht aus wie ein Ei“ (Roche, 2010: 39). Helen also reflects that she’ll never come closer to giving birth than her cultivation of the avocado babies (Roche, 2010: 40). Later on, in the novel as her relationship with Robin develops, she offers to give him one of the best specimens. This exchange is important to consider because it is as if Helen is vetting Robin as a potential partner by giving him the opportunity to rear one of her children. By the end of the novel when she asks to move in with him, this relationship is made even more explicit. They will become surrogate parents, supplanting Helen’s need to experience the success of her own parental union. She still maintains a foothold in the collective woman identity to have children, and she does this through her own relation to the avocado pits.

Other tensions between normative woman-centred modes of belonging are exemplified by Helen’s cool persona and her annoyance with women she deems as prim and proper. Postfeminism is predicated on the ideal that feminism has succeeded, but also that women should be encouraged to create their own ideals of feminism. This idea references that women can identify with men by being cool without presenting any outwardly feminist traits. Helen’s aggressive flirting with Robin and her iteration of exhibitionism on the dance floor are an example of her desire to be cool as well as one-of-the-guys. In order to prove her sexual dominance to Robin, Helen relates a story of how she cut a hole in her underwear at a nightclub, “damit man die Haare und die ganzen Schamlippen und so sieht” (Roche, 2010: 101). Ariel Levy conceives of these women as “female chauvinist pigs” (Levy, 2005). This term entails how women retain sexual attractiveness while immersing oneself in coded male activities. Helen’s desire to appeal sexually attractive to Robin whilst engaging in brazen, and so-called unladylike behaviour is an example of this.

The desire to be one of “The Guys” also results in a renunciation of a perceived collective sisterhood, whether that includes feminism or sorority (Moran, 2012: 133). As Caitlin Moran summarises in her book *How to be a woman*, “seeing the whole world as ‘The Guys’ is important” because it simultaneously neutralises and nullifies gendered difference (Moran, 2012: 133). As the protagonist of *Feuchtgebiete*, Helen is an illustration of a young woman who yearns to be desired

by the men around her and whose ostentatious attitudes towards liberated sexuality and purveyance of brothels illustrates her as one-of-the-guys. This analysis, however, risks being derivative if it does not consider Helen's overall subversion of behaviours that are attached to this activity. Helen has too much "Respekt" (Roche, 2010: 116) for the women in brothels to be inebriated while there. She is there for a "Muschistudium" and to learn from women's experiences, and therefore her presence elevates the events from voyeuristic to a student/tutor relationship.

Helen's behaviour as being part of one-of-the-guys, however, lies in opposition to her perception of women who are too well kept or unmessy. Helen's thoughts about a nurse, Margarete, exemplify the ingrained and coded individualism of neoliberal thought. Helen mocks Margarete and the concept of a well-kept-woman, or what she calls the appearance of a doctors' daughter. The women are "sauber und irgendwie behandelt. Jede kleinste Körperstelle wurde mit irgendwas bedacht" (Roche, 2010: 106). Helen deems these women "uptight" and "unsexy" because of their pursuit of what she believes to be a hygienic and perfect ideal. Helen muses: "Solche Frauen traut sich doch keiner durchzuwuscheln und zu ficken" (Roche, 2010: 106). Helen's issue with external aesthetic perfection, as opposed to her predilection for genuine reflections of self, or external imperfection, is further explored through notions of sex and femininity.

This section has illustrated how *Feuchtgebiete* explores feminist identity through the narratives of self-actualisation and popular consumption. Specifically, I have investigated feminist identity as it is illustrated in double entanglement, self-actualisation and the cruel optimism of collective sisterhood. Helen's endurance in the concept of sisterhood and female belonging in *Feuchtgebiete* creates a dissonance between Helen's desire to be a part of a feminist community and actions that take her further away from this reality. Juxtaposed against an adherence to a postfeminist philosophy, this problematises Helen and Roche's creation of feminist identity. The next half of this chapter explores this discourse as it relates to reading for awkwardness in the politics of power, perception and relation.

Awkwardness as politics of power, perception and relation

Awkwardness can be explored in multi-varied ways in relation to a specific performance, event or text. As Smith-Prei and Stehle address, the word itself

contains many referents: “including embarrassment, strangeness, discomfort, breakage, humour, adolescence, and mistakes” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a: 149). Popfeminist depictions of political awkwardness are inherently placed within a neoliberal framework that collective female sexuality is commodified and highly politicised. The latent discursive arguments of these themes (the popfeminist use of consumerism, the use of the female body to normalise and subvert cultural practices as well as awkward space between political activism and monetary gain) all help to fully explore the complex and intertwined relationship between Charlotte Roche, *Feuchtgebiete* and the contemporary German feminist movement.

Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle discuss the notion of Roche as audience versus participant through an argument of sincerity in her overall work. They contend the following:

She exploits the cruel optimism of feminism mainly by questioning the legitimacy of any emotional responses that her texts might produce; she exploits the cruel optimism of pop by making entirely uncomfortable the object/scene that promises participation in the consumer event (the books themselves but also her readings and media appearances). (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 144)

Roche’s written and verbal promotion of feminist identity that resonates with her audience, such as body positivity and sexual power, become the very components of her work that she continually challenges. Awkwardness will be explored in this section through an analysis of the politics of perception and relation of Roche’s performative marketing of *Feuchtgebiete* and the disruptions of cruel optimism present in the narrative.

Politics of perception and relation

In a 2009 interview for *Spiegel Online* magazine, Roche commented to interviewer Nina Power that Helen was “like my brave, freed alter ego” and that “I can be like her sometimes” (Roche quoted in Power, 2009). The association between author as subject and the narrator Helen Memel as object created a singular environment for *Feuchtgebiete*’s success as a literary event. Roche’s awareness of the role she played as author and marketing agent of this success is underlined by the implicit connection with Helen’s actions and circumstances. Roche succeeds in “embrac[ing] the ambivalence of effectiveness in feminist creative work” in practice

(Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 132-3). This narrative is primarily evidenced through marketing and promotion of the novel and in authorial sincerity and narrative reliability. Subsequent analysis depends largely upon the performative nature of Roche's engagement with the novel, her readership and the media. My analysis will problematise the advent of awkwardness in the creation, dissemination and engagement with *Feuchtgebiete*. I focus on the discursive discussions surrounding the author as performer and text as performance as well as the awkward relationship between media commentary and Roche's self-marketing as popfeminist meta-commentary.

Feuchtgebiete did not become a literary event overnight. Its success was conceived and engineered by Roche's media presence and corresponding marketing. The ensuing popular interest from the media and readership elevated the success of the novel and its subsequent prominent relationship with creation of feminist identity. The media's fascination with Roche as a woman and contemporary feminist figure created a dichotomy between what Roche said and how she said it. Joanna Russ argues in her *How to Suppress Women's Writing* that one of the most effective techniques in belittling a female author is to "pollute the agency" of her work (Templin, 1995: 35). This refers to denouncing the immodesty of the "abnormal, neurotic, unpleasant and hence unlovable" picture of women (Russ, 1983: 25). If an author writes of personal experiences, this denotes a level of shame for primarily having engaged in such behaviours and for bringing them to light (Russ, 1983: 29).

Roche's mediated playful persona as an author implied a moral ambiguity that divided media reaction to both herself as author and the novel as literature. This juxtaposition is evidenced through Roche's choice to grant her first interview in promotion of the novel to *Playboy* magazine (Senner, 2009: 62). The connotations of the magazine notwithstanding, questions ranged from "Hatten Sie oft One-Night-Stands?" and "Wem fällt der Humor beim Sex schwerer, Frauen oder Männern?" (Mergel and Thiele, 2008) showing a clear and intimate interest in Roche as an author and certainly subverting the normative literary publicity trail. In addition to promoting Roche as an author, the decision to engage with non-traditional media outlets alongside traditional outlets illustrated an awareness of the

multi-varied audiences *Feuchtgebiete* attracted. Rather than step away from neoliberal pop and postfeminist depictions of objectified female bodies as new forms of female expression, Roche waded in to the stickiness of this argument.

Roche's playful subversion of socially-accepted and normalised performance of authorship and femininity highlighted the awkward space between feminist expressions of self and formative expressions of femininity. Roche's use of "Muschi" in front of a live studio audience (Lanz, 2011) and interpreted "well-documented record of thriving on provocation" (Connolly, 2010) evoked a popfeminist stance of sticky self-expression. Rather, where women were once "struggling and fighting not to be portrayed in this objectified manner," Roche and other popfeminists asserted their right "to present themselves in this way" (Gill, 2009). This objectification was alternately sexual or grotesque, depending on what Roche chose to highlight in given interviews. Her decision to begin a particular book signing with a 20 page "Blaseszene" was as premeditated as her "hohe Pumps und [...] knielange[s] Shift Dress, ein figurbetonter Look" or her fielding of questions "auf geradezu kölsch frohgemute Art" (Wurster, 2011). The decision to use playful and sexually suggestive imagery and commentary juxtaposed against Roche's described "lifetime problems" such as "going to the toilet in public lavatories" (Power, 2009). The notions of femininity and women partaking in these discussions further problematised social acceptability. Roche states this point more bluntly, citing the novel is "all about being a woman and not being able to shit" comfortably and openly in a public restroom.

Roche's appearance on the German talk show *Menschen* in 2008 further illustrated the awkwardness between author and performance. Host Johannes B. Kerner aired a clip of venerated German book critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki's stark appraisal of *Feuchtgebiete* who cited it as "sehr ekelhaft" and "wertlos" (Menschen, 2008). Roche brushed the review off and analysed Reich-Ranicki's old age as the reason for his disapproval. In a subsequent interview, she declared that "old men think I'm breaking taboos just to make money" (Sehgal, 2009). At the end of the program Kerner handed Roche a bouquet of pink roses. After smelling them, she leaned conspiratorially towards Kerner and commented that they look like a "Muschi." This appearance and others like it indicate Roche's calculated

playfulness was entirely self-aware and expected and nurtured by media coverage. Her complicity in the coverage does not negate the awkward impact created by a woman equating pink roses to vaginas. This complicity is part of the performative aspects of popfeminist meaning-making.

Playful performance is not only underscored by Roche's media performance in support of the novel, but also in her support for political causes. Popfeminist activity is often accompanied by stark political messaging, which Roche satiates with the body-positivity messages encoded in *Feuchtgebiete*. Roche's political leanings as evident in the media, however, are also relevant to the discussion as Roche used the similar playful performance to create an awkward political moment. Roche offered in late 2010 to have sex with then President Wulff if he refused to support the extension of Germany's nuclear power stations. In an interview with *Der Spiegel* she added, "my husband is in agreement. Now it's just up to the first lady to agree to it...I am tattooed" (Connolly, 2010). This offer was a cheeky extension of Roche's public persona and the media attention part of the reason for the provocation. The offer was made to provoke, command attention and cement Roche's position as the brazen and sassy public figure she has cultivated since her time at MTV Viva.

Roche's personification as playful and sexually bold, however, was exposed as one aspect of her public persona, not the entirety of it. Subsequent appearances revealed an emotionally vulnerable side, which in turn challenged the media to reflect on a complex representation of a woman, rather than a singularly-defined one. Roche's performance as author began "in the position the self-directed, self-challenging feminist and emerges in the process of reception as well as in Roche's (multi-)media circulations" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 144). Roche called herself a "circus pony" when speaking to the press, calling in to question her personal agency in the creation of literary event as a spectacle (Roche quoted in Kulish, 2008). The stickiness of popfeminist political statement thrives in the space between assuredness and discomfort with success. That Roche's public persona traded on varying notions, evidenced a more complex association with the role of personal performance in the wake of public success.

This complex association is further explored by journalistic intrigue

surrounding Roche's role as the implicit narrator of text, Helen Memel. Journalists have made the parallel that Charlotte is Helen, a literary representation of herself, primarily because of Roche's media engagement with the visceral and awkward body politics *Feuchtgebiete* confronts (Roche, 2008). Roche explained her reason for writing the novel in an interview with Ludwig Heinrich: "Dabei habe ich die *Feuchtgebiete* geschrieben, weil ich mich so schämte. Ich fühlte mich unfrei und schamhaft behaftet. Deshalb war ein starker Druck da, mich davon zu befreien" (Roche quoted in Heinrich, 2014). The implication that Roche was as carefree and perhaps hygienically unfettered as Helen heightened the feeling of the novel's taboo elements and increased its popularity. This assumption is perhaps the result of Roche's chosen confessional writing style, which highlighted the similarities between Helen, the character, and Roche, the person (Economist, 2008).

The conflation of Roche as a flesh-and-blood person with Helen as a character created an awkward performance between authorial intent and reader's perception. Peter Rabinowitz notes the implied author as a tool for understanding "what's involved when we're exploring the forces (political, psychological, whatever) that influence what an author can say and how he or she can say it" (Rabinowitz, 2011: 103).

An analysis between the implied author and narrator is most clearly evidenced by *Feuchtgebiete's* prologue, which is written by Roche as author but illustrates a main thematic element of Helen Memel's story. Roche writes about her own familial crises and notes her desire for their re-unification:

Ich halte sehr viel von der Altenpflege im Kreise der Familie. 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. Irgendwann, ich muss nur geduldig warten, liegt es in meiner Hand. (Roche, 2010: 7)

This passage creates a tension between the reader and author, imploring the reader to create a connection between the author and her relationship with divorced parents before this conceit is heavily explored by Helen. In addition, the notion of

implied author allows the reader to further explore the political and socio-cultural forces that act upon Roche and her writing of the novel.

These forces also highlight Roche's treatment of Helen as a character alongside the novel as a general performance. Helen is an unreliable narrator, yet "the text neither questions nor validates her perspective" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 143). These questions arise rather outside of the bounds of the narrative, and in the public realm during discussions between Roche and the media and fans. Roche's relationship with Helen as an author and character lacked the clarity that popular media portrayed. Roche noted "if I knew someone like Helen in real life, I would be extremely disgusted," (Caesar, 2009) causing an interpretation that Roche disapproved of fans' relation to Helen as a character. The uneasiness in this interpretation is made more awkward in that the novel "does not offer a clear position from which to evaluate the text and its voice; on the contrary, the novel and its narrator create an insecure position for readers" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 143). Roche questioned the perception of the given truths of the novel, citing "The big misunderstanding is that I am so cool, so open, because I've written this book. It's not at all the case" (Roche quoted in Power, 2009).

Nevertheless, Roche's work resonated with so many millennial readers, who felt the pressures of "a world in which sex had become grossly distorted through mass commercialisations" and "which had in turn divorced them from their bodies" (Paterson, 2008). At a book signing, 24-year-old Cynthia Friedrichs explained that, "Charlotte ein Bild unserer Generation gezeigt [hat], wie sie sein könnte, wenn der Schönheitswahn uns nicht so unfrei gemacht hätte" (Wahba, 2008). Roche's connection to this statement is further enhanced through the popfeminist entanglement between objectification of neoliberal values. In Roche's opinion, "der Feminismus der ersten Generation wusste immer genau, wie wir Frauen uns zu benehmen haben" (Roche, 2008) and *Feuchtgebiete's* analysis rested on the principles that women should find freedom in behaving how they like.

The structure and technique in the way *Feuchtgebiete* was written and promoted created a continuous narrative of Roche as performer and the work as performance. In this manner, politics of perception and relation formed the basis of the media and broader cultural relationship with Roche's marketing and promotion

of *Feuchtgebiete*. This relationship enhanced the stickiness of an author's promotion of work mired in the performance of gender. This relationship subsequently limited the seriousness of how *Feuchtgebiete* was evaluated. Scrutiny over Roche's at times sexualised and playful performance instead problematised the overall engagement with *Feuchtgebiete* as a work of body positivity and literary popfeminism. The next section illustrates *Feuchtgebiete's* disruptions of cruel optimism of awkward sexualities and the pathologising of adolescent behaviour.

Disruptions of cruel optimism

The stickiness and disruptive elements of *Feuchtgebiete* lie between the private and public perceptions of precarious female sexualities. This space becomes the stickiness and the general focus for analysis that creates more thorough understanding of how *Feuchtgebiete* redefines feminist political writing through the engagement of difficult and awkward subject matters. To this end, reading *Feuchtgebiete* intentionally produces discomfort for the reader, highlighting the "create[d] expectations around, traditional feminist questions surrounding physical norms, motherhood, sexual liberation, and sexual self-realization" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 141). Disruptions of cruel optimism are explored in this section through the analysis of precarious sexualities and the pathologising of youthful behaviour.

A prominent area for analysis is Helen's awkward relationship with her sexuality, as juxtaposed against neoliberal mainstream acceptance of what sexuality should look like. The first introduction the reader has to Helen is as she describes her haemorrhoids, stating "Solange ich denken kann, habe ich Hämorrhoiden" (Roche, 2010: 8). After describing their appearance as "wolkenförmige Hautlappen, die aussehen wie die Fangarme einer Seeanemone" (Roche, 2010: 8) as well as a cauliflower, Helen discusses their role in her sex life. This introduction provides proof of how integral an unpleasant condition like haemorrhoids are to her sexual pleasure. Rather than feeling shame because of them, Helen utilises their existence as a barometer to determine whether someone is worthy of having sex with her (Roche, 2010: 9). Helen's use of her haemorrhoids as extensions of her sexual nature is juxtaposed against their connotations with being old and unfeminine. She notes being afraid to tell anyone about them because they are associated with

grandparents and are perceived as “sehr unmädchenhaft” (Roche, 2010: 8).

Helen’s integration of her haemorrhoids into her sex life further challenges conceptions of acceptable sex through her favour of anal sex, both oral and penetrative. Helen describes her preferences:

Ich fordere ihn schon bei einem der ersten Sexe zu meiner Lieblingstellung auf: ich in Doggystellung, also auf allen vieren, Gesicht nach unten, er von hinten kommend Zunge in die Muschi, Nase in den Arsch, da muss man sich geduldig vorarbeiten, weil das Loch ja von dem Gemüse verdeckt wird. Die Stellung heißt ‘Mit-Dem-Gesicht-Gestopft’. Hat sich noch keiner beschwert. (Roche, 2010: 9)

The primacy of socially subversive sexual acts is not only challenged by Helen’s enjoyment of them but goes further to illustrate her lack of hang ups with sexual taboos. When she is comfortable enough with a lover, Helen describes how she does not thoroughly clean her anus in preparation for anal sex: “Da muss das Vertrauen groß sein, damit ich einem erlaube, seinen Schwanz mit meiner Kacke zu schmücken” (Roche, 2010: 91). Helen’s enjoyment in what is coloured as deviant and submissive sexual behaviour illustrates her disruption of the relation of awkwardness to sexual preferences.

The reverence of bodily fluids as additions to sexual pleasure is also a deviant sexual behaviour that Helen reclaims and uses to disrupt the cruel optimism of anti-feminist rhetoric. An example of this is Helen’s use of menstrual blood. She is “traurig, wenn meine Periode nach zwei oder drei Wolfstagen wieder aufhört” (Roche, 2010: 110) and details the ways in which her period adds vigour and excitement to her sex life. Helen desires to:

Am liebsten benutze ich dafür frische, weiße Laken, falls ich die Möglichkeit habe, darauf Einfluss zu nehmen. Und ich wechsele sooft es geht die Stellung und die Position im Bett, damit ich das Blut überall verteilen kann. (Roche, 2010: 109)

Helen’s further decoration of white sheets with her menstrual blood is evocative of her celebration of the aspects of her femininity she is supposed to suppress.

The roles of power and sexual enjoyment are questioned by Roche with the emphasis on the almost violent enjoyment Helen takes in her menstruation. This notion of violence is evidenced by Helen’s desire for partners to perform oral sex on her during her period. She relates that “wenn er mit dem Lecken fertig ist und

mit seinem blutverschmierten Mund hochguckt, küsse ich ihn, damit wir beide aussehen wie Wölfe, die grad ein Reh gerissen haben" (Roche, 2010: 110). The base, animalistic quality to sexual enjoyment highlights the disruptive element in the novel aimed at efforts to normalise taboo sexual acts.

Helen also enjoys imbibing her old bodily tissues. This is illustrated through her experienced with the infected tissue of her anus, removed by Dr Notz at the beginning of the novel. Helen summarily asks to see the tissue and explains through narration that she is uncomfortable with a piece of her body being removed without inspection. She examines the remains and when she is finished, licks her fingers, effectively consuming herself, or who she used to be (Roche, 2010: 79). This literal consumption becomes a kind of ritual for Helen in her haste to prove, perhaps most stringently to herself, that she has attained self-realisation, actualisation and acceptance. Self-consumption is also unpacked through Helen's preliminary tasting of her vaginal fluids before sex:

Es kann ja nicht sein, dass ich beim Sex die Beine für einen Typen breit mache, um mich zum Beispiel ordentlich lecken zu lassen, und selber keine Ahnung habe, wie ich da unten aussehe, rieche und schmecke. (Roche, 2010: 50)

These occurrences become even more emphasised in the stark, sterilised environment of a hospital. Helen's preoccupation with bodily fluids and lack of traditional western hygienic practices are juxtaposed against an environment that evokes sterility and hygiene.

The relational aspects of bodily fluids are further explored through Helen's reverence of male ejaculate, or cum. In contrast to the nefarious or toxic characterisation of male sexuality in old feminism, popfeminist reclamation of sexual enjoyment is predicated upon the primacy of women's sexual satisfaction. Helen is a character who clearly reaches sexual satisfaction and does what she wants, but she still appreciates and to some extent, reveres male fluids. She waxes poetic about being "stolz" to house "sein Sperma in allen Körperritzen" (Roche, 2010: 26) after sleeping with someone. Helen also delights in creating mementos of sex by allowing her partner's cum to harden under her fingernails and later reminisce by chewing and eating it, her "Sexandenkenkaubonbon" (Roche, 2010: 26).

Helen dictates that her male lovers pass a test for her affections, an apparent subversion of typified woman's passivity during the sexual act. In addition to this, Helen wants very specific sexual satisfaction by her own hand. She herself is an incredibly active force in her own sexuality, alongside her need to be desired specifically by her male lovers. Her female lovers, on the other hand, are surrogate teachers and she pays them for their experience. Her seeking of professional female lovers indicates her preference for their knowledge, not necessarily their bodies. That she patronises female prostitutes exclusively in the novel rather than male, indicates she elevates female knowledge of the self, over male knowledge of her body. Helen frequently laments that a woman "sieht nur ein kleines Büschel Haare da abstehen und eventuell zwei Hubbel, die die äußeren Schamlippen andeuten" (Roche, 2010: 50). She remains envious of what men experience of women's bodies. Helen desires to see everything "wie ein Mann; der sieht halt mehr von der Frau als sie selber, weil die unten so komisch versteckt um die Ecke rum gebaut ist" (Roche, 2010: 50).

There is also a case to be made that *Feuchtgebiete* pathologises adolescence through instances of inherited mental illness and the blurring of distinction between reality and imagination. This last point characterises Helen as child-like, because she doesn't value that her actions have consequences, as is most clearly evidenced by her reopening of her anal wound and subsequent emergency surgery. She does not expect that the resultant effect will be emergency surgery and extreme blood loss. Helen lacks the connection between harming herself and actual self-harm. She does not couch this event using as self-harm because she's only using it as a tool to leverage a longer hospital visit, much in the same way she faked appendicitis to get out of a French exam. Helen's behaviours are extreme examples of selfish, teenaged behaviour in that the total cost to others as well as herself are never quantified. The novel's view of adolescence, or young adulthood illustrates a circular and disruptive element of the in between and awkward stage of youth.

The paradox of Helen's ingrained attitudes about the body and sex versus her own active participation in it is illustrated by her embarrassment around changing in front of posters in her room. She admits:

Ich ziehe mich auch nicht einfach so in meinem Zimmer um. Da hängen überall

Poster von meiner Lieblingsband. Und weil sie beim Fotomachen alle in die Kamera geguckt haben, hat man nachher das Gefühl, die verfolgen einen mit ihren Blicken. Wenn ich mich also in meinem Zimmer umziehen will und die dabei einen Blick auf meine Muschi oder Titten erhaschen könnten, versteck ich mich hinter meiner Couch. Bei echten Jungs und Männern ist mir das egal. (Roche, 2010: 75).

While Helen's sexual experience appear extensive, she frequently self-characterises as naïve. These moments relate to childhood experiences. As Kanell prepares to shave her for the first time he dons a headlamp and Helen notes how this makes him look like a Cyclops, a Greek monster she's only just learned about in high school. This naiveté is further juxtaposed against her sexual worldliness. She is upset that doctors and nurses may see her naked during the operation but uses brazen images of her body to seduce possible lovers. Helen internalised a male gaze that she sought to continually subvert.

This final section argued the politics of power, perception and relation of *Feuchtgebiete* as a constructed literary event and its inscribed disruptions of cruel optimism. The awkwardness in *Feuchtgebiete* was formulated according to a relationship with the media that highlighted an awkward reading of the novel, propelled by Roche's use of grotesque imagery in addition to her unconventional publicity.

Conclusions

Feuchtgebiete constructs a feminist identity that hinges upon a neoliberal narrative of self-actualisation, popular consumption and awkwardness. The first section investigated the double entanglements in the novel that problematised Helen's relationship with popfeminism, in addition to the process of self-actualisation through lifestyle choices and the complex portrayal of sisterhood. The latter half of the chapter explored Roche's role as an author in the creation of *Feuchtgebiete* as a literary event. Furthermore, I uncovered instances of awkwardness within the promotion of the novel in addition to the novel itself. Each of these halves creates a fuller image of the engagement of feminist identity within the novel and reveals the "subcultural and subversive performances" of its awkward events of "resistance to the hegemonic, male-dominated, pop-cultural configuration of female bodies"

(Smith-Prei, 2011: 23).

The analysis of these concepts produced a layered depiction of perceptions of feminism and women's bodies as evidenced by *Feuchtgebiete* and Charlotte Roche. The broader issues raised include the notional direction of feminist political writing and the broader implications for feminism narratives that focus on provocation and marketability.

3) "Literatur ist für mich androgyn, ich versteh nicht, wie man eine Ästhetik des weiblichen Schreibens überhaupt wollen kann":²

Diebe and Dea Loher

Tantas veces te mataron, / So many times will you be killed
tantas resucitarás / so many will you revive
tantas noches pasarás desesperando. / so many years will you spend despairing.
Y a la hora del naufragio / And at that moment of shipwreck
y a la de la oscuridad / and of darkness
alguien te rescatará, / someone will rescue you
para ir cantando. / to go on singing.

— María Elena Walsh, "Como la cigarra," 1973

Diebe significantly and powerfully addresses issues of gender that coincide with contemporary feminist ideals. Reading *Diebe* through a popfeminist framework reinterprets Loher's work as a feminist text and is therefore relatable to other defined contemporary feminist works. Loher herself, however, has staunchly defended her work against a feminist interpretation and rejects a gendered approach to thematic analysis. The juxtaposition against Loher's relationship with her own work and a popfeminist analysis results in a unique interplay of Loher's initial intent and subsequent interpretation. This interplay thereby frames a discussion of feminist identities throughout *Diebe* as well as the awkward tensions between alienation and connection that characterise a broader uniform notion of a German feminist movement.

The following chapter reads *Diebe* through a popfeminist lens. This contextualisation is then analysed against the play's reception to demonstrate a focus on attachment to objects and a reading for awkwardness. The close textual analysis alongside an exploration of Loher as an author contributes to *Diebe*'s relationship with feminist identity as a construct of popular culture and contemporary feminism. The first section begins with an in-depth synopsis of the play, a discussion of Loher's perceived role as a playwright and the act of reader and audience interpretation. The second section problematises various attachments to objects as related to instances of cruel optimism and feminist identities. The final

² Willmann, B. 1998. Kalter Blick auf menschliche Tragödien. *SonntagsZeitung*.

section reads for awkwardness in relation to thematic tensions of alienation and connection in the play as well as a critique on the play's use of symbols in relation to popfeminist aesthetic.

Context and prior scholarship

Theatre as literature and performance mirrors societal values on the stage. As a playwright, Loher writes and reflects a microcosm of social, cultural and political issues in her work. In an interview Loher herself paraphrases well-known dramaturge Heiner Müller, "the play is wiser than the playwright. If it is a good play, it is rich and offers more options than you can think of" (Loher quoted in Ballas, 2012). Loher's work represents individuals in times of crises and world-weariness, as they deal with the "unanswerable questions about conscience....in a disfigured world" (Kaut-Howson, 2010: 280). Yet as a playwright she steadfastly refuses to classify her work as feminist, preferring instead to think of writing as an androgynous exercise. Birgit Haas quoted Gayle Austin's work in regard to feminist designations of text in "Gender-Performanz und Macht. (Post)Feministische Mythen bei Sarah Kane und Dea Loher." Austin argues that analysing a text as feminist "means paying attention...when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not. It means making some 'invisible' mechanisms visible" (Austin, 1998: 136). Loher employs women characters and the specific issues they face (sexual assault, abortion, exploitation, promotion bias, pay gap, etc.) indicating that *Diebe* bears great relevance for a gendered interrogation. Loher's "radical questioning of the very foundations of the dominant culture and its inherent cognitive paradigms" in regards to gender, lends itself to a feminist theoretical interpretation (Sugiera, 2004: 27).

As *Diebe* can be experienced both as a performance as well as a read play, it is prudent to consider the boundaries between a writer's intent and audience perception. Rabinowitz suggests that an "attempt to gauge the dynamics of making meaning" of "how the gender and other social characteristics of the reader might influence interpretation" of a given text bears more fruit for analysis (Rabinowitz, 1993: 535). The differing interpretations of individual and collective experiences colour the "process of ideological production and transformation" that reading and performance entails (Rabinowitz, 1993: 550). Judith Fetterley argues in *The*

Resisting Reader that “feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read” (Fetterley, 1978: viii). Therefore, reading Loher’s work in a feminist light creates a sense of urgency around the social and political criticisms of Germany that her works entail.

Birgit Haas’ reasons in her study *Das Theater von Dea Loher* that female characters “sind nicht einfach ‘besser’” than their male counterparts in Loher’s work (Haas, 2006: 234). Loher herself expresses that literature and writing are inherently “androgyn” and she does not believe that a person is able to create “eine Aesthetik des weiblichen Schreibens” (Haas, 2003: 145). Yet these beliefs do not preclude Loher from writing about women and gendered-situations they might face. Writing literature about women, while not universal, is a structural consideration to dissecting the identity and reality of lived female experiences. Loher’s approach, whilst being against the concept of female writing, nevertheless aids providing evidence for theorising conceptual feminist identities.

All of these aspects are further explored in relation to the political nature of Loher’s theatre and its similarity to in-yer-face theatre. In-yer-face theatre was coined by Aleks Sierz in his 2001 book *In-yer-face theatre: British drama today* (Sierz, 2001). Sierz used the term to describe the surge of young British playwrights who create “any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message” (Sierz, 2001: 4). Specific playwrights (Sarah Kane, Phyllis Nagy, Joe Penhall) (Sierz, 2001) were creating plays that were shocking, controversial and often violent in nature. Their aim became to write theatre that would compel an audience to react to a given narrative, both instinctually and forcefully (Zarhy-Levo, 2011: 322). This theatre was the very antithesis of a bourgeois aesthetic and sought instead to reach this demographic through gratuitous and shocking material that might offend or distress. In-yer-face theatre is also characterised by its lack of assumptions regarding the staging of its words. A notable example can be found in Sarah Kane’s play *Cleansed* wherein a stage direction calls for a sunflower to burst forth from the centre of the stage (Kane, 2006: 120). This theatrical style is less concerned with the feasibility of performance than it is with its particular thematic narratives. *Diebe*, whilst not

classified as stringently in-her-face, embraces the notions of shocking material that directly confronts the audience.

German theatre plays an important socio-political role in the confrontation of new ideas and old ideologies in the German public sphere. Thomas Ostermeier, theatre director of Schaubühne Berlin, remarked that the “notion of German theatre as a refugee camp for an old idea of German monoculturalism and nationalistic values is stone dead” (Ostermeier quoted in Billington, 2011). He implores playwrights and directors among theatregoers to create and demand a “vibrant new theatre” (Ostermeier quoted in Billington, 2011). While the focus of change, difference and grappling with burgeoning realities are very much at the forefront of new German theatrical productions; the “traditional bourgeois audience[s]” still expectantly crave the tradition and familiarity of the classics (Billington, 2011). Loher’s breadth of work is celebrated, lauded and well attended by this group, bringing to light the paradigm between the tensions her work explores in the theatrical space.

Diebe: 12 characters and 37 scenes

The following section first outlines *Diebe* as a play, providing an overview of its various plots, characters and general thematic elements. Whilst *Diebe* comprises 12 characters and 37 scenes, the links that bind characters to plot and each other are at times more a marker of convenience than actual connection. The first half of this section aims to clearly explain the plot primarily in relation to the women characters: Linda Tomason, Monika Tomason, Frau Ida Schmitt, Gabi Nowotny, Mira Halbe and Ira Davidoff. After this detailed examination of the play’s plot, I focus on theatre’s role in contemporary German political, social and cultural commentary. This analysis foregrounds the resulting examination of *Diebe* as a popfeminist work both in its relationship to feminist goals and reading for awkwardness.

Although *Diebe* is given no particular time or setting, scene notes indicate it is set during present day on the outskirts of a German city. There are twelve characters in total, six men and six women comprised of three distinct families and two separate couples, or “viele Geschichten, viele Gesichter” (von Becker, 2010). The first family encompasses siblings Linda and Finn and father Erwin Tomason.

The second family is couple Monika and Thomas Tomason and their child, who remains unnamed. The third family is Gerhard and Ida Schmitt, who is the biological estranged daughter of Mira Halbe. Mira is in a romantic relationship with Josef Erbarmen. Ira Davidoff is unrelated to any of the characters, but meets Thomas at a police station and Erwin at a bus stop. Finally, there are Rainer Mataschek and Gabi Nowotny, who have once had a romantic relationship with each other and whose narratives intersect with other characters. The plot is structured in 37 scenes, many with repetitive names, such as *Wachen*, *Traum*, *Termin*, *Spuren*, *Fragen*, *Sonntag*, *Freunde*, etc.

Stefan Kirschner argues that *Diebe's* central theme "ist die Fragilität, die die moderne Gesellschaft durchzieht" (Kirschner, 2010). The play's narrative is characterised less as a linear plot and more of a series of brief vignettes in the lives of these twelve characters. Characters' relationships to each other and themselves are insecure, impermanent and incomplete:

Die Beziehungen brüchig, die Jobs unsicher, die Chefs gaukeln ihren Mitarbeitern eine Zukunft vor, die nur eine vage Möglichkeit ist, selbst die Familie stellt nur ein lockeres Band dar, das zu zerreißen droht, sobald die Bereitschaft zum Selbstbetrug erlischt. (Kirschner, 2010)

Loher presents individuals in times of crises and world-weariness, as they deal with the "unanswerable questions about conscience....in a disfigured world" (Kaut-Howson, 2010). Without a reliable narrator or fuller understanding of the drama, the audience is left to their own contemplations of the fragility of modern culture that's presented on the stage.

As the primary study of this thesis revolves around the analysis of gendered discourse, I will provide a summary of events of the play as they chiefly relate to the six women characters: Linda Tomason, Monika Tomason, Ida Schmitt, Mira Halbe, Gabi Nowotny and Ira Davidoff. The characters are positioned usually in relation to another, as a couple or a family unit, and can then be viewed functionally as foils to other pairs throughout the piece. This placement allows for the comparison between how women in *Diebe* are internally and externally perceived according to the specific "cluster of promises" they seek.

Linda is the first character the audience is introduced to. In a dream-like

monologue, the audience learns that Linda yearns for a family and career of her own making. She speaks to Rainer and a child, both fictitious, about a wolf sighting and a possible future nature reserve erected on the site. The rest of Linda's journey is mired by a tense relationship with her own family, heightened by the suicide of her estranged brother Finn. In contrast, Monika Tomason has the family of Linda's imagination. Yet this does not satisfy her. She dreams of a promotion at her supermarket job. Her husband Thomas, a police officer, is reluctantly supportive but emotional distance and a dissimilarity of goals evidence the strain in their marriage and the cracks in their future. This relationship characterises one of the larger thematic elements of the drama, the acknowledgement of the how "we all lead tragically fragmented, disconnected lives" (Billington, 2011).

Ida Schmitt, wife of Gerhard, is part of an older couple who live alone. Throughout the play, Ida and Gerhard contend with the emergence of an intruder, who happens to be Josef (Mira's lover). Ida is confronted by the knowledge of her husband's biological child, Mira. His activities as a sperm donor shock her self-perception, her life and the veracity of her marriage. This awakening culminates in their subsequent rejection of Mira. A prevailing feature of Ida Schmitt as a character is her almost symbiotic-like relationship with her husband. Juxtaposed against this relationship is Ira Davidoff, who maintains a similar level of in absentia devotion to her husband of 43 years. On their wedding night, Ira's husband either left her or disappeared. For 43 years she waited for his return in their honey moon suite, singing regularly in a local club and keeping to herself. Yet she decides, suddenly, to confess this disappearance to Thomas at the police station and engages in a conversation with Erwin at a local bus stop.

The final characters for analysis are Mira and Gabi. At the beginning of the play, Mira reveals to Gabi she is pregnant with Josef's child. In her late teens, Mira is blasé about the pregnancy and confesses to wanting an abortion because she never knew her own father. Desperate to keep the baby, Josef discovers Gerhard as Mira's father and stakes out their home, hoping to learn about him from afar. Yet when he reveals himself to the couple, they ultimately end up rejecting his intrusion and murdering him. When the time comes, Mira chooses not to get an abortion. After Josef's death, Mira realises that her child will grow up without a

father just as she did. Gabi, Mira's co-worker and older friend, is in a sporadic and unfulfilling relationship with Rainer *Tscheki* Mataschek. Gabi questions her relationship with Tscheki, especially after she confesses to Thomas that he attempted to murder her in the woods over a debt repayment. Tscheki is revealed to be a con artist, selling probable stolen goods and attempting to extort money from Linda after the death of her brother Finn. Tscheki and Linda become briefly romantically involved before she realises the extent of his deceit.

Scene 37 "Und dann" is the last in the play. In it, Linda, Erwin, Thomas and the child are in a restaurant. Erwin is waiting for Ira. Thomas and his child sit by a window, and Monika arrives with a bandage on her head. She sits down next to them as Linda plays with a toy car, moving it across the table with her magnetic finger. This final scene integrates an overarching thematic element of alienation and disconnection, highlighting Loher's "strength in a poetic, ambiguous language that allows situations both to come to a head while also leaving space for silences" (Brunet, 2012: 60).

Theatre as political, social and cultural commentary

Loher's work questions the relationship between her role as author and creator of text, the presentation of text and audience reception of the play. She notes that a playwright gives up authority over interpretation of their work as soon as it's read and performed by others (von Düffel, 2009: 6). The text, however, is not inviolable as the set, costumes and actors bring further meaning and intention to her work. Yet Loher confirms she does not like to clarify her work's purpose, preferring the work "to explain itself" (Loher quoted in Ballas, 2012). The concurrent ownership and distancing of herself from the work highlights the inherent paradoxes that reinforce the complex circumstances that inform Loher's work as feminist. Loher conceded in an interview that:

"I don't wake up in the morning and think: 'Oh my God! I am the most important dramatist in Germany today!' I wake up and think: 'God, what will I do? I don't know how to write a play!'" (Loher quoted in Ballas, 2012)

Her self-effacement reveals the author within the public role of being a popular dramatist. Yet Loher upholds that theatre is "von allen Künsten...die wichtigste für die Gesellschaft" (Loher quoted in Pełka, 2007: 90). Loher does not typically

comment on a public discourse of her work, but maintains theatre's relevance as entertainment and moral imperative.

Whilst a play is open to interpretation by the director, actors and viewers, the text itself remains sacrosanct. Loher proved her adherence to this belief in 2013, wherein she threatened legal action against Theater Bremen for their production of *Unschuld*. *Unschuld* premiered at the Thalia Theatre in Hamburg under Andreas Kriegenburg in 2003. It explores thematic issues of guilt, innocence and characters' will to survive. Theatre Bremen's 2013 production excluded the character Ella, causing Loher and Verlag der Autoren representative Annette Reschke to release a statement:

Dea Loher sieht 'durch die Streichung einer zentralen Figur' sowohl 'die tragende Struktur' als auch den 'Sinnzusammenhang des Stücks nicht mehr gegeben'. Zudem sei der Eingriff 'der Autorin und dem Verlag erst wenige Minuten vor der Premiere' bekanntgegeben worden. (feb/and, 2013)

As a solution, the theatre reinserted Ella as a character back into production, causing the cancellation of a show. Loher celebrated this victory and Reschke commented that "Ohne Ella geht es nicht" (feb/dpa, 2013). Loher's response indicates a level of artistic integrity that celebrates interpretation alongside a faithful inclusion of text.

Theatre as politics is a well-identified construct in Loher's body of work. Loher argued herself in a 2001 article that "Theater ist ein politischer Ort" (Loher, 2001: 9). The political nature of theatre therefore situates it within the realm of social and cultural discourse. German theatre, in particular, fosters an uneasy relationship between audience reactions and the performance. This relationship is characterised by the audience's frank appraisal of events on the stage. Loher conceded the dynamics of this relationship, noting its role in the promotion of theatre as a political reflection of societal concerns:

in Germany, at good performances you can see there is huge tension between the audience and what is happening in the production. You can see reactions like, for example, people who walk out, or who write a letter expressing their feelings after the performance. There is great importance in what the theater tells you about what is happening in society. (Loher quoted in Ballas, 2012)

The interaction between performance and viewer's perception generates the same

tension in popfeminist pop cultural expression. Popular culture, in this instance, is performance art and the audience participation with the performance validates the use of popfeminist methodology in analysing *Diebe*.

Loher expresses the role of the social function of theatre as it relates to the individual. Haas' included this analysis in a chapter entitled "Contemporary political theatre in Germany." Loher states that she has "die Schnauze voll von dem postmodernen Orientierungslosigkeitgefasel, das die gesellschaftliche Funktion des Theaters letztlich auf Null setzt, weil es wurscht ist, was gespielt wird" (Loher quoted in Haas, 2005a: 290). As Haas theorises, Loher's work focuses on larger political, and social implications for individual characters, choosing to humanise complex events through embodied experience rather than generalisations. In this regard, I further assert that Loher's commitment to situating individual contexts within a wider political and social sphere, indicates the strong link of feminist identities within *Diebe*.

Loher's work confronts the political and social implications of an individual's rights and happiness over the collectives'. In an interview with Claus Caesar for *Schauspiel Frankfurt*, Loher discusses the thematic implications portrayed in her play *Leviathan* that illustrate a character's conflict between her own desires and the good of the many. Loher describes an incident of a man with a large suitcase on a train, who fears being able to find an appropriate seat. He begins to push a woman who is in his way, exhibiting fear and aggression. Loher further explains the significance of the incident:

Woher diese Angst und die damit verbundene Aggressivität kommen, weiß ich nicht, ich beobachte nur das Phänomen: ... Panik, weil man als Einzelkämpfer zurechtkommen zu müssen glaubt, weil man sich scheinbar oder anscheinend auf die Unterstützung und die Solidarität anderer nicht mehr verlassen kann? Diese Haltung wird durch die pseudoliberalen Parolen der Politik unterstützt, die mehr Einzelinitiative verlangt, ohne dass es die Freiräume dafür geben würde oder ohne dass diese Einzelinitiativen zu einem Erfolg führen könnten. (Loher quoted in Caesar, 2005)

This anecdote illustrates the push and pull of individual and collective politics that inform a larger engagement with old and new feminisms. The sense of an

individual's desires and needs placed ahead of another's, hearkens to the personalised approach of popfeminist meaning-making. In turn, this association relates to Loher's work on the psychological impacts of political events on the individual (Haas, 2005a: 290).

In artistic cases, performance transcends mere entertainment and is elevated to philosophical understandings of morality. Christine Dössel argued in *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* article "Immer noch Sturm" that theatre demands an internal reckoning with one's struggles. She argued, "Dass das Theater der ideale Ort für diese Art der Entschleunigung, Vergegenwärtigung, gesellschaftlichen (Selbst-) Vergewisserung ist. Dass es ein Ort der Reflexion und der Widerständigkeit ist" (Dössel, 2012). As a place of resistance and reflection, Loher uses the social capital of her work to ask difficult questions of the audience. These questions reflect the interchange of ideas from performers to performance, audience to each other in a "direkte Erklärung, heftige Diskussion, Meinungs austausch" (Loher, 2001: 9).

Loher's work is further juxtaposed as art that exists in spite of its artistic medium. Loher writes "'against' the stage," defying the supposed physical and metaphorical limitations of the craft (Ballas, 2012). In this regard, Loher authored *Diebe* as devoid of plot or character development as she was able. In its place, Loher strove to "allow the audience time to watch characters without anything happening" (Loher quoted in Ballas, 2012). This lack of traditionally obvious devices creates a more apt and realistic comparison with real-world social, cultural and political issues. Loher's work more clearly reflects the angst, and experiences of its women characters because it isn't attempting to equivocate these experiences as the purview of a single individual. Rather, the individuality of *Diebe's* characters is the summation of the systemic experiences of women in general as it relates to instances of gendered oppression, freedom and sexual or economic equality.

The stage also offers a sense of removal and safety in the unpacking of ideas that may be personally taboo, most notably in the middle-class milieu that Loher concentrates on. Her work is especially notable for tackling issues of violence, albeit with "ganz verschiedenen Ausprägungen und Perspektiven" (Künzel, 2007: 360). Loher therefore authors a play to illustrate certain aspects of society, a director and actors further interpret that work to be presented to an audience who

also interprets both the source material and its reflection in performance. This process entails a multi-varied lens of interpretation for the audience involving visual and auditory elements. When further pressed about why she writes for theatre, she explains her aim as “reflecting a social situation in the most concentrated poetic way you can think of” (Loher quoted in Ballas, 2012). The interaction that audiences have with the text becomes part of the performance itself. In other words, the relevance of the text is underpinned, in part, by the text’s reflection of societal issues it seeks to represent.

In the process of reading and making meaning, especially feminist meaning, it is prudent to consider the boundaries between a writer’s intent and audience perception. Rabinowitz suggests that an “attempt to gauge the dynamics of making meaning” of “how the gender and other social characteristics of the reader might influence interpretation” of a given text bears more fruit for analysis (Rabinowitz, 1993: 535). An audience’s perception of a work, whether it be performed or read, is as important as authorial intent. This is true given the differing interpretations of individual and collective experiences colour the “process of ideological production and transformation” that reading and performance entails (Rabinowitz, 1993: 550). Judith Fetterley argues in *The Resisting Reader* that “feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read” (Fetterley, 1978: viii). Therefore, reading Loher’s work in a feminist light creates a sense of urgency around the social and political criticisms of Germany that *Diebe* explores.

Audience participation with a play therefore mimics the interactive and iterative processes of current feminist participation with popular culture. This participation, however, is relegated to smaller actions that more immediately affect the scope of the play, such as leaving the theatre, commenting on the performance or protesting the performance. Loher is aware of this relationship, commenting “Der Zuschauer kann das hören, was er selbst ausrufen möchte” (Loher, 2001: 9). Loher’s statement problematises the role of the playwright, the performance and the audience through a recognition of varying perspectives the play elicits. *Diebe* itself is positioned to speak directly to this “(primarily middle-class) audience, effectively anaesthetised by the everyday influence of the mass media, in order to nag at their

conscience" (Sugiera, 2004: 17). Much like the in-her-face playwrights of the 1990s, *Diebe* empowers the audience to forgo the traditional boundaries of theatre.

In an interview with John von Düffel and fellow dramatists Nuran David Calis and Dirk Laucke, Loher argues that her written text becomes more enriched and multi-faceted through the reinterpretation of performance. She argues:

Der zweite Vorteil ist, dass es dann noch jemanden gibt, der mit dem Text arbeitet und im Idealfall noch etwas ganz anderes daraus macht, etwas, das gar nicht in meiner Intention lag, das ich mir nicht in der Form vorgestellt hatte. (Loher quoted in von Düffel, 2009: 4)

In this regard, Loher not only looks forward to reinterpretation and analysis of her work, but depends upon it. This dependence upon the back and forth of theatrical production creates an impression of a dramatist who is aware of her work, its influence and the role it plays in enriching a social and cultural discussion.

Loher reasserts her belief in the political, social and cultural relevance of theatre. This belief rests upon a certain timelessness of the issues presented on stage. In the case of *Diebe*, the specifically gendered issues of freedom from oppression, of expression and sexual and economic equality are explored without markers of time or place.

Hinzu kommt, dass das Theater für mich immer noch das politischste Medium unter allen Künsten ist. Es muss gar nicht unbedingt sein, dass der Text aktuell ist und das Zeitgeschehen problematisiert. Aber er muss sich im Hier und Jetzt des Spiels in seiner Gegenwärtigkeit behaupten. (von Düffel, 2009: 6)

Diebe exists in a *current* time, but specific technologies to the present are not mentioned. Likewise, the setting of a nameless town in Germany is given no immediate details to be analogous to a real place. The play's anonymity creates a nowhere/everywhere feeling that encourages the audience and readers to complete the narrative in their own images.

In a discussion on the roles of public intellectuals in Germany, Erich Steiner acknowledges the divergence between the public's perception of their statements and messages versus the intellectual's internal perception of what they are saying. The audience and public's scepticism is grounded in what Steiner notes as the "deeply rooted suspicion towards 'universal' values" in the German public

discourse (Steiner, 2005: 7). These suspicions reflect the “contradictions between what we observe empirically, and what we believe ought to be the case according to our ethics” (Steiner, 2005: 24). Loher evidences this in *Diebe* through the character and audience reactions to questions of morality and ethics explored throughout the play.

Birgit Haas argues for a measured interpretation of theatre’s morality, which is coloured more by individual perceptions than by Loher’s specific intent. Haas contends, that “ethische oder moralische Probleme auf der Bühne in Gestalt passender Fabeln verhandelt werden, macht das Theater nicht moralisch oder ethisch” (Haas, 2007b: 280). In this regard, the stage becomes a kind of neutral zone that offers the playwright, actors and audience the opportunity to embody their own interpretations of a play’s ethical or moral considerations. Loher therefore asks moral and ethical questions through “eine diskursive Metaebene, auf der sich für den Rezipienten durchaus Lösungen finden lassen” (Haas, 2005b: 226). This discursive plane allows for an analysis of Loher’s work in relation to its “materialistische Betrachtungen der Gegenwart” (Haas, 2005b: 225). Loher’s work, while set in different periods and places, comments specifically on the nature of present-day questions of moral and ethical considerations. These considerations also extend to questions of feminist identities, which, in contradiction to Haas’ earlier interpretation of Loher’s work, are not merely preoccupied with issues of power between genders (Haas, 2005b).

This section began by summarising *Diebe*, paying specific attention to the roles of women within the play and how these characters interact between themselves and the men. Following this, I analysed Loher’s personal and public perception as a playwright, focusing on the internal and external discourse that encompasses German theatre as well as the specific reception of *Diebe*. The notion of the play’s characters facing a sense of alienation from their own humanity (Philipp, 2010) and connection to other’s loneliness, will be explored in the latter half of this chapter. First, I will explore the various narratives of feminist identities within the text.

Narratives of feminist identit(ies)

Helena Kaut-Howson remarks that Loher is “widely recognised as the voice of the

younger generation, expressing in a vivid and original way the disenchantment and alienation of the increasingly fragmented urban society" (Kaut-Howson, 2010). Yet Loher's association with a younger generation is not further extrapolated to a relationship with feminism. Birgit Haas' reasons in her book *Das Theater von Dea Loher* that female characters "sind nicht einfach 'besser'" than their male counterparts in Loher's work (Haas, 2006: 234). Loher herself expresses that literature and writing is inherently "androgyn" and does not believe that a person is able to create "eine Ästhetik des weiblichen Schreibens" (Haas, 2003: 145). Yet these beliefs do not preclude Loher from writing about women and situations they might face, specifically according to their gender. Loher's protestations decry a desire for free art in which symbolism and nuance are favoured over literal interpretation.

Writing literature about women, while not universal, is a structural consideration to dissecting the identity and reality of lived female experiences. Judith Fetterley examines the use of structural power in literature:

To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness - not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male - to be universal, to be American - is to be *not female*. (Fetterley, 1978: xiii)

Loher's approach, whilst being against the concept of feminist writing, provides a conceptual framework for discussing female identity. Adrienne Rich states that feminist literary criticism cannot be defined as "the writing by a woman about other women's books without consciousness of the political context of women's writing" (Rich, 1986: 88). Feminist criticism seeks to highlight the "continuous accountability to the lives of women" through meaningful interrogations in literature (Rich, 1986: 88).

Loher's work has been conceptualised as dealing with gendered issues, but within a framework that problematises postfeminism and gendered power issues. Haas argues in "Gender-Performanz und Macht," that Loher's plays are grounded

“auf einer Distanz” that encourages the audience to reflect upon gendered difference (Haas, 2005b: 226). Yet Haas makes the assumption that power differentials are evident between opposing genders and not within. Therefore, a specific narrative of feminist identities within Loher’s work is not conceptualised as a facet of divergent feminist views, but as a function of “der Gender-Problematik” (Haas, 2005b: 226). Through revealing the instances of feminist identities and instances of popfeminist awkwardness and cruel optimism within the text, I uncover that Loher’s attention to women and gender in *Diebe* is a function of the text’s relationship with feminism, rather than an attempt to clarify a so-called gender problem. In other words, I argue the text does not seek to resolve or clarify issues of gendered difference between men and women, but rather to explore gender in relation to feminist identities and discourse.

The following section discovers and analyses the varying narratives of feminist identities in *Diebe*. These identities are conceptualised through the new feminist goals of liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom of expression and choice of sexuality or economic equality. Whilst these goals are initially presented as collective representations of feminist belief, their individual understanding and presentation illustrate the importance of embodied experience in relation to engagement with feminist identities. These goals are manifested within discussions of abortion, sexual assault, economic dependence, partnership and the desire for a family.

Cruel optimism of attachment

Diebe draws attention to the neoliberal paradigm of the inability to satiate desires that, regardless of how ardently they may be pursued, result in a loss and failure to attain said desires. This describes the cruel optimism of Berlant’s thesis or the entrenched “cluster of promises” that are striven for. Berlant further explains “the object of desire” as the confrontation of:

what is incoherent or enigmatic in our attachments, not as confirmation of our irrationality, but as an explanation for our sense of *our endurance in the object*, insofar as proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises, some of which may be clear to us while others not so much. (Berlant, 2006: 20)

Throughout this next segment of analysis, I theorise Linda's role as emblematic of the popfeminist cruel optimism of attachment. As one of the main protagonists of the play, Linda represents normative gender attachments to having a partner, a child and a career.

Linda's attachment to these objects is evidenced through her internal and external ruminations. At times, the scenes are Linda's dreams, day dreams or actual encounters with other characters. In these moments, it is ambiguous whether Linda is speaking only to herself or to other characters. Linda clarifies her attachment to procuring the good life, or in her estimation, a family and job she enjoys. She explains this to Tscheki in scene 32 "Freunde 2:" "Ich will meine Kraft dazu verwenden, dass das gute Leben zu mir kommt, und nicht umgekehrt" (Loher, 2009: 79).

The audience is first introduced to Linda's attachment to the idea of family in scene 2, "Wolf." The scene's point of view is in third person limited, indicating that Linda is either daydreaming this scenario or she is having an internal monologue. As Loher does not provide any scene notes throughout the play other than Pause and Schweigen, choices regarding perspective and how the scene is staged are entirely up to the performers and the director. In this scene, Linda speaks to her imaginary husband and children, going so far as to give them both personalities, suggesting these visions or daydreams are a regular occurrence. The husband is named Rainer, which is significant for several reasons. The first is that Linda had a former partner named Rainer (Loher, 2009: 79). The audience initially learns of this relationship as Linda is speaking with Tscheki. Linda frequently thinks of this former relationship, in the form of her dream husband. This husband, however, does not exist as a perfect version of her past-partner or what she desires in a current relationship. When explaining her vision of the wolf, dream Rainer is described as dismissive: "Der Mann, sie nennt ihn Rainer, der Mann in seiner kurzen herablassenden Art, die ihr manchmal so dermaßen auf die Nerven geht" (Loher, 2009: 8).

The desire for a family is juxtaposed against the somewhat harsher reality of her own flesh-and-blood family in the story. Linda has a brother, Finn, and a father, Erwin. She is estranged from Finn, who lives alone, having eschewed the outside

world and all human contact. Erwin lives in an aged-care facility, and whilst Linda visits him regularly, the two have a tense relationship. Linda has created a more idealised version of a family life she lacks. Linda, however, comes no closer to a fulfilling familial relationship with her father or brother, choosing instead to focus on the unforeseen future rather than the achievable present. Scenes 10 and 17 “Sonntag 1” and “Sonntag 2” illustrate Linda’s inability to distance herself from the object of family unity. She speaks to Erwin of the possibilities of a nature reserve for the future: “Weißt du, wenn sich die Wölfe hier ansiedeln, dauerhaft, dann gibt es für mich ganz andere Möglichkeiten” (Loher, 2009: 31). Yet Erwin has fallen asleep during this discussion, indicating these possibilities only exist in her own mind. Their relationship is also coloured by Erwin’s obsession with Finn, whom he has not seen in years. Feeling frustrated by her second-best status, Linda retorts, “Sieh mich an. Wie ein Ei dem andern. Nur männlicher” (Loher, 2009: 44). Linda’s relationship with her father is fraught with lack of understanding and compassion for one another, resulting in her increased obsession with gaining a husband and child.

The second half of Linda’s arc in *Diebe* centres on the aftermath of Finn’s death and her attachment to an ideal existence. Linda is notified that her brother has committed suicide, and she goes to collect his personal affects and cremate his body. Scene 28 “Gang” is set in a mixed third and first-person perspective. As the scene title indicates, Linda walks through town with her brother’s ashes in an urn. On this walk, the dialogue indicates that Linda is confronted by the absurdity and lack of ideal circumstance in her life:

Linda Tomason geht mit der Urne durch die Stadt,
die sie nicht kennt. Linda kennt die Stadt nicht,
und die Stadt kennt sie nicht.
Die Häuser sehen sie fremd an.
Die Straßen sind ausgebleichen,
die wenigen Bäume erschrecken
und lassen Blätter fallen.
Auf den Grünstreifen vergilbt das Gras.
Junge Vögel legen ihre Flügel an
und stürzen von Dachkanten in den Tod. (Loher, 2009: 70)

The death of young birds in the street, yellow grass and strange houses are images of alienation and fatalism.

Linda has striven for a family that she had access to and took for granted. In this regard, the more she struggled for a promised life after feminist struggle, the further away she drifted from its realisation. Linda believes ardently, however, in the attachment to a better life regardless of how unlikely its attainment. In scene 6 "Traum 1", Linda is having a dream about going to the supermarket where Monika works. In this dream, "Sie kauft Kalbskoteletts, für drei, und Gehacktes vom Schwein, auch für drei" (Loher, 2009: 18). She is purchasing food for Rainer and her child. Upon telling Monika of her future job prospects at the nature reserve, Monika laughed, and replied "schöne Aussichten für Sie" (Loher, 2009: 19). This dream sequence illustrates that Linda's dreams are only fantasies, with no basis in achievable reality. Her attachment to an idealised life, with a meaningful job, steady husband and child are indicative of the perceived gender normative goal.

Liberation from gender-based oppression

An incredibly subtle play in some respects and bombastic in others, *Diebe* treats physical and emotional assault of its women characters from varying viewpoints. The perspective of the women themselves are not always given primacy in a scene, indicating Loher's consideration, whether warranted, of men in the scene. The following analysis problematises the portrayal of gender-based oppression that Gabi Nowotny and Ida Schmitt face, and their differing perspectives of liberation as it relates to feminist principles of identity.

Apathy, deceit and abuse characterise Gabi and Tscheki's relationship to one another. In their only physical scene together, Gabi muses as they search for an apartment to rent, "und wir haben uns vorgestellt, was wäre wenn. Wenn wir hier, zu zweit?" before quickly stating, "War natürlich nur fake, ein Spiel eben. Das war schon klar" (Loher, 2009: 41). Loher employs several methods to create distance between what has occurred between Gabi and Tscheki on stage and off stage. The abuse Gabi alleges against Tscheki is not portrayed on stage, and is instead revealed through a scene with Thomas, a police officer. The retelling of the event rather than the depiction of the event forces the audience to relate to Thomas' perspective, having heard this story for the first time. That displacement from Gabi's

perspective creates a new framework for viewing the assault, bolstering a narrative of doubt of Gabi's perspective on the event.

Thomas, as a stand in for the audience, asks leading questions about the assault, as Gabi positions herself variably as victim, survivor, bystander and opportunistic citizen. As Gabi tells the story, Tscheki has invited Gabi to dinner with a Minister. It is revealed, however, that this was a lie and that Tscheki attempts to strangle Gabi in order to forgo repaying her a three thousand Euro loan. She escapes from his hold and he drives them back to town. This plethora of labels, defies categorisation of what a woman who has been assaulted should be or feel. In this regard, liberation from gender-based oppression is based on thwarting stereotypes about women who've been assaulted.

Judith Howard notes in her article "The 'normal' victim" the "curious ambivalence" societal reactions towards victims can be. She further explicates by saying that although "pity and concern are the normatively prescribed responses to victims...we may also derogate victims, holding them at least partly responsible for having been victimized" (Howard, 1984: 270). Gabi herself, when asked if she got dressed up for the occasion, tells Thomas she wore "das rubinrote Lange mit dem spitzen Ausschnitt" (Loher, 2009: 57), before admitting this was a lie. She wore a tasteful salmon-coloured suit. Gabi's self-sexualisation of her clothing indicates her comfort with linking her gender and appearance to the instance of her assault. This idea is reinforced through Tscheki's choice of attempted murder weapon. He lures Gabi outside of the car in the middle of the woods with the promise of a ruby necklace, thereby capitalising on an assumption of feminine vanity.

Gabi's increasing anger at Tscheki's attempted strangulation, eventually gives way to pragmatism. Thomas is shocked as she describes allowing Tscheki to drive her home and Gabi defends his actions. She rationalises Tscheki's behaviour, going so far as to excuse as it based on nerves:

Ja, der Abend is irgendwie schief gelaufen, schon klar. Aber ob er das alles so geplant hat, weiß ich nich. Vielleicht hat er was anderes vorgehabt, wollte mit mir allein sein – vielleicht sind ihm wirklich einfach die Nerven durchgegangen – (Loher, 2009: 61)

Because she does not directly blame Tscheki, police officer Thomas feels inclined

to place fault with Gabi instead. If the victim does not recognise her oppression, then no one else will. Gabi asks Thomas if she can log this incident in a police report in case Tscheki launches another attack in the future and he responds that he is going to lunch. This indicates that liberation for Gabi from gender-based oppression is conditional and places emphasis on the systemic issues facing women from a legal, social and cultural perspective.

In contrast to Gabi's grappling with gender-based assault, Ida Schmitt remains firmly ensconced in a gender-normative role of wife. Frau Schmitt (as she is referred to in the play) functions as much as a character-driven unit with her husband, Herr Schmitt, than she does as an individual character. As Josef enters their lives, Ida becomes increasingly paranoid and insecure that this intrusion will result in the loss of her chosen path – a family and home. In fact, she values this identity so strongly that by the end of the drama she murders Josef to protect it. The gendered identity of mother and wife are most strongly depicted only when Ida fears their dissolution. She pleads with Gerhard to maintain their union and their dependency: "Solange ich mit dir zusammen bin, habe ich auch keine Angst. Nur getrennt möchte ich nicht werden" (Loher, 2009: 53). Josef's intrusion and his reveal of Mira as Gerhard's biological daughter threatens to disrupt all that Ida has worked for: "Wir werden alles verlieren, alles, was wir geschaffen haben, für uns" (Loher, 2009: 77).

Seeking clarity outside of their union did not ultimately provide the closure Gerhard assumed he needed. Only by the end of this scene, is this made explicit through his line "Wir haben einen Fehler gemacht" (Loher, 2009: 77). He has subsumed the dialogue of his wife, and in his desire to test the bounds of his prior life decisions, formed an untenable attachment with them instead. Where he might have earlier accepted he had produced another child, the threat that this mistake will irrevocably alter his marriage and legitimate child, is too great a risk for Gerhard and Ida. Rather than give up her attachment to normative gender-based identity of wife or mother, Ida literally removes Josef as a barrier to her personal fulfilment. The familial bond is so intrinsically linked to her personhood that any acceptance of its destruction would result in her internal devastation. As Gabi portrays a multi-varied approach to her perception of gender-based oppression, Ida

illustrates her acceptance and even craving of a subsuming of her personality and identity to her husband's.

Freedom (of expression)

The lack of knowledge and connection with her biological father has left an emotional gap in Mira's life. The absence of her father features strongly in her lack of connection to herself and unborn child. Mocking Josef's age, as he is almost twice hers, she snaps, "wenn ich so gucke, auf der Straße, könnte praktisch jeder sein von 35 aufwärts. – Du, du könntest mein Vater sein. Is doch gruselig" (Loher, 2009: 39). In addition to an attraction of Josef as a surrogate father figure, Mira is initially uncertain about aborting her pregnancy. Gabi and Mira discuss this issue in scene 8 "Termin." When asked if she loved the child, Mira replies: "Kann ich doch jetze nich sagen – kenn das Kind ja nich. Kann n ganz unangenehmes Kind sein, is nurn Klumpen Eiweiß jetz. – Weiß ich, was draus wird." Her ambivalence about becoming a mother is therefore directly tied to an understanding of her biological history.

Mira connects the creation of life to a deeper sense of connection with her biological parents. While she does know her mother, the greater significance lies with her father. She criticises her mother for her difficulty conceiving and her biological father for his "gespendete Ergüsse" (Loher, 2009: 38). She criticises him for being nothing more tangible than genetic material. Mira further rants to Josef:

Er is nur Sperma. Weiter nichts. Nur Sperma. Ein Spermaschleim aus einer
Arztpraxenwixbude. Von irgendnem beschissenen Medizinstudenten beim
Durchblättern irgndsones beschissenen Tittenmagazins in irgndsonen
beschissenen
Plastikbecher gerülpst und von irgndsoner beschissenen Arzthelferin mit
Plastikhandschuhfingern eingefroren. (Loher, 2009: 39)

Mira's words, however strong, are not entirely congruent to her true feelings regarding her father's identity. The value placed on a father figure frames her self-expression and acceptance. Cruelly, however, Mira does end up meeting Herr Schmitt, but without finding out about his relationship to her or to Josef's murder. Gabi and Mira have brought Monika to the hospital after she walked into the clothing boutique with a gunshot wound to the head. Herr Schmitt is the doctor on

call who is tasked with helping Monika. Their interaction is overshadowed by the tense nature of the situation and nothing more ultimately passes between them.

As Mira yearns for meaning within her role as daughter and mother, Ira seeks to disrupt her self-imposed stasis by leaving her role as wife. Ira has an immense fear of independence and living free from the spectre of her husband. She admits, "Ich war zuvor nie allein gewesen, nie. Deshalb wusste ich nicht, was ich tun sollte" (Loher, 2009: 68). By her own omission, Ira's life has never truly been about making choices or decisions for her present or future condition. Without her husband either explicitly telling her what the next action should be or fulfilling the predetermined role she thought she was going to play, Ira becomes fixed in time, a living relic of old ideals of femininity. She continues with, "Er ist verschwunden und vielleicht hätte er mich gebraucht" (Loher, 2009: 68). Ira could not have left the hotel room or the situation without giving up on the chance that her husband would have returned or made contact. Ira is "gleichgültig und dabei voller Angst" at the prospect of abandonment (Loher, 2009: 68).

Although little is directly spoken of Ira's lineage and past, she does give clues about her life. Speaking to Erwin about her circumstances she says, "Ich dachte, in einem Zimmer, für das ich bezahle, mit dem Wenigen, das ich habe, ein paar Kleider, ein paar Bücher, ein wenig Musik, wäre ich frei" (Loher, 2009: 68). Ira ties her probable metaphorical freedom to her lack of material engagement with the world. She refuses to own tangible possessions where they might become markers of her continued existence and participation in an ever-evolving landscape. She sings "*Como la cigarra*," a reference to regeneration of circumstance, of nostalgia for the past and hope for the future. The song's most hopeful line reads, "And at that moment of shipwreck / and of darkness / someone will rescue you / to go on singing" (Sosa, 1979). With the hope of this song also comes the foreshadowing of Ira's eventual descent back into the earth.

Freedom of expression as a sense of feminist identity is further explored through Ira's discussion with Erwin at a bus stop. Ira's choice to remain in the same hotel room for forty-three years after her husband's disappearance becomes, in effect, her decision to cling to an identity of being a wife first and a person second. In an impassioned monologue about the difficulties of moving on, she relates the

experience to waiting for a bus:

Man ist nicht mehr in der Lage aufzustehen, allein wenn man im Geiste aufsteht, sieht man ihn schon kommen. Und deswegen bleibt man sitzen. Man bleibt sitzen, weil man denkt, wenn ich jetzt aufstehe und weggehe, dann genau kommt er. Wenn ich aufstehe, passiert etwas. Wenn ich mich bewege, passiert das Entscheidende. Also bewegt man sich nicht. Das wiederum ist der Fehler. Das Fatale ist, dass man sich nicht bewegt. Denn es stimmt natürlich, wenn man sich bewegt, passiert etwas. Man steht auf und geht fort. Das passiert. (Loher, 2009: 66)

Ira's internal reticence to perceive herself as getting up and leaving the promise of marriage is heightened by her own sense of shame at having waited for so long.

Choice of sexuality or economic equality

The illustration of disconnection between what is desired and what can or will be achieved is especially evident in Monika and Thomas's story. Monika's arc is focused on her desire to move her family in order to secure more permanent and economically fruitful employment. In addition to this development, her relationship with her husband becomes strained. The conceit that Monika desires a job promotion is introduced in scene 4 "Aussicht 1." She discusses the prospect of being promoted at her current supermarket job. Her boss has led her to believe that she may be transferred to a position in the Netherlands and Monika is excited, even learning Dutch in the process.

Monika craves the choice of sexual and economic freedom. According to the neoliberal insistence of individual choice and the reality of cruel optimism, Monika believes in her promotion inasmuch as the construct is maintained by those around her. Monika's boss confers the idea of choice like a muscle Monika has only to exercise:

Aber, liebe Tomason, letztendlich liegt die Entscheidung bei Ihnen. Sprachen lernen, meint er. – Letztendlich, das sagt er gern. Diesbezüglich, sagt er auch gern. Am Ende des Tages, sagt er sehr oft. – Letztendlich liegt die Entscheidung bei Ihnen. (Loher, 2009: 12)

Her commitment to career advancement develops into a moral indictment of this choice. As Monika strives further towards a promotion by taking language classes online in addition to working full time, she paradoxically loses more of her

economic equality.

Her boss deliberately ensures Monika's delayed sense of satisfaction and attainment of what's been promised in several ways. One of which is a list with multiple lines of redacted names. He promises that since hers is visible, she will be promoted. Monika excitedly relates what she's seen to Thomas:

Aber oben auf der Seite stand mein Name, ganz deutlich, Monika Tomason stand da, der Rest, nach unten, alles schwarz. Aber oben ich, mein Name...Und dann hat er noch gesagt, wir beide, Frau Tomason, haben noch einiges vor. (Loher, 2009: 11)

Yet Monika is ultimately not promoted and her marriage dissolves, amidst speculation that she was having an affair with her boss. This results in a suicide attempt, although she is saved by Gabi, Mira and Herr Schmitt. The relationship of power and expectation between Monika and her boss is exasperated by the illusion of choice.

The illusion of choice is tested through Monika's internal understanding and reception of possible solutions to her predicament. It may appear that Monika chooses suicide after being falsely led to believe that it was her choice and decisions that led to her failure of promotion. In another sense, Monika was encouraged, through discussions with her husband, that this path also led to the destruction of her marriage and family life. Therefore, the association with freedom of economic choice led to Monika's forced freedom of sexuality through her separation. These associations do not indemnify Monika against hardship, but rather explore the disruptions of feminist identities as they relate to awkwardness. A further explanation of this concept is explored in the next section, as the politics of power, perception and relation are contextualised in accordance with alienation, connection and the use of symbols.

Awkwardness as politics of power, perception and relation

An exploration of feminist identity in *Diebe* is further explored through alienation and connection in the text. I analyse Loher's use of these elements as I uncover what they mean in relation to the earlier analysed feminist goals. I further address the use of these themes in relation to the politics of power, perception in the work. Throughout this section, a prioritisation of awkwardness "politicizes the object, its reception, and the very nature of the feelings it produces" (Smith-Prei and Stehle,

2016a: 149). The latter half of this section investigates and interprets the use of three symbols (thieves, wolf, tracks) to highlight the use of awkwardness as politics of power, perception and relation. I argue that each symbol represents an element of awkwardness that further unveils aspects of popfeminist discourse within Loher's work.

Feminist commentary as alienation and connection

Alienation and connection are two of the most prominent themes in *Diebe*. They overshadow all of the individual and interpersonal actions of the play. In this regard, thematic elements of *Diebe* play a more significant role in providing meaning than plot does. A singular non-linear play like *Diebe* thrives in a liminal space between meaning and irrelevance. The existential elements of the play similarly mirror feminist critique and commentary, which treads the line in contemporary culture between great significance and outdated social movement. Throughout *Diebe*, the binary of alienation and connection as two halves of a similar condition, portray the awkwardness inherent in feminist goals or ideas, evidenced in the first half of this chapter. Feminist identity is critiqued in the following section as an awkward interplay between an alienation of feminist goals and a subsequent connection to these goals.

Loher employs several techniques that simultaneously alienate and connect the audience and characters from and with each other. This is achieved with Loher's relatively straightforward yet nuanced language. Daniel Brunet in his article "The Edges of Society" maintains that with her use of "direct address, fragmentary dialogue, and scene titles" Loher "continues to create characters with which her audiences can identify in some way, shape, or form" (Brunet, 2012: 60). This language, often simple and understandable, is familiar to the audience. The motifs and thematic elements, however, concurrently estrange and engage the audience. Discussions of abortion, suicide, ill health and ill intentions are all uncomfortable, avoidable topics. Loher's work is "marked by innovative uses and combinations of styles" (Brunet, 2012: 60). This fuses "the poetic with the pedestrian, the literary and the laconic, utilizing the resulting dissonance to great dramatic effect" (Brunet, 2012: 60).

An alienation between feminist identities is clear in the juxtaposition

between old and new feminist discourse, much like a sense of postfeminist double entanglement. Mira's arc provides an example of illustrated tension of alienation and connection that translates to the awkwardness of internally politicised debates surrounding abortion. Mira frames her abortion according to a puritanical understanding of self and family. Without the knowledge of her biological father, an awkwardness develops between her relationship with herself, with Josef and tangentially, Herr Schmitt. These relationships manifest in a dual experience of Mira desiring an abortion according to social conventions and desiring to keep the child to maintain her connection with Josef, who will leave her if she follows through with the procedures. These tensions encapsulate the modern feminist notion of personal choice against the perceived traditional perfection of a normative, nuclear family.

Ultimately, the tension between Mira's personal and social reasons for having an abortion remains unresolved by the end of the play. Josef's untimely murder by the Schmitts occurs as Mira chooses not to have an abortion. Towards the end of scene 15 "Fragen 1," Mira monologues to the audience and reveals her decision to keep the baby. Josef, whilst present in the scene, is not privy to this information, and fully expected Mira to have an abortion if he did not find her biological father. In a monologue, Mira reasons:

Und er sagt, mein Josef Erbarmen sagt, wieder mal, ich kümmer mich drum. Ich glaub, so was Ähnliches, ich kümmer mich drum. Is er von der Mafia oder was. Er kümmer sich. Aber ich hör gar nicht richtig hin. Gib mir noch ein bisschen Zeit, sagt er, Josef der Geduldige, aber ich hab keine Zeit. Gar keine. Ich geh hin und lass mirn Termin geben.

Pause.

Ich wollts wegmachen lassen. Kommt der Tag, 9.45, steh früh auf, dusch mich, zieh mich an, nehm meine Tasche, geh zur Tür –

Pause.

– und dann bin ich doch zuhause geblieben. – Hab mich aufs Sofa gesetzt und bin den ganzen Vormittag da sitzen geblieben. Weiß nich, was ich gedacht hab. (Loher, 2009: 40)

The language and format of this scene clearly alienates Mira from Josef. Rather than communicate these feelings to Josef, they are internalised and shared only with the

audience and herself. In addition to this, Mira notes her decision not to have an abortion as one fraught with uncertainty and lack of knowing. Reading for awkwardness in this example encapsulates the popfeminist tensions of past versus present feminist identities and their effect on an individual's relationship with feminist goals.

Loher's use of the last name Tomason for two of the families indicates this term's importance and relevance to alienation and connection. A term first identified by Japanese artist Akasegawa Genpei, Thomasson³ references "hyperart", or objects that serve no practical purpose (Genpei, 2009: 2).⁴ By definition, if a Thomasson is an object that no longer has any practical use, then it can be argued that its form becomes ornamental. This is also the case for objects that may seem to always have an inherent practical use.⁵ Both Tomason families and all individuals experience the tension of being "hyperart", both internally and externally. These tensions therefore relate to an individual's relationship with a feminist identity and this identity's relevancy. In this regard, a Thomasson challenges an individual's connection to meaning through an alienation of purpose. Much like a piece of hyperart is considered to once have use but no longer be useful, feminist identity and belief might be termed as no longer being useful. Therefore, the more figures are considered hyperart within the play, the more disparate they become from a sense of feminist identity.

Linda and Monika Tomason experience a schism between their self-defined purpose and the reality of their existences. As the feminist identities explored in the first half of this chapter illustrate, Linda's goals are aligned to career and family. Monika wishes for a promotion that she assumes will fill a void in her personal

³ The spelling is changed to Tomason in *Diebe* to assumedly reflect a more Germanic spelling.

⁴ Genpei Akasegawa explains this term as having stemmed from the example of major league baseball player Gary Thomasson, whose prowess secured him a lucrative contract with a Japanese team but eventual inability to play to expected standards rendered him effectively ineffective. Thomasson's last name in Japanese spells "hyperart," hence the translation.

⁵ The example Akasegawa uses is his first Thomasson discovery - a staircase that he assumes "as long as things like capitalism and communism existed in the world, staircases would always be practical objects" Genpei, A. 2009. *Hyperart: Thomasson*, New York City, Kanya Press.

fulfilment. Yet their last name indicates the fruitlessness of these goals through signifying their individual agency as effectively useless. Genpei further posits that all artistic iterations of hyperart “are in a constant state of uncertainty, never knowing when their contracts will be terminated” and that “when they do disappear, they disappear for good” (Genpei, 2009: 19). As examples of hyperart within their own lives, Monika and Linda mimic the internalised discourse of feminism’s relevancy. As Monika ardently works towards career advancement, her relationship and family bonds dissolve, leaving her without both. As Linda deals with her brother’s suicide and Tscheki’s deceit, she becomes less invested in her personal and professional goals.

Both Mira’s internal struggle over getting an abortion and the connection of Tomason with “hyperart”, highlight thematic relationship between alienation and connection that characterises an association with feminist identity. I critiqued an association with feminist identity through the awkward tension between the alienation/connection of self-defined feminist goals. The final analysis of this chapter investigates the perception and relation in the use of symbols to define feminist identity in *Diebe*. I argue that the symbols of a thief, a wolf and tracks highlight the awkwardness between politics of power, perception and relation in the play.

Symbolic representations of awkwardness

The following section engages with symbolic representation of awkwardness that theorise the politics of power, perception and relation in *Diebe*. The symbol of thieves is representative of the politics of power as an interplay between characters as well as their own internal perceptions. In turn, this relationship between thievery and the self comes to signify the possible disjointed nature between individual and collective feminist identities. The next symbol analysed in the play is a wolf, which is related to the politics of perception, or the association of a wolf with opportunity and change. This symbol signifies the challenge of creating feminist communities. The last representative symbol is the tracks or traces, speaking of both the tracks left by wolves or thieves, or biological, familial traces left behind. Tracks represent the focus on the connections between the characters and their actions, and what they’ve left behind. Accordingly, this symbol represents the relationship between

feminist movements and the resultant tension between newer and older iterations.

Thieves

One of the most prominent symbols of *Diebe* is related to its title. Thievery, in its literal state, is the act of taking that which does not belong. There are two facets to thievery: the subject who has taken an object and the subject from whom the object has been taken. In other words, this symbol reflects the politics of power between the characters and their self-perceptions. Feminist identity is further explored as a construct of collective and individual notions, problematising the relationship between the socio-political interplay of the two.

Thievery exists in many forms throughout the play, chiefly in relation to the overarching themes of alienation and connection. These instances of thievery are symptomatic of physical theft as well as abstract conceptions of theft. Rainer attempts to steal money from Finn's estate after his death. Josef initially intends to steal information about Frau and Herr Schmitts' lives before he is discovered hiding in their backyard. Tscheki and Gabi, in an abstract sense, steal time from one another as they are never wholly invested in their relationship. In a similar vein, Ira Davidoff admits to Thomas and Erwin that she has in effect stolen through her own life, her refusal to admit her husband's disappearance resulting in an existence stagnated.

Ira Davidoff's self-characterisation as a thief highlights the awkward relationship between individual and collective notions of personal choice and freedom. Ira's scene with Erwin explores being a thief as it relates to an internalised perception of failure. Ira argues that she's lived her life as a thief, as if she does deserve or belong to be there. She asks Erwin whether he can relate to this feeling:

Glauben Sie, dass es viele von meiner Sorte gibt. Menschen wie ich, die leben, als lebten sie nicht. Die sich durch ihr eigenes Leben hindurchstehlen, vorsichtig und scheu, als ob ihnen nichts davon gehören würde, als ob sie kein Recht hätten, sich darin aufzuhalten. – Als ob wir Diebe wären. (Loher, 2009: 68)

As a self-perceived thief, Ira challenges the perception of a person in charge of her own life. As a self-dependent woman for nearly 43 years, Ira outwardly exhibits a person in control of her existence. She sings nightly at a bar called The Rusty Anchor, pays for her accommodation at a hotel and creates, to a certain extent,

relationships with others. Yet in spite of this life, Ira's choices remain a function of the life she expected to have with her husband.

Ira steals through her own existence, through an inability to choose the life she wishes to lead. Her individual identity is a function of her identity as a wife, which has not been a fixture of her existence since her husband disappeared. In this regard, a thief symbolises the awkwardness of the cruel optimism of feminist identity and attachment. Ira Davidoff presents the neoliberal cruel attachment of desiring a partner and this implicit life more than she desires to live life itself. The more she tries to retain the romanticism of her honeymoon, the further away, via time, she drifts from attaining it. The older she becomes, the less she resembles the person who married her husband, the less inevitably attached she becomes to the reality of the situation. In a neoliberal framework, the desiring of a husband and stable marriage is part of the social conditioning process. This framework lies in contrast to Ira's attachment to both her perceived sense of and actual lived experience of freedom.

The symbolic importance of thieves is elevated from considerations of individual characters, to a larger discussion of the relevance of individual and collective experiences of feminist identities. The politics of power in a discussion of thieves suggests the disjointed nature between popfeminist elements of feminist identities (freedom from oppression, freedom of expression, choice of sexual or economic equality). Each individual character in *Diebe* has their own experience and perception of feminist identities, yet these experiences may differ according to character's internal and external perceptions of their differing situations. Therefore, the symbol of thieves comes to represent a more significant, overarching awkwardness of the text, which explores these inconsistencies through character interactions and comparisons of journeys.

Wolf

The symbol of the wolf holds varied meanings and metaphorical significances. A wolf is, first and foremost, descriptive of a physical animal, noted for its ferocity, hunting prowess and general predatory biological nature (Garry, 2012: 7). Other notions of wolves are met with references to lasciviousness, rapaciousness or general evil doing. In German literature especially, the wolf bears significance from

medieval conceptions of “the criminal as wolf” to being representative of modern cultural, social and political apprehensions (Arnds, 2015: 1). Idiomatic phrases also offer consideration of wolves. To “cry wolf” regards an individual giving false alarm to a problem (Company, 2002).

In *Diebe*, the wolf becomes a symbol of the politics of perception, or the complications of creating (feminist) communities. Wolf is initially introduced as a symbol of individual and collective opportunity through the second scene in *Diebe* and the initial introduction of Linda Tomason. Linda’s connection to the wolf begins with her encounter with the animal in the wild and her subsequent ruminations on the importance for her future. Linda mentions the wolf sighting in conversations with Tscheki, Monika and Erwin, in addition to daydreams she herself experiences. The wolf’s purpose as a physical and immaterial symbol is singularly reinforced through Linda’s perspective and implied in others. The Schmitts, for instance, when noting the appearance of tracks in their backyards, note the possibility of a predatory figure, such as a wolf, having infringed upon their life. Just as the symbols of thieves and tracks are multi-dimensional and oft varied according to context, so is the conceptual element of the wolf.

To Linda, the wolf represents an apparent possibility that a nature reserve will open in the town and she will have found a new career, or the possibility of community connection. She ruminates, that paradoxically, the appearance of the wolf could have an opposite effect. Linda wonders, “steht Wolf für Anfang Neubeginn oder für Abschied Verfall” (Loher, 2009: 8). Even more telling is the last line of the scene, which Linda says aloud: “Wölfe leben doch im Rudel. Oder” (Loher, 2009: 9). That wolves live in packs, indicate a formation of a possible community, or a feminist community. Linda’s use of the wolf in conversations with Monika belies her attempt to create a sense of camaraderie between them. The inability of their relationship to foster a true community, however, creates a sense of disconnect and further alienation. The wolf therefore comes to represent the politics of perception that do not necessarily eventuate in the interplay between feminist identities.

Herr and Frau Schmitt, however, indicate nervousness of the same community that Linda longs for. Initially believing that Josef’s presence is that of a

wolf, they conspire to render it “unschädlich” (Loher, 2009: 17). Their collective angst implies a fear of increased community, in this case the revelation of Gerhard’s biological child Mira. The politics of perception indicate an unease for feminist communities due to a level of the unknown or misapprehension of what this entails. Therefore, the complications of creating a feminist community lie within the distrust of individuals with the notion of a collective feminist identity.

Tracks

Tracks, or traces, pertain to the tangible or immaterial links or course that lead an individual to a particular end. Traces are related to thieves in thieves are potentially caught when a trace leads back to them. The symbol of tracks or traces connotes the politics of relation between characters and their past actions. This symbol also indicates the tension between feminist identities, from the old to new movement, as well as the privileging of certain ideologies in popfeminism over others.

Much like the symbol of the wolf in the previous sub section, the concept of traces features heavily in the Schmitts’ character arcs. Through their explicitly entitled scenes, “Spuren” one to four, Josef and the Schmitts argue over the significance of his observations from afar. Josef is in fact introduced through the appearance of tracks and the Schmitt’s supposition of who they could belong to. These physical tracks are then an inversion of Josef’s mission in spying on the Schmitts, which is to confirm the DNA or biological traces that connect Herr Schmitt to Mira. The politics of relation in this case, are between the genetic and familiar connections between Mira and Gerhard. In turn, this relationship symbolises the tensions between the past and present, or the old and new. The Schmitt’s past reality functions without Mira. Josef’s appearance and the connection of tracks forces Ida and Gerhard to reconcile this past reality with the present and possibly future reality of Mira as Gerhard’s child, and her child as his grandchild.

Ida, however, is terrified of losing material possession and sense of her identity as a result of these traces, much in the way that popfeminist identity counters the narratives of older feminist movements. After being overruled by Herr Schmitt over whether Josef will intrude on their lives and stay in their home, Ida focuses on the reality of their joint and dependent situation. She acquiesces with a sense of resigned formality: “Dann machen wir jetzt das Abendessen, und danach

schalten wir den Fernseher ein" (Loher, 2009: 55). Her desires and opinions are invalidated, subsumed by Gerhard's needs. She is completely mollified by Gerhard and his assurances. He tells her, "du musst keine Angst haben, Ida. Niemand muss mehr Angst haben" (Loher, 2009: 54). This is in response to her other prevailing fear, that she'll lose the stability of her family, "Solange ich mit dir zusammen bin, habe ich auch keine Angst. Nur getrennt möchte ich nicht werden" (Loher, 2009: 53). Ida discusses the traces the wolf has left in their backyard:

Und dann verschwindet es unter unseren Augen, und hinterlässt diese Anwesenheitsspuren. Es hinterlässt die Wärme seines Schlafes in der Graskuhle unter dem Holunderbusch. Damit wir wissen, dass es da war. (Loher, 2009: 16)

As a symbol, traces represent the awkwardness of the varied connectivity between Josef, Mira and the Schmitts. This relationship is further problematised by Ida and her obsession with being identified. She discusses this concept in relation to an identification chip located inside one's eye. She argued that, "niemand wird mehr einen Personalausweis besitzen; wir tragen unseren genetischen Code auf einem kleinen Chip mit uns, eingepflanzt in die Netzhaut des linken Auges" (Loher, 2009: 53). She expresses no fear of this future, yet as Josef presses Gerhard for his paternal history, Ida becomes upset and contrary to Gerhard's past. She continually interrupts Josef's line of questioning, calling Gerhard "großzügig" and unequivocally calling his sperm donations a "Verschenken" that was no longer a part of their lives (Loher, 2009: 54). Accepting the traces or tracks of the past and integrating them into one's narrative of the present, illustrates the tensions between popfeminist politics of relation.

Conclusions

The complex relationships of power that characterise ownership and presentation of various feminist identities were explored throughout this chapter on *Diebe* and Dea Loher. The first section evaluated *Diebe's* role in German theatre as an important social, cultural and politically relevant platform. While Loher does not self-identify herself or her work as feminist, *Diebe* presents significant gender-specific examples that warrant the discussion of feminist identities. The second section argued the various elements of narratives and goals of feminist identities, paying particular attention to the cruel optimism of attachment, liberation from

gender-based oppression, freedom of expression and choice of sexual or economic equality. The analysis uncovered that various aspects of feminist identity are individual in nature and do not necessarily agree with conceptions of a singular feminist identity. Finally, I critiqued the presentation of *Diebe's* feminist identities as an interplay between awkwardness as politics of power, perception and relation. Findings included the tensions between feminist commentary as alienation and connection and the use of symbols (thieves, wolf, tracks) to indicate individual versus collective understandings of feminist identities.

Loher's presentation of herself, *Diebe's* reception in the public discourse and the resulting nuance of feminist identities present in the work, complicate the current understanding of popfeminist political discourse. Alongside the reconceptualisation of what is considered a popfeminist text, I presented and argued a concurrent understanding of feminist identities and reading for awkwardness within *Diebe*. The next chapter considers the interplay of social media movements, feminist identities and the politics of awkwardness inherent in the presentation of an author working in a popfeminist space.

4) "ich bin da, und ich gehe nicht weg":⁶ #aufschrei and Anne Wizorek

Klar ist: Das Private ist auch für meine Generation immer noch politisch, vermutlich mehr denn je. Wer sich dagegen aber einfach komplett ins Private zurückzieht und dort verbleibt, lässt Politik und damit Selbstbestimmung in dieser Gesellschaft ohne sich stattfinden. Uns selbst nicht nur immer wieder als Teil dieser Gesellschaft zu begreifen, sondern auch als ein Teil, der Gesellschaft trotz allem beeinflussen kann (und muss), scheint mir die größte Herausforderung meiner Generation und dieser Zeit.

— Anne Wizorek, "Generation müsy," 2016, p.139

In early 2013, #aufschrei became the most visible, and widely disseminated socio-political feminist movement in Germany. It sought, through established mechanisms of framing, to create an on the ground movement of German speaking, woman-identified persons to digitally share their stories and experiences of everyday sexism in order to illustrate its cultural prevalence. The projection of these everyday instances of sexism into the public discourse cultivated a level of gender-specific discussion in contemporary German society that had not been seen since the 1970s. As a popfeminist movement, #aufschrei further championed social media as a vehicle for public discourse of depictions of both private and public acts of violence, assault or harassment against women as told through their viewpoints in 140 characters or less. As a chief author of this movement, Anne Wizorek further problematised the reception, public discussion and evolution of the movement through a focus on the power relationships between women and the media.

The following chapter problematises #aufschrei's role as a popfeminist work of feminist identity through an investigation of Anne Wizorek's embodied experience of feminist identity alongside the promotion of feminist identities of #aufschrei. First, I contextualise #aufschrei's success, rise to prominence and role in the creation of die Sexismus-Debatte. From its promotion of anti-sexist and discriminatory messages to its relationship to movements around the world, and the German media's reluctance to critically discuss female-centred issues, #aufschrei's

⁶ Banaszczuk, Y. 2013. Ich bin eine Quotenfrau. *Frau Dingens* [Online]. Available from: <http://frau-dingens.de/?p=1925#main-nav>.

rise to prominence illustrates the overall power of the campaign. I will then discuss specifically how #aufschrei aided in the creation of feminist identity through the consciousness raising and awareness enabled through the social media platform Twitter. Second, I consider the influence of neoliberalism on the #aufschrei campaign in terms of its inception and promotion throughout the intended community and the wider public sphere. Third, I examine the cruel optimism of the movement's emphasis on individual awareness of the de-stigmatisation of sexual harassment/assault against the promised clarification of meaning and productivity. The final section analyses the employment of awkwardness in the politics of power, reception and relation in the movement and its creation of feminist communities.

Context and prior scholarship

Scholarship on #aufschrei has been largely based on its role as a digital feminist movement (Maireder and Schlögl, 2014), its relationship to the public sphere (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015; Sadowski, 2016) and its role as a popfeminist work (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a). Axel Maireder and Stephan Schlögel argued in "24 hours of an #outcry: The networked publics of a socio-political debate" for an understanding of how #aufschrei grew from an informal conversation to a nationally-discussed movement within a 24-hour period. Maireder and Schlögel explore this phenomenon through a theory of networked publics or the "communication spheres defined intrinsically by shared interest in certain topics and extrinsically by networked media technologies – and how these publics interact and evolve over time" (Maireder and Schlögl, 2014: 688). This analysis critiques #aufschrei as a socio-political debate, influenced by the wider ability of communication through Twitter and its subsequent media engagement. Whilst I do not argue with this approach, my thesis aims to further contextualise #aufschrei as a popfeminist debate and its resultant effects to collective and individual identity. Maireder and Schlögel focus singularly on the means of information dissemination without further contextualising the social implications.

#aufschrei is discussed as a popfeminist event in Smith-Prei and Stehle's 2016 book *Awkward politics: technologies of popfeminist activism*. They argue that the use of digital spaces in social media movements creates "a new kind of engagement with violence and body politics through not disembodied but, instead,

digitally embodied performances that allow for potentially endless repetition” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016b: 99). In this regard, the performance of discursive political identities is in constant relationship to shifting perspectives and engagement in the digital sphere. Activists’ feminist identities are in flux according to which information is being highlighted on the platforms; whether this is the promotion of personal stories of assault or the lampooning of these stories.

Ricarda Drüeke and Elke Zobl frame their methodology around theoretical principles of the public sphere in “Online feminist protest against sexism: the German-language hashtag #aufschrei.” This analysis relies on an understanding of the “public sphere as a process of social negotiation and refers to various, mutually permeating spheres of discourse in three layers: the simple, intermediate, and complex layers, each of which exhibits its own communication forms and forums” (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 38). As with Maireder and Schlögel’s article, Drüeke and Zobl’s approach is contingent on a communication studies methodology, whereby I approach #aufschrei with a literary and popfeminist analysis. While their analysis is therefore useful for understanding how sexism is discussed on Twitter, my research in chapter four further prioritises the understanding of #aufschrei as it relates to individual and collective experiences of feminist identity. These ideas are further discussed in the article “Öffentlichkeiten im Internet: Zwischen Feminismus und Antifeminismus” by Drüeke and Elisabeth Klaus. They argue “Die Kritik an patriarchalen Strukturen und heteronormativen Mustern, die durch #aufschrei eine größere Öffentlichkeit erreichte, blieb nicht ohne Widerspruch” (Drüeke and Klaus, 2014: 65).

Helga Sadowski’s article “From #aufschrei to hatr.org: digital–material entanglements in the context of German digital feminist activism” problematises digital feminisms and “what role the interplay of materiality and the digital plays within them” (Sadowski, 2016: 56). Sadowski quotes Nathan Jurgenson who argued that:

social media has everything to do with the physical world and our offline lives are increasingly influenced by social media, even when logged off. We need to shed the digital dualist bias because our Facebook pages are indeed “real life” and our offline existence is increasingly virtual. (Jurgenson, 2011)

Sadowski further supposes that “digital boundaries and online–offline boundaries are fading, and this factor accounts for what digital feminism is today” (Sadowski, 2016: 64). I agree with this position and also use it as an assumption for further analysis into #aufschrei’s role as popfeminist movement.

The remainder of this section explores the background of die Sexismus-Debatte in addition to the prominent role of #aufschrei in propelling this conversation into the mainstream. #aufschrei will then be contextualised according to Anne Wizorek and other’s experiences of everyday sexism and its effect on the everyday association of women. The latter half of this section explores how participants within #aufschrei created their own feminist identities through the sharing of individual experiences and the collective trends on social media that inspired this wave of antisexist campaigning. #aufschrei is finally compared briefly to other similar movements in Germany and the UK, which illuminates the complex yet iterative creation of feminist identities through social media campaigns.

#aufschrei and die Sexismus-Debatte

On the evening of January 23, 2013 Anne Wizorek reached for her phone to check her Twitter feed before going to bed. She noticed her friend and fellow blogger Nicole von Horst (@vonhorst) tweeted about an experience she recently had whilst in hospital. The tweet read: “@vonhorst: Der Arzt, der meinen Po tätschelte, nachdem ich wegen eines Selbstmordversuchs im Krankenhaus lag” (@vonhorst, 2013). Feeling dismayed and appalled by the content of her friend’s tweet and determining to highlight the sexism of von Horst’s complaint, Wizorek (@marthadear) replied back to @vonhorst: “wir sollten diese erfahrungen unter einem hashtag sammeln. ich schlage #aufschrei vor” (Weiler, 2013). Germany’s most high-profile hashtag campaign had begun.

This series of tweets activated a pro-woman, anti-sexism social media movement that increased in momentum as the days passed. By morning, thousands of exchanges rendered #aufschrei a trending hashtag on the German Twitter feed, creating a resonance far beyond the exchange’s original intent. National media picked up the story, Wizorek began taking interviews and a single series of tweets became the impetus for the wide-reaching discussion on everyday sexism. The

#aufschrei campaign, however, was not the only contributor to the discussion on sexism in Germany. Other individuals and events lent their voice to the cacophony of examples wherein known women, mostly journalists or those with associations with the press, enumerated their experiences of everyday sexism.

Maike Hank, a founder with Wizorek of feminist blog *Kleinerdreij*, recorded her experience in “Normal ist das nicht!” on January 24, 2013. This personal account relayed in detail Hank’s experience of being stalked home by two men from the U-Bahn station late one night in Berlin. The writing is vivid and exact, expressing the incident in detail to immerse the reader in the minute details of how Hank felt in those moments:

Hektisch schloss ich die Wohnung auf, sprang in den Flur, warf die Türe zu, an die ich mich anschließend mit dem Rücken lehnte, um leise wieder zu Atem zu kommen und mich vor allem auch nicht mit Schritten zu verraten. (Hank, 2013)

This blog post enriched the conversation already developing on Twitter. It connected Hank’s experience of sexism with sexualised violence and assault, further linking the event to instances of being cat-called on the street.

Hank further explained that street harassment is a normal and socially acceptable part of her day. She clarified, “Niemand möchte wahrhaben, dass es so unangenehm sein kann, im Sommerkleid durch die Stadt zu spazieren” (Hank, 2013). #aufschrei became a platform for the calling out or naming and shaming of specific behaviours related to sexualised violence and sexism that affect women in Germany. Hank further implored, “wie unangenehm es ist, jeden Tag an der gleichen Baustelle vorbei zu gehen und angegafft zu werden” (Hank, 2013). The media’s interest in these stories piqued and other women began to tell their stories.

Coincidentally and with no relation to the #aufschrei campaign, journalist Laura Himmelreich’s article “Der Herrenwitz” was published in *Stern*. The article dryly related the sexual harassment Himmelreich faced from prominent CDU politician Rainer Brüderle at a press and politician gathering. Himmelreich claimed that as she attempted to interview Brüderle at this joint press and political event, he enquired after her age. Himmelreich asked about a recent speech he gave in which he claimed Germany wasn’t changing fast enough. Brüderle asks where she is from. As she noted she was from Munich, Brüderle mentioned that women actually drink

there, noting the Coca Cola in her hand. Himmelreich further clarifies she would be drinking at Oktoberfest and Brüderle's "Blick wandert auf meinen Busen. 'Sie können ein Dirndl auch ausfüllen.'" He took Himmelreich's hand, kissed it, and asked for a dance. Himmelreich responded to Brüderle "Sie sind Politiker, ich bin Journalistin" and further "Ich finde es besser, wir halten das hier professionell." He replied "Am Ende sind wir alle nur Menschen" (Himmelreich, 2013).

The article further concerns Brüderle's political career, his lack of leadership qualities and general instances of mistakes and misconduct over the years that point to political and social incompetence. Himmelreich relates her uncomfortable experience with Brüderle to his overall lack of professionalism and ability, arguing he is "so verliebt in seinen Charme, dass er sich nicht vorstellen kann, welche Wirkung seine Sprüche haben." The article was a scathing portrait of a man "der aussterbenden Klischees liebt - egal, ob es um Frauen geht, den politischen Gegner oder die Inhalte der FDP." "Der Herrenwitz" became a widely read narrative, confirming the suggestive commentary of a male political figure and its subsequent impact on a member of the press. While Brüderle initially remained silent about the allegations, then FDP faction leader in Schleswig-Holstein, Wolfgang Kubicki spoke publically about the matter, citing the incident occurred one year prior to the article's publication to support that *Stern* had ulterior motives. He alleged this proved *Stern's* attempt to discredit Brüderle and his chances for the FDP leadership (n-tv.de, 2013).

Thomas Osterkorn, an editor at *Stern*, took specific issue with the claim, that the timing of the article's publication was substantively based on alternate purposes. Osterkorn commented:

Der erste Eindruck, den Laura Himmelreich vor einem Jahr von Brüderles Umgang mit Frauen gewonnen hatte, bestätigte sich im Laufe der Zeit bei weiteren Beobachtungen und Begegnungen. Ich halte unsere Berichterstattung deshalb für legitim. Denn es scheint ein wiederkehrendes Verhalten von Brüderle zu sein (Osterkorn, 2013).

Editor in Chief of *Stern* Andreas Petzold agreed with Osterkorn's assessment. Himmelreich herself, distinguished how her agency had also been called into question. Himmelreich wrote in a follow up article "Wie die stern-Autorin den

#aufschrei erlebte“ how this public perception was not one that she had anticipated. Before this debate, she did not consider it possible “dass es so viele Menschen gibt, die einer jungen Frau mit guter Ausbildung die Fähigkeit des selbstständigen Denkens absprechen“ (Himmelreich, 2014).

Himmelreich discussed how herself and Brüderle became a projection of people’s perceptions of sexism, and alternately victim or perpetrator. She identified how the larger debate became about these feelings and perceptions of the individual instead of collective association with sexism as a broader social issue:

Gefühle können nicht widerlegt werden. Sie sind weder richtig noch falsch. Im besten Fall besteht heute mehr Sensibilität für die Gefühle der anderen. Im schlechtesten Fall haben sich alle nur selbst bestärkt. (Himmelreich, 2014)

The association between feelings and sexism was problematic, considering the movement’s goal to legitimise internalised sexist actions and thought processes that reinforced behaviours of sexualised violence. In addition, the overwhelming association of Brüderle and Himmelreich with die Sexismus-Debatte distorted the broader understanding of sexism, projecting it as emblematic of individuals and their interaction.

Another journalist, Annett Meiritz, relayed her experience of sexism within the Pirate Party in a *Spiegel Online* article published January 14, 2013. “Man liest ja so einiges über Sie” accounts Meiritz’ continual harassment by Pirate Party members throughout her yearly coverage of their political activities. Meiritz was accused, without basis, of having an affair with two party members as well as of being a prostitute for having said relationships. Twitter again provided the backdrop for this rumour, sparked due to the fact she met these men at a café (Giesecke, 2013). Meiritz captured the initial Tweet that precipitated her harassment:

Sag mal @piratsimon hat Dich @annmeiritz jetzt auch geblockt? - Keine Ahnung. Solange mich nicht Journalisten blockieren, sondern nur Prostituierte ist mir das egal cc @annmeiritz ... Menschen prostituieren sich nicht nur für Geld. (Meiritz, 2013)

Meiritz explained how the harassment disrupted her working life. She commented how unfair it was for her male colleagues not to have to worry about their clothing or whether a smile will be misconstrued as sexual. She explained:

Niemand wünscht sich ein aseptisches Arbeitsklima, wo jeder harmlose Flirt gleich zur sexuellen Belästigung deklariert wird und Scherze nur politisch korrekt sein dürfen. Aber die Regeln, die für Männer selbstverständlich sind, müssen endlich auch für uns Frauen gelten. (Meiritz, 2013)

Meiritz' story again reaffirmed die Sexismus-Debatte and the larger #aufschrei movement as highlighting sexism that largely occurred in the lives of several professional white women whose working lives bisected quite heavily with the Internet.

Creation of feminist identity

The culmination of social agitation into the success of the #aufschrei campaign, created a centralised node for media attention and individual participation. Its de-facto leader and speaker Anne Wizorek, increased the campaign's profile through media appearances in print and talk shows, a prestigious Grimme award and eventually a book deal. Yet these events do not adequately describe how #aufschrei defined and crafted its identity as a feminist movement. Through a series of frames of sexualised violence and harassment, #aufschrei encouraged users to submit their experiences and stories on Twitter, thereby raising collective awareness of sexism. As a woman-centred movement, male sexist behaviour was significantly highlighted and explored by media coverage and participants' stories.

#aufschrei provided participants with the immediate ability to add their story to the collective Sexismus-Debatte in Germany with 140-characters. The movement's greatest strength remained its digital connectivity. This connectivity afforded users the ability to read what others wrote on the same topic. The strength in weak ties, as Mark Granovetter maintains, leads to "our greatest source of new ideas and information" (Gladwell, 2010). Consequently, this activism motivates people to "do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice" (Gladwell, 2010). This action then reinforces the political identity of the participant, the validity of the overall anti sexism movement and the effectiveness of online political change.

Wizorek and those who are involved in the netzfeminismus movement laud the Internet's egalitarian and open principles of change and fostering of community. Wizorek herself notes: "Allein mein feministisches Netzwerk ist gerade durch

#aufschrei noch größer und stärker geworden, und ich haben nun noch mehr Freund_innen, die sich ebenfalls feministisch engagieren" (Wizorek, 2014c: 269). Wizorek's emphatic statement, "Ich liebe das Internet und dessen Möglichkeiten!" is illustrative of her approach to the creation of feminist thought in Germany (Wizorek, 2014c: 7). This is evident in her pronouncement that "Ein Online-Netzwerk ist nicht weniger menschlich und kraftvoll als eines, das offline entstanden ist" (Wizorek, 2014c: 269). In her opinion, on and offline activism are similarly important to collective and individual feminist meaning making. In the article "Volatile Bewegungen im Netz," Anne Wizorek recognises that "ein Hashtag ist kein Allheilmittel" for solving sexism in Germany (Wizorek, 2013c).

Individual women's experiences became the most important evidence of the movement and feminist identity was framed as ancillary to the awareness raising of the campaign. Users tweeted their past experiences of sexism, as @Tugendfurie related an uncomfortable relationship with a former teacher: "@Tugendfurie: Der Lehrer, der andauernd mitten im Unterricht meine Haare und Augen lobte und mir vielsagende Blick zuwarf. #aufschrei" (@Tugendfurie, 2013). Anne Wizorek also participated, sharing her experience of unwanted sexual contact: "@marthadear: der Kommilitone, der mir anbot, mich nach Hause zu fahren und während der Fahrt seine Hand nicht von meinem Knie nahm. #aufschrei" (@marthadear, 2013a). Wizorek tweeted the rest of the incident, relaying that she was perceived at fault for the incident: "@marthadear: später hatte er behauptet, ich hätte Signale gesendet und das ja alles so gewollt. #aufschrei" (@marthadear, 2013d). In addition to naming and shaming instances of sexism, Wizorek and others analysed their experiences and connected them to larger issues of men's entitlement to women's bodies.

These issues were later targeted by the media, who raised questions around the acceptability of sexism. Lisa Caspari examined these question in her article "Der #aufschrei und seine Folgen," asking specifically "Wie sexistisch ist unsere Gesellschaft? Was muss sich ändern? Wer übertreibt? Und was ist eigentlich mit den Männern" (Caspari, 2014). The shifting of the lens from victims of the sexism to the perpetrators evidenced a turning point in media discussion of sexism and the promotion of one discourse over the other. Individual user experiences were

validated through the sheer volume of participation and similar messaging. As a social media movement #aufschrei engendered a “specific kind of collective action that happens mostly outside of existing political structures” (Dimond et al., 2013: 1). Anne Wizorek's creation of #aufschrei and its unique reliance on user-created content highlighted the “connections between social movement theory and storytelling online” (Dimond et al., 2013: 1).

Popfeminist narratives of identity and success

In her talk “Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism” Hester Baer poses the question, “what happens to the key feminist construct of the personal is political, when the political...is reduced to the personal in neoliberalism?” (Baer, 2014) This question remains the premise for the first half of this chapter, which analyses the individual, feminist narratives #aufschrei has made invisible and further, how these narratives have impacted the collective perception of sexism. Baer's early comment problematises the focus of #aufschrei on these two complementary facets of the Internet as egalitarian and the popfeminist creation of meaning as an individual, discursive political performance. This section explains the cruel optimisms of attachment in #aufschrei before analysing the goals of feminist narratives. These feminist goals include the liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom of expression and choice of sexuality or economic equality.

Cruel optimisms of attachment

The following section defines the narratives of individual identity within die Sexismus-Debatte alongside the global and national collective response against claims of widespread sexism in Germany. A thorough dissemination of the neoliberal narratives of individual identity within #aufschrei will aid in constructing the overall creation of feminist identity within the movement. Neoliberalism in #aufschrei is characterised by the movement's focus on women's victimisation by sexism and the use of popular culture (social media platforms) to express a feminist sense of identity. The movement itself isn't predicated on calling oneself a feminist, but on associating feminism with activism such as speaking out against everyday instances of misogyny. The goal or belief in #aufschrei as a movement indicates the desire to promote an increased awareness of sexism thereby limiting the overall

structural power that accepts it. The cruel optimism of spreading awareness of sexism, or that the growing movement against sexism creates a reactive and regressive response, highlights the ephemeral and nebulous qualities of social-media based movements, even when they have a foothold in present political discussion. In this discussion, cruel optimism refers to the desire to spread awareness of sexism yet through this building of awareness, creating smaller spheres of engagement with these issues. In essence, the more sexual harassment and assault is discussed on digital media platforms, the more niche and exclusive the conversation becomes.

A facet of neoliberalism is the notion that identity is formed, in part, due to behaviours of consumption. Consumption relates to consumerism, as in buying materials, in addition to theoretical consumption of popular culture, such as watching television and the use of social media. A popfeminist event is one that occurs within the given pop culture spectrum of consumerism and the use of political capital to escape the neoliberal failure/success binary. #aufschrei is a popfeminist event because its digital media embraces and utilises the norms of popular culture. It accepted the use of these pop culture-imbued forums, blogs and social media, as its mediums for change. In addition to this, Wizorek herself is active in the online feminist communities, calls herself a “Nerdette” (Wizorek, 2013a), regularly blogs and engages with various pop cultural phenomena.

The cruel optimisms of #aufschrei challenge interpretations of the failure/success binary promoted by neoliberal consumption. Rather than incremental change that previous anti-sexism movements championed, #aufschrei argued for complete cultural change. Wizorek defined this call to action in a 2013 *Stern* article:

Um uns von unserer sexistischen Gesellschaft endlich zu verabschieden, bedarf es einer verschränkten Verantwortungsübernahme in Politik, Medien, Bildungseinrichtungen und *Privatem*. Anhand der Art, wie die Debatte bislang verlief, zeigt sich, wie sehr wir eigentlich noch am Anfang von etwas stehen, das ein wahrhafter Kulturwandel werden muss. Ist das viel Arbeit? Oh ja. Ist es unmöglich? Oh nein! (Wizorek, 2013b)

Wizorek’s attachment to the object of cultural change, challenges the association

with success of #aufschrei. #aufschrei does not solicit incremental change, but rather an overall of cultural acceptance of sexism throughout major institutions.

The cruel optimism of this movement is created by the assumption that further understanding and awareness of women's plight will result in the acceptance and understanding of the underlying issues of systemic sexist structural power. The cruelty in this analysis follows that although the individual may understand their role in the promotion or halting of harassment, the collective social structures still support these systems of oppression. Therefore, the promised clarity of meaning of the movement (the increased awareness of sexual harassment/assault and ways to halt it) does not lead to the promised productivity of the movement (complete changing of the social structures).

Liberation from gender-based oppression

Wizorek began her 2014 book, *Weil ein Aufschrei nicht reicht: für einen Feminismus von heute*, by stating its purpose as "einen persönlichen Einblick liefern" (Wizorek, 2014c: 8). Wizorek sought to give the reader an inside perspective on the current feel and attitude of German feminism in three distinct ways: "...was Feminismus heute bedeutet, warum wir ihn dringend brauchen und wie vielfältig die Möglichkeiten zur Veränderung sind – für jede_n von uns" (Wizorek, 2014c: 8). The text, a companion book to the #aufschrei movement, became a written guidebook to understanding and perhaps changing the prevailing institutions that simultaneously reinforce and restructure gender-based oppression. The book sought to contextualise "die Möglichkeiten zur Veränderung" in the push against sexism.

Gender-based oppression references the social structures of the oppressive prevailing attitudes towards women. In turn, this denotes the engagement of privilege in relation to the structural nature of sexism. Wizorek encapsulates this argument in her book. She writes:

Sexismus, das sind nicht einfach nur ein paar alte Herren mit ihren Witzen am Stammtisch, die sich 'danebenbenehmen'. Sexismus ist etwas, das sich durch unsere zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen, Arbeitsumfelder etc. zieht – eben ein strukturelles Problem. (Wizorek, 2014c: 17)

Wizorek's use of the term "strukturelles Problem" illustrates the general neue

Feminismus and Netzfeminismus desire to alter existing structures to improve women's overall experience and standing within German society.

This argument is noteworthy in that a classic post or new feminist approach to feminist cultural significance posits that progress is a top-down construct (such as legislative changes). Wizorek and the #aufschrei movement, however, does not attempt to align Germany's progressive global persona with its lack of social and culturally liberal policies (Wizorek, 2014c: 202). Instead, Wizorek prioritises the ideologically conflicting notions of political liberality alongside culturally regressive tendencies. Specific gender-based oppression is therefore not incongruent with the many representative strides Germany has made towards gender equality:

Klar, es wächst gerade die erste Mädchengeneration heran, für die es vollkommen selbstverständlich ist, dass eine Frau Bundeskanzlerin werden kann, und das ist super. Aber: Eine Kanzlerin macht noch keinen Sommer. Und Sexismus löst sich deswegen auch nicht auf magische Weise in Luft auf. (Wizorek, 2014c: 86)

Sexism is a focal point for the feminist goals of eradicating gender-based oppression. The discussion of Germany's progressive and regressive policies, however, do not render its losses or achievements in gender parity absolute.

Discussions of gender equality have not been particularly forthcoming in German political circles, save for recent policy changes that have come about since 2013 regarding use of gendered language and gender presentation. Myra Marx Ferree argued that consequentially Germany has been "a reluctant latecomer to combating discrimination against women, an exemplary case of feminist political leadership, [and] a middle-of-the-pack European welfare state" (Ferree, 2012: 2). Yet studies indicate that sexism and violence against women occurs. The 2004 government report on the "Health, Well-Being and Personal Safety of Women in Germany" indicated 37% of interviewed women experienced some form of violence against them and 58% experienced sexual harassment (Müller et al., 2004: 9). The study, however, fails to properly signify levels of street or lower levels of harassment and is dated enough to indicate the lack of support for discussions of sexism as they stood in 2013 at the beginning of #aufschrei.

Wizorek and others sought, with the creation of #aufschrei, to validate the experiences of women who experienced sexism. The campaign offered instant

association with a movement that believed women's individual experiences without the burden of proof. Barbara Hans and Simone Utler discussed the concept of burden of proof in their article "Aufschrei-Debatte auf Twitter: Der ganz alltägliche Sexismus." They argued the myriad of ways women are asked to justify their experiences of sexist behaviour:

Rechtfertigen müssen sich häufig genug die Frauen, die einen Sexismus-Vorwurf erheben: weil sie keinen Spaß verstehen; weil sie prüde sind; weil sie überhaupt dankbar sein können, wenn ihnen mal ein Mann Aufmerksamkeit schenkt; weil sie angeblich nur neidisch sind; weil sie nur ihre allgemeine Unzufriedenheit zum Ausdruck bringen; weil sie 'Kampf-Emanzen' sind. (Hans and Utler, 2013)

As a feminist-led movement, women were not asked to qualify how and why their experiences were sexist. Participants were asked to define their own boundaries for sexist behaviour and enumerate them on social-media platforms (Dargent, 2013).

#aufschrei routinely proved the structural focus of sexism on the reality of individual choices within a political system. One of the goals of #aufschrei was channeling the liberation from gender-based oppression as it related specifically to sexism. In a somewhat combative interview with *Stern*, a left-leaning magazine, Wizorek stated #aufschrei's purpose in exposing that "wir leben in einer Gesellschaft, die von Männern beherrscht wird" (Wizorek quoted in Schlenz, 2014). She further clarified that prominent women politicians did not indicate a paucity of "ungebrochene strukturelle Diskriminierung" (Wizorek quoted in Schlenz, 2014). Detractors were quick to assign #aufschrei as a movement of victims. Wizorek countered that the movement was not one of victims, but rather a movement dedicated to making visible the myriad disadvantages that befall women according to their gender. #aufschrei's stance on anti-sexist behaviour encompassed a larger political and cultural goal of eliminating gender-based injustice.

#aufschrei participants most frequently recorded their experiences of gender-based oppression in relation to harassment including "verbal and visual assaults, physical assaults, and intimidation" (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 45). In an analysis of 700 tweets from a five-week period after #aufschrei's inception, researchers Ricarda Drüeke and Elke Zobl manually coded the categorical responses of #aufschrei

participants. They argued that the coded actors, situation and type of assault were primarily related to “power structures and hierarchies” and therefore indicated sexism “as part of social structures” (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 45-6). This analysis specified participants’ disclosure of individual injustices led to the exposure of more widespread injustice and gender-based oppression. These discussions therefore led to an increased solidarity of feminist identification (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 46).

Furthermore, the assault described by participants implicated the various power and structural relationships inherent in systemic sexism. Non-physical assaults of women included “sexual innuendos, sexist comments, verbal abuse (sometimes with seductive intentions) and threats, and covetous gazes” (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 45). These acts of assault and harassment are gender-based and concerned with systemic power. Drüeke and Zobl argue that these illustrations are more concentrated on “making collective patterns visible” rather than individual participant’s experiences (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 46). Yet the highly individual and personalised responses of participants’ experiences of gendered oppression reveals that importance of the parts in addition their sum. Wizorek added to the cacophony of these tweets with her own memory: “der Typ, der besoffen meine Freundin an die Wand drückte, so dass ich mich zwischen sie schieben musste, um ihr zu helfen. #aufschrei” (@marthadear, 2013b).

Freedom (of expression)

Through her work and public appearance, Wizorek suggested a new generation could create and build upon the feminist foundations of former generations with greater success than if they tried to create new platforms entirely. The foregone tactics of awareness raising “the marches, the boycotts, the coordinated letter-writing campaigns – don’t really work so well any more” and the structural systems of oppression develop “resilience to these approaches” (Stavri, 2012). Wizorek argued:

#aufschrei bietet die Möglichkeit zu verstehen, was wir wirklich wollen bzw. was nicht. Es geht ums Zuhören, Verstehen und schließlich reflektiertes Handeln. Wie schon gesagt: Weg von einer Kultur des ‘Du willst es doch auch!’ und hin zu einer Kultur des ‘Willst du auch?’ (Wizorek, 2014c: 212)

#aufschrei's eventual goal is to shift Germany's social structures from prescriptive attitudes regarding women's lack of individual agency to that of asking women what they as individuals have the personal freedom to express.

Christine Lüders, leader of the *Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes* in Germany, argued the following in response to #aufschrei's social impact:

Dank der #aufschrei-Debatte wurden viele Frauen ermutigt, offener über das Thema sexuelle Belästigung am Arbeitsplatz zu sprechen und sich zu wehren. Bei uns ist im vergangenen Jahr die Zahl der Frauen, die sich gemeldet haben, im Vergleich zu den Vorjahren um ein Drittel gestiegen. (Jakat, 2014)

Lüders praises #aufschrei for giving women the leverage with which to speak up about their experiences in the workplace, an area in which sexism proliferates. Lüders further states that "Viele Frauen trauen sich nicht, dagegen vorzugehen. Oft haben sie Angst um ihren Arbeitsplatz oder suchen gar die Schuld bei sich" (Jakat, 2014). One of the ways in which #aufschrei seeks to promote the discussion of sexual violence against women is to destigmatise women's experiences of coming forward.

Freedom of expression also encompassed the social and cultural imperative to counteract negative stereotypes around women's acceptable body sizes. In *Weil ein #aufschrei nicht reicht*, Wizorek wrote about fat acceptance and the #609060 social media movement that occurred just prior to #aufschrei (Wizorek, 2014c: 107). This action was inspired by a blogpost by Journelle, an online political, social and cultural commentator. The hashtag #609060 referenced the absurdity of ideal body sizes (Journelle, 2012a). The movement itself was inspired by Journelle's blog, wherein she asked the following:

Warum sollte ich mich also runterhungern, um in bestimmte Kleidung zu passen, wo ich doch eigentlich nur das hübsche Runde an mir unterstreichen und das weniger hübsche Runde kaschieren möchte? (Journelle, 2012b)

Wizorek commented on this in her book, positing that self-love is "leider auch heute noch ein radikaler Schritt" (Wizorek, 2014c: 106). #aufschrei's discussion of feminist identities sought to not only broaden the scope of women's acceptability to themselves, but to a broader public sphere.

#aufschrei also drew attention to diverse feminist protests and activists,

including those who identified as queer, transgender or as gender fluid. This is evident from Wizorek's personal writings to participation in the movement. In her book, *Weil ein #aufschrei nicht reicht*, Wizorek uses gender-inclusive language and pronouns and mentions the success of #aufschrei-associated movements. These movements included #queeraufschrei, #Rassismus, #Cissexismus and #Homophobie (Wizorek, 2014c: 330). A *Mädchenmannschaft* blog post further questioned why, with the existence of these separate hashtags, a more diverse cross section of experiences were not explored in the public discourse: "Über welche Erfahrungen wurde dann gesprochen, welche fielen hinten runter?" (Mohamed et al., 2013)

Similar beauty ideals that challenged women's freedom of expression exist alongside racialised boundaries. The stereotypes and assumptions that effect women of colour are categorically and historically more unjust and pervasive than those that effect white women. In accordance with this, the beauty standards that women of colour are confronted with, expose these racialised prejudices. Wizorek explores this in relation to beauty standards, noting that "Frauen of Color durch das Schönheitsideal mit weißer Hautfarbe zusätzlich vermittelt wird, dass sie nicht als schön empfunden werden" (Wizorek, 2014c: 87). The right or freedom to express oneself irrespective of western beauty standards, is an especially fraught proposition for women of colour, whose self-determination is continually questioned according to stereotypical notions of who they can be.

#queeraufschrei highlighted the varying experiences of queer-based gendered discrimination that directly effected the social, cultural and political ramifications of individuals. #queeraufschrei was most actively used in February 2013, engendering repeat interactions and retweets. User @genderknight, noted the difficulty they faced with freedom of expression after coming out of the closet: "#aufschrei die menschen, die nach dem coming out den kontakt abbrachen. #queeraufschrei" (@genderknight, 2013a). Specific gender-based discrimination was explored by @acknowlii: "nach intensivem Gespräch über seine Rassismuserfahrungen ein 'I don't care about girls': Junge steht auf und geht wortlos #queeraufschrei" (@acknowlii, 2013). @genderknight further confronted issues of visibility in the lesbian community: "#queeraufschrei dass die lesbenszene noch so

unsichtbar ist. als ob es uns nicht gäbe..." (@genderknight, 2013b). Through acknowledging the varying experience of queer individuals, the additional hashtag problematised the gendered notion of freedom of expression visible within the #aufschrei movement.

#queeraufschrei challenged the freedom of gendered expression as it was discussed publically and generically in the mediasphere. The public discourse prioritised a discussion of women over gender inclusivity. Hengameh Yaghoobifarah⁷ examined this exclusion through a discussion of their own personal gendered identity. They maintained a lack of gendered identity as a woman, questioning a western notion of gendered binary:

No, I don't identify as a woman because there are more than two genders and the construction of the gender binary is a colonial myth. In my mother tongue, there are no gendered pronouns and Western languages are trying to force womanhood upon me even though this is not what I identify as. (Schneider, 2016)

A feminist-centred freedom of oppression is therefore translated entirely as a function of individual choice. Yet this individual choice positively impacts a collective notion of feminist identities.

Freedom of (gendered) expressions explored within #aufschrei accentuates the movement's nuanced and highly individualised expectations of participants. While some individual women participated to laud their freedom of personal expression, it was important for others to demonstrate their commitment to more complex, systemic issues of injustice. Social and political conventions that frame inequality as a function of individual ambition instead of individual privilege and circumstance diminishes the ability of social movements to create lasting collective significance. Lisa Duggan frames this argument in her book *The Twilight of Equality?* She argues that:

as long as the progressive-left represents and reproduces itself as divided into economic vs. cultural, universal vs. identity-based, distribution vs. recognition-oriented, local or national vs. global branches, it will defeat itself. (Duggan, 2003: xx)

⁷ Yaghoobifarah chooses to use 'they' and 'their' as personal pronouns. For this reason, any use of pronouns addressing Yaghoobifarah, will defer to 'they' or 'their' instead of 'she' or 'her.'

#aufschrei's social saturation hinges upon these two complementary notions of economic/class politics and identity/culture politics.

Choice of sexuality or economic equality

A visible goal of #aufschrei was to highlight individual and collective choice of sexual and economic equality for women through the negative exposition of moments wherein they were not treated equally. The resultant discourse stood within the framework of the neoliberal precepts of individual choice to benefit the collective good. In an article entitled "Generation müsy," Wizorek parses the distinctions of what freedom is actually achieved through individual liberties:

Das neoliberale 'Du kannst alles erreichen, du musst es nur wollen' – Mantra suggeriert zugleich Freiheit, wo doch gar keine ist. Jeder Mensch soll möglichst einzeln agieren und dastehen. Man soll sich dabei maximal als Teil einer bestimmten Interessengruppe identifizieren, ohne jedoch gesamtgesellschaftliche Zusammenhänge herzustellen. (Wizorek, 2016: 134)

The notion of simply wanting something in relation to its achievement is countered by #aufschrei's narrative of the negative: the more an unwanted action is desired has no bearing on its fruition. Ergo the feminist goals of sexual and economic equality are linked to institutional political norms as well as powerful cultural and social norms.

Through women's participation in #aufschrei and engagement with social media activism, systemic and structural inequality in the workforce was given increased attention by the media. This attention in the public discourse was most prominently given to the questions over a legislated gender quota. Subsequent online articles regarding the quota were characterised mainly by photographic visual representations of a singular white woman wearing a skirt and black heels juxtaposed against several men in black slacks and dress shoes (Creutzburg, 2014; Wizorek, 2014b; Seitz, 2013). The periodicals were the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a centre-right newspaper, *Focus*, a conservative leaning weekly magazine, and *Cicero*, a liberal conservative political magazine. The visual depiction of gender-quotas reinforced a retrograde understanding of class, status, gender and race. A poll conducted by *Focus* indicated a majority of readers rejected a gender-enforced work quota, including 50% of woman-identifying respondents (Seitz,

2013). The framing of the discussion demarcated the larger reality that women's choice of economic equality was beholden to legislative and social and cultural precedence.

Wizorek champions this approach to the extent that she calls for a mandatory gendered-enforced work quota for increased positive employment outcomes in Germany. Wizorek concedes that "Niemand will die Quote," but her reason for stating so appears to be mired in the neoliberal policies of market intervention. (Wizorek, 2014c: 33). Regulation of the social structure is an imperfect solution and not desired by Wizorek chiefly due to its inability to effect social and cultural change. Wizorek writes:

Wenn Feminist_innen sich für die Quote aussprechen, erkennen sie diese einfach als notwendiges Mittel zum Zweck an, weil sich eingefahrene diskriminierende Strukturen, die weiterhin von versteckten Vorurteilen getragen werden, eben nicht mit ganz viel Daumen drücken und guten Wünschen von alleine ändern. (Wizorek, 2014c: 33)

The intervention or regulation of forces to create gender parity, does not address issues of cultural, political or social change that underlie the need for positive work-based discrimination. Wizorek maintained that individuals who argued against the quota were illustrating their personal misogyny: "denn wenn im Jahr 2014 immer noch Leute behaupten, dass wirtschaftliche Fortschritte durch eine Geschlechterquote behindert würden, enthüllen diese nicht nur ihre fehlende Expertise, sondern auch blanken Sexismus" (Wizorek, 2014b).

Sarah Jaffe discusses in her article "Trickle-Down Feminism," how the prevailing attitudes that current feminists still have regarding the opening up of economic and social opportunities for women who remain largely at the bottom. She postulates that today's feminists are no different from their predecessors in that, "the famous faces are largely white and well-educated; they are authors of books and columns and executive directors of single-focus organizations" (Jaffe, 2013). Yet there is little evidence to support that women in power will notionally effect the wherewithal and status of women without power. If this were the case, discussions of mandatory gender quota would be less relevant, as those women in positions of power would have instilled such institutional change from the inside. In effect, this

system becomes “the elite leading the slightly-less-elite” (Grant, 2013). At its most basic level, the quota is primarily concerned with promoting those in privileged positions to those in more structural, entrenched roles of a traditionally male power base.

Wizorek and #aufschrei also sought to lead a discussion that substantially disambiguated sexist cultural norms faced by women. In addition to highlighting the everyday sexist incidences of women who participated in #aufschrei, Wizorek related these cultural norms to the structural implications of sexism as it influences perceptions of gender-ingrained roles. She argued that sexist culture “immer noch suggeriert, dass Frauen insgeheim erobert werden wollen, dass sie passiv sein sollen und keine eigenen Bedürfnisse haben” (Schlenz, 2014). #aufschrei challenged these perceptions through framing sexual harassment and violence as negative constructs, not of sexuality, but of power dynamics. The prevalence of #aufschrei’s message argued for the individual boundaries of women’s sexual choices to be respected within a culture that does not always prioritise these rights.

Wizorek’s key analysis and the aims of #aufschrei, argue that personal and individual acts of sexism are evidenced of a larger structural reinforcement of sexism as they relate to women’s perception of self. The relationship between women’s individual choice to their practice of sexuality and the ensuing political implications are evidenced by an exchange between Wizorek and *Stern* interviewer Kester Schlenz. Schlenz told the following story to Wizorek during their exchange about her 2014 book and pervyance of sexism in Germany. Schlenz questions Wizorek’s depiction of sexist men who frequently employ terms like “Geile Titten” and “Willst ficken?” Wizorek countered with proof from #aufschrei’s participants, whose individual commentary informed her assessment. Schlenz then relays a neue Feminismus neoliberal argument that allegedly champions women’s right to their own sexuality:

Schlenz: Ich habe mit einer jungen Kollegin darüber gesprochen. Sie sagte, die wahre Gleichberechtigung sei erst erreicht, wenn auch Frauen ganz einfach mal fragen können: ‘Willste ficken?’

Wizorek: Ist nicht meine Diktion, aber ich kann das nachvollziehen. So etwas muss aber immer auf Augenhöhe geschehen. Das ist der Punkt. (Schlenz, 2014)

In this example, true equality is positioned as a woman's freedom to engage in a performance of her own sexual desires, as presumably men do. Wizorek agrees with the reasoning, but qualifies the stance based on rhetorically equitable socio-cultural structures. Wizorek and #aufschrei thereby examine the paucity of women's choice to pursue their own sexual equality against the perception that women are completely free to pursue their desires.

Reading for awkwardness

As #aufschrei is representative of a moment in time, when ideals and notions of propriety and acceptability are rapidly changing, the ability to delineate the stickiness of the text is not without its challenges. Smith-Prei and Stehle note that the political meaning in texts are temporal, "fleeting and often political only within a certain, messy discourse" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 149). Yet #aufschrei's role in the 2013's sexism debate is indicative of the messy social, culture and political discourse engulfing the German discussion of sexism. The following section reads for awkwardness through the politics of power, reception and relation, specifically highlighting the role of cultural and sexual precarity. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the feminist communities created through the claiming of individual space, new opportunities for connection and feminist identities.

Politics of power, reception and relation

Reading for awkwardness requires the analysis of the varying politics of power, reception and relation inherent in the sexism debate. I first argue the cultural and sexual precarity in the discussion of #aufschrei belies the public's misapprehension of what constitutes sexism against an individual, as well as a systemic issue. These politics of power and perception represent the awkward relationship between the public discourse and #aufschrei as a movement. In addition to this, an analysis of #aufschrei must not ignore the movement's relationship with commodification and its connections to subsequent feminist identities.

The awkwardness in #aufschrei is related to the positioning of precarities that are reinforced through the public discourse's reading of sexism and sexist institutions. The discussion of sexism as a term is fraught with misapprehension and obfuscation that seeks to cloud analysis. Jasna Lisha Strick argues in "Reaktionäre

Reaktionen – der Versuch, gegen Sexismus zu argumentieren“ that the sanitisation of the terms sexual harassment and assault lead to a renouncement of the interconnected quality of the terms. Strick contends, “Gleichzeitig ist es vielen Kritiker_innen unheimlich wichtig, zu betonen, dass zwischen Sexismus und sexueller Belästigung ein Unterschied besteht. Beide Begriffe müssen sauber getrennt bleiben, alles muss seine Ordnung haben” (Strick, 2013: 42). The desire to clearly express and delineate the terms ignores the liminal nature of harassment and assault as connected phenomenon rather than separate events.

This discussion lies in contrast to the socially constructed norms of sexism. Diehl, Reese and Bohner argue scientifically in their article “Zur ‘Sexismus-Debatte’: Ein Kommentar aus wissenschaftlicher Sicht” conducted “im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend“ found in relation to the “Lebenssituation, Sicherheit und Gesundheit von Frauen“ that 58.2% of women questioned admitted to facing instances of sexism in their work or personal lives. (Diehl et al., 2013: 1). The authors sought to answer the frequent claims or myths perpetrated about sexism from a scientific perspective. The myths interrogated include: harassment is an isolated incident unrelated to violence, sexism is perpetrated equally by men and women and men live in constant fear that their behaviours are misconstrued as sexist (Diehl et al., 2013: 1-4). Through an interrogation of these myths with resultant facts and figures to disprove their veracity, the authors position the perpetration of sexual harassment as a factor of both “hostility (a generalised hostile sexist attitude toward women) and sexuality (a preference for short-term mating strategies)” (Diehl et al., 2012: 529).

Furthermore, the cultural precarity of what constitutes sexism is further complicated by the misalignment of sexism within feminist identity. In their 2014 book *Tussiekratie*, Theresa Bäuerlein and Friederike Knüpling argue that the Tussi of the book’s name represents “eine innere Haltung, die heute viele haben” of men or women who highlight the discussion of women’s disadvantage at every opportunity, “wenn eigentlich andere Fragen wichtiger wären” (Rothenberg, 2014). They further argue that “Frauen nur bewusst machen, dass sie sich selbst beschränken, wenn sie sich als Repräsentantin des gesamten Geschlechts betrachten” (Rothenberg, 2014). In this regard, individual women do not

collectively represent women or victims of systemic sexism. Instead, sexism should be looked upon as a system that individual feminists work to combat, and not representative of the movement itself.

The discussion of everyday sexism in #aufschrei aimed to provide survivors of such actions a social and cultural platform. The messiness in this situation lies in providing the victims or survivors of these incidents with the agency to control their resulting experience in the movement. As a supporter and participant in the movement, Strick contends:

Wichtig ist, dass es bei #aufschrei nie darum ging, eine Gruppe Menschen pauschal als Täter darzustellen, sondern vielmehr darum, den Opfern Raum für ihre Erlebnisse zu geben. Frauen haben vielfach keinen Platz für ihre Geschichten, und wenn sie ihn sich nehmen, wird mit allen Mitteln versucht, sie zu behindern.

(Strick, 2013: 43)

The presentation of a socio-political platform to redress everyday sexism in Germany came with the understanding that this space was to be shared between those who were for and against the movement. This understanding engendered a culturally precarious situation between participants' agency in creating a space for their narratives and the constant need to prove this space is warranted.

A lack of nuanced awareness of sexism is also illustrated by the public discourse, which overshadowed and downplayed the inherent differences in individual's stories and experiences. Wizorek notes the mediasphere's attempt to distort the individual experience in her book:

Mehrfachdiskriminierung ist zu komplex, um in das mediale Bild des Geschlechterkampfes gepresst zu werden, und so drehen sich auch die dort erzählten Geschichten belästigter Frauen nahezu ausnahmslos um junge, normschöne, weiße, heterosexuelle Cis-Frauen. (Wizorek, 2014c: 201)

Ergo the nuanced discussion of sexism in the public discourse was replaced with a broad and facile engagement with the varying intersections of political, social, racial, sexual and gendered privilege. Creating further complexity to the issue of personal identities, Coston and Kimmel, in their article "Seeing privilege where it isn't: marginalised masculinities and the intersectionality of privilege" argue "social norms become personal identities" (Coston and Kimmel, 2012: 99). The notion that identity does not create social norms but that social norms colour or create identity,

enriches the stickiness of the awkward in #aufschrei's ability to de-stigmatise everyday sexism.

Peggy McIntosh further explores these concepts in her seminal paper "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies." She reasons:

The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo. (McIntosh, 1986)

#aufschrei, more than neue Feminismus, was aware of these privileges and their predominance in the social structures that dictate societal expectations and normative behaviour. The notion of privilege and identity are particularly sensitive topics for Germany, whose "burden" of historical events create a heightened sphere of discourse (Younge, 2011).

Furthermore, Wizorek's engagement with feminism as consumerism complicates the reception and perception of #aufschrei as a social movement. Wizorek has transcended from a simple blogger to a notable, contemporary feminist activist. She is regularly interviewed on television, printed in prestigious magazines and given a far-reaching platform in Germany media. This has also resulted in the publishing of her own book *Weil ein #aufschrei nicht reicht*. Yet there exists a disparity between the author of a social movement and the subsequent commodification of said movement through merchandising and personal success. In this regard, Wizorek complicates the relationship between activist, spokesperson and businesswoman. The tangling of this relationship is made more explicit by Wizorek's social pragmatism. She argues, "unsere Gesellschaft braucht aber keinen reinen feministischen Debattierclub, sondern in erster Linie eine Veränderung von Machtverhältnissen und die Auflösung diskriminierender Strukturen" (Wizorek, 2014a). The arguing for a diversity and multivariate approach to feminist meaning making highlights the stickiness between the promotion of the self in addition to the movement.

In an interview with Kat Sark, Wizorek discusses the writing of her book as a way to reach other kinds of people that would not ordinarily engage with

#aufschrei. Wizorek's reach is therefore extended beyond the digital sphere, creating new connections and associations. Wizorek argues this point in the following passage:

...because of my book I've been invited to a lot of places, and of course that's another level of reaching people. I have numerous ways now of reaching different audiences. I get a lot of emails from young women who buy the book and say 'I will give this to my dad, so he understands what all this feminism is about that I'm talking about.' Or a second-wave feminist mother who can give the book to her daughter to have an inter-generational conversation about feminism. (Wizorek quoted in Sark, 2016)

The consumption of feminism transcends from a reductive argument of neoliberal gain, to a discussion of increased connection with varying groups.

This promotion, however, does not suggest a cognitive dissonance between altruistic intent and personal gain. Lauren Berlant highlights aesthetics' role in people's management of "the too closeness of the world" and the human "desire to have an impact on [the world] that has some relation to its impact on us" (Berlant, 2011: 6). In this example, the "too closeness of the world" can refer to the digital sphere that encases #aufschrei's impact. Aesthetically and metaphorically, sexism is an entrenched and systemic component of German political, social and cultural life. Much like the effects of these systems, digital and technological lives have become intertwined with the flesh-and-blood version of people. In this regard, the monetisation of the #aufschrei movement engenders a closer, more dedicated engagement with its aims.

A commodification of goods that relates to social directives also encourages self-reflection on the awkward aesthetics of feminist identity. The question of feminine aesthetics has been argued since the second-wave feminist movement. Silvia Bovenschen and Beth Weckmueller argued "the very different way in which women experience things, their very different experiences themselves, enable us to anticipate different imaginations and means of expression" (Bovenschen and Weckmueller, 1977: 120). Berlant argues that individuals desire to have a corollary impact on the world that has impacted them. Through pairing consumerism with social and political activism, an individual simultaneously performs their activism

and feminist identities. Yaghoobifarah typified this dual expression in an interview with *ExBerliner* magazine. They asserted the role of consumption in relation to public expression of politics:

Feminism has become very en vogue; you can buy a feminist t-shirt at H&M or Acne Studios depending on your budget. It's nice to make feminism more popular but it has to stay a threat. It's not a fashion accessory. It's about making men feel uncomfortable. (Yaghoobifarah quoted in Schneider, 2016)

In this statement, Yaghoobifarah contextualised the presentation of feminist identity as something to be owned as well as a conceptual framework for one's beliefs. The dual role of feminist identity becomes both a commodity and a representation of social and political values.

Feminist communities

Reading for awkwardness can be further explored in the creation of feminist communities. These communities are identified as individual or owned spaces, discovery of new spaces for connection and relatability and the assertion of individual feminist identities within the overall movement. Most importantly, these communities constitute ever-evolving feminist identities, ones that are shaped primarily by an individual's experience within a larger collective movement. These digitally collated spaces also capture the "vivid and intersecting transnational debate on the issue of sexism within-and even beyond-the feminist movement" in Germany (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 37). The latter section of this chapter delineates the specific feminist communities set in motion by #aufschrei as well as Wizorek's continual relationship with the evolution of the movement from Twitter angst to national spokesperson.

The primary function of #aufschrei was the encouragement of individual and collectively owned women-centred spaces. Whilst these spaces were initially digital, they quickly translated across and through boundaries, establishing fluid and efficient representations of relevant feminist identities. In a short compendium of essays written after the advent of #aufschrei, Yasmina Banaszczuk, Nicole von Horst, Mithu M Sanyal and Jasna Strick explore the causes and their experiences of sexism in "*Ich bin kein Sexist, aber...*": *Sexism erlebt, erklärt und wie wir ihn beenden*. Von Horst argues for storytelling as a radical act, stating: "Es hat für

andere und uns den Effekt, dass wir realistischere Bilder von uns selbst bekommen, und sehen können, andere uns sehen können, wir uns Raum geben" (von Horst, 2013: 13). Von Horst writes of self-empathy and the collective empowerment that comes with hearing similar stories echoed from other's experiences.

These experiences further echo the liminal nature of digital spaces. Wizorek comments that digital spaces allow women to use "unsere Stimmen, kommentieren aktuelles Geschehen, diskutieren" (Wizorek, 2014a). Yet they also depend upon the weakening of social boundaries and ties to create new connective spheres of influence. Wizorek maintains that these spaces are not only full of militant digital activists, but "Freund_innen, Bekannte, Kolleg_innen und reine Netz-Bekanntschaften" (Wizorek, 2014a). The digital space becomes not a surrogate for physical connections, but another equally valid realm for feminist communities and relationship building.

The use of storytelling to break down and fuse together new realms of feminist identity is evident in the claiming of what might be read as absurd or clichéd experiences. In the essay "The stories we tell" Von Horst asserts women's right to tell the stories "die sich niemand vorstellen oder selbst ausdenken kann, die absurd klingen oder unrealistisch" (von Horst, 2013: 14). Von Horst's statement is a reclamation of the acts of harassment outlined through #aufschrei, of the instances of everyday encounters that may read over the top or unfounded to those who have not explicitly experienced them. Von Horst's own Tweet precipitated the launch of #aufschrei. The story illustrates a lack of regard of von Horst's humanity, right to her own body and the state of emotional duress she experienced after attempted suicide. The doctor's sexual violation of her illustrates in an almost farcical manner the ubiquitous and ingrained nature of sexism in Germany.

Von Horst writes of reclaiming power from these moments in the shared process of storytelling. This empowerment is framed through a sense of individual and collective ownership of these stories and moments. The repetition of these moments makes them "konkreter und greifbarer und sichtbarer...Weil es *unsere* Geschichten sind" (von Horst, 2013: 14). In the article "Online feminist protest against sexism: the German-language hashtag #aufschrei," Drüeke and Zobl argue that blogs and feminist actors building on #aufschrei's narratives, do so without

“personal descriptions of experiences” but through discussions of “political and social impacts of events (Drüeke and Zobl, 2015: 49). However, this analysis fails to consider the melding of traditional rigid interpersonal boundaries fostered by social media platforms and harnessed by #aufschrei. Von Horst and others took to their own blogs, wrote personal essays and maintained a social media presence largely based upon connection of their personal experiences in relation to the widespread political and social effects of systemic sexism.

These interpersonal social-media based connections flourished through the personal investment or stake of Wizorek and other women within the movement. On the night of #aufschrei’s inception, Wizorek looked on as her Twitter feed erupted with participation of women sharing their personal outcries. In a Tweet that suggests a feeling of community, and outpouring of emotion, Wizorek writes: “@marthadear: ich heule gerade, aber hört bloß nicht auf! #aufschrei” (@marthadear, 2013c). Another instance of this is von Horst’s self-engagement with #aufschrei. She explores the tension between personal investment and creation of avenues of connection and relatability:

Ich erinnerte mich an Situationen, die ich erlebt hatte, die nicht eindeutig waren, in denen ich mich nicht gewehrt hatten oder erst spät, die ich nicht sofort als übergriffig einordnen konnte und wo ich wusste, dass andere diese Einordnung nicht anerkennen würden. (von Horst, 2013: 9)

In this regard, feminist communities cement these bonds through the acknowledgement of shared experiences and the personal investment of sharing those stories. As Wizorek observed, “Anders als klassische Diskursräume sind diese Plattformen offen für alle – wie viel ‘Selbstbezüglichkeit’ sich darin ausprägt, hängt eben auch von denen ab, die bislang lieber draußen stehen” (Wizorek, 2014a).

The sharing of stories and creation of feminist-centred spaces positions a participant in #aufschrei in a liminal space between object and subject. Von Horst rationalises: “Indem man Diskriminierung ein Gesicht gibt, macht man sich selbst zum Subjekt; über das zu sprechen, was einer_einem passiert ist, ist das Gegenteil davon, sich zum Opfer zu machen” (von Horst, 2013: 14). This analysis casts doubt on the “Super-Feministin” implied by public perception of what each feminist should be (Wizorek, 2014a). The participation in discussion of sexism both

reiterates the commonplace occurrence of these events in a broader sense, within a specific and unique placement to an individual. Thus, the participant becomes both a subject, to be discussed and analysed, and an actor, to create and disseminate her own knowledge and experiences.

Wizorek's personal experience with the creation of feminist communities, drove her evolution from online activist to primary spokesperson of German feminist identity. In the article "Menstruationscomics, nein danke" journalist Hannah Lühmann specifically criticises Wizorek and the online feminist movement for promoting anti-intellectualism and memes ahead of rigorous dialogue. She argues: "Es ist Ausdruck der Verweigerung von intellektueller Anstrengung, Verweigerung dem anderen gegenüber, es ist ein strategisch fehlgeleiteter Ätschibätsch-Gestus, der sich von Anfang an im Recht sieht" (Lühmann, 2014: 2). Lühmann binds Wizorek's individually expressed feminist identity to the whole of the #aufschrei movement, conflating the individual and collective work of the other women who partook in shaping the evolution of the movement. Instead, Wizorek responded that net feminism "steht für eine heterogene Gruppe, die keine einheitliche Auffassung von Feminismus vertritt, aber doch einen gemeinsamen Diskussionsraum nutzt" (Wizorek, 2014a).

The creation of feminist communities in #aufschrei are illustrated through the creation of individual spaces, the discovery of new connections and relatability and the assertion of individual feminist identities within a loosely collective framework. In turn, these connections fostered "catharsis for the sharers and removal of isolation" alongside "a treasure trove of personal-story hooks for journalists and activists" (Zandt, 2013). The inherent awkwardness of discussing personal trauma within pop cultural social media platforms championed both the individual, embodied experience of a woman as well as general collective experiences due to gender.

Conclusions

This chapter scrutinised the creation of individual feminist identity in #aufschrei, the embodied and perceived experience of Anne Wizorek as its instigator and the awkwardness of the political interplay between both. The first section began with a contextualisation of #aufschrei, die Sexismus-Debatte, and the creation of a

collective feminist identity within this movement. The following section argued that #aufschrei's role in the challenging cruel optimism of attachment related to the desire to shift the structural inequalities that fostered sexism, yet the ultimate inability to effect these changes through a consciousness-raising social media movement. Following this,

I considered the individual components of feminist identity within #aufschrei as a function of liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom of expression and choice of sexual or economic equality. Finally, reading for awkwardness uncovered the role of cultural and sexual precarities that further complicated the reception and perception of #aufschrei as a movement and Wizorek's role as its architect.

Feminist communities were evaluated through the uncovering of owned spaces, new spaces for connection and the primacy of individual identities within a collectively-defined popfeminist movement.

The relationships of power explored throughout this chapter challenge the assumption of homogeneity of feminist identities and concepts within a singular social media movement. In fact, expressions of feminist identity are relational between an individual's sense of self and their position within #aufschrei as a discourse. This chapter also explored the relationship between the commodification of #aufschrei and the movement in relation to its social and cultural goals. The final substantive chapter of this thesis explores two popfeminist events #schauhin and #ausnahmslos, primarily instigated by Kübra Gümüşay. It contextualises the role of racialised women in the discussion of events within a popfeminist framework.

5) “Gegen sexualisierte Gewalt und Rassismus. Immer. Überall”:⁸ #schauhin, #ausnahmslos and Kübra Gümüşay

As I observe my presences and actions on different platforms, as I observe the actions of others, I discover a world in which we tell different stories of who we consider we are, slowly uncovering ourselves, standing in front of each other – naked and vulnerable. Almost as if we were waiting for a little child to wake us up and scream ‘But they aren’t wearing anything at all!’

– Kübra Gümüşay, “You. According to Social Media,” 2014

Kübra Gümüşay a prominent social media activist and journalist as well as a Muslim woman of colour, instigated both the #schauhin and #ausnahmslos social media movements. Through her interaction within these movements, her feminism became a tangible and visible source of self-identification. Gümüşay’s identification with feminism contrasts against the populist racialisation of Muslim women in Germany as carried out by Theo Sarrazin and Alice Schwarzer. Sarrazin and Schwarzer both critiqued Muslim women of colour as objects and victims of their religious beliefs. Gümüşay was a prominent figure in redefining her own experiences with feminism and the subsequent relevance of #schauhin and #ausnahmslos to a wider German feminist movement. This discourse is juxtaposed against a dominant cultural and social depiction of those who practice Islam as the other (Weber, 2016a: 108). By using social media platforms, blogging, and public appearances, Gümüşay narrated her lived and observed experiences with sexism and racism, thereby conceiving a new Islamic interpretation of popfeminist activism. These experiences culminated in a reclamation of the term feminism; most importantly, a feminism that fits according to the beliefs and structures of Islam and the philosophy of gendered equity.

This chapter contextualises the creation of feminist narratives through Gümüşay’s own writing and the contributions of other Muslim women of colour (WoC) within the #schauhin and #ausnahmslos movements. Following the

⁸ Gümüşay, K., Wizorek, A., Aslan, E., Lohaus, S., Bücken, T., Fredua-Mensah, K., Adiyaman, G., Küçüköğül, D., Hansen, H., Lunz, K., Horst, N. V., Schrupp, A., Sookee, A., Agena, G., Strick, J., Banaszczuk, Y., Steiner, L., Gottschalk, K., Lagrande, N., Yaghoobifarah, H., Isak, M. & Kisi, M. 2016. *Gegen sexualisierte Gewalt und Rassismus. Immer. Überall. #ausnahmslos* [Online]. Available: <http://ausnahmslos.org/> [Accessed 9 September 2016].

precedent of the first three sections, the individual woman within a movement is given primacy through her own perception and creation of feminism. This chapter differs in the approach to defining a separate kind of feminist meaning, experienced by Muslim WoC in Germany. The departure from focusing solely on a more homogenous group of white, middle class, heterosexual women will provide a more holistic snapshot of the climate of contemporary feminism in Germany. Overall, this chapter will outline how Gümüşay, in conversation with other Muslim German WoC, has constructed her own feminist narratives within #schauhin and #ausnahmslos. These movements are considered popfeminist because they uncover aspects of cruel optimism whilst still engaging in cruel optimistic forms of attachment. Reading these movements through a popfeminist lens thereby allows for an engagement with the inconsistencies and approaches to feminist identity-making that are complex and without easy interpretations.

In this first section, I provide a contextual background to #schauhin and #ausnahmslos as well as analysis regarding the specific creation of Muslim WoC's identity through social media movements and the racialization of WoC. The next section will discuss the background and context behind each social media movement and analyse how Gümüşay exhibited her own feminism through storytelling aspects of personal blog posts and public appearances. The second section frames how Muslim WoC challenge the imagination of a contemporary popfeminist movement characterised by the subversive reordering of pop cultural events to signify elements of feminist goals or behaviours. Along with this, Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC have had to resignify (or change the meaning of) the attributed racialisation of their culture, race, religion and gender by societal events and mainstream reaction towards them. These goals and aims lie in contrast to the process of individual and collective identity that their white feminist counterparts have undergone.

The final section explores awkwardness as politics of power, reception and relation. Awkwardness as a term will be disambiguated and outlined according to events that precipitated #ausnahmslos and the way #schauhin was utilised by Gümüşay as a Muslim woman of colour to narrate her own experience with racism. The narrative will further focus on cultural and sexual precarity and colonial

imagery perpetuated by the media in relation to the sexualised violence of the Cologne attacks. This analysis also contextualises how Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC created feminist communities through their fostering of feminist identities. My concluding thoughts will review how Gümüşay has adopted aspects of popfeminist dialogue through the creation of her own feminist identity.

Context and prior scholarship

Discussions on #schauhin and #ausnahmslos have been less forthcoming than those about #aufschrei. A simple explanation for this is that #aufschrei produced a larger impression in the traditional and digital media, promoting further interest and analysis. There has been interest, however, in Muslim women bloggers and specifically in Kübra Gümüşay. Her impact as a feminist activist has been specifically theorised in several texts, mostly in relation to the political significance of her personal blog (Weber, 2016a; Eckert and Chadha, 2013) and the nature of Islamic German feminism (Winkler, 2013). I aim to address the gaps in the current research in this chapter through a thorough explanation of social media activism instigated by Gümüşay and framed through popfeminism.

Stine Eckert and Kalyani Chadha analyse the role of Muslim bloggers in their article “Muslim bloggers in Germany: an emerging counterpublic.” Specifically, they note that “some German Muslims have turned to blogs as an alternative space where they not only undertake processes of self-definition but also challenge the dominant public discourse through a variety of discursive practices” (Eckert and Chadha, 2013: 928). Gümüşay is mentioned within the article, though anonymously. There is enough identifying information to assume she was interviewed for the article. Her work in bringing a critical frame of analysis to political, social and cultural issues through her blog is briefly explored (Eckert and Chadha, 2013: 937). Arguing for a further subjective rather than objective approach to German Muslim women, I place Gümüşay and her words at the centre of this chapter’s research.

Claudia Winkler profiled Gümüşay in her article “Kübra Gümüşay’s blog ein fremdwoerterbuch: re-presenting the ‘silent Muslima’ in the public sphere.” Winkler argues *ein fremdwörterbuch* directly represents Muslim women in Germany. I remain critical of this position, and further illustrate how Gümüşay

distinguishes between individual differences in Islamic identity in relation to feminism and collective associations of Islam. Winkler further theorises that Gümüşay refutes the “image of being a silent victim by speaking out against gender and racialized violence” (Winkler, 2013: 8). Winkler suggests Gümüşay’s identity resists “oversimplification” (Winkler, 2013: 12) and further that she uses her platform to:

highlight the many voices of the Muslim community, which paradoxically undermines her own role as a spokesperson, while simultaneously highlighting the need for a greater and more diverse presence of ethnic and religious minorities in the public sphere. (Winkler, 2013: 17)

Therefore, Gümüşay creates her own feminist narratives but does not explicitly maintain these individual narratives represent other Islamic feminist women of colour within Germany.

The most recent scholarship of Gümüşay and her work is conducted by Beverly M Weber in the article “Kübra Gümüşay, Muslim digital feminism and the politics of visibility in Germany.” The article places *ein fremdwörterbuch* in a visual context through examination of the “50 Thoughts” sub project. This analysis contextualises Gümüşay’s role in creating feminist alliances and connections, ideas that I further explore in chapter five. Yet Gümüşay’s relationship with Islamic feminism is in danger of being read as essentialist without further contextualisation of #schauhin and #ausnahmslos’ role in popfeminist activism.

Notably, this is not the first instance in which German WoC have defined their own engagement with and emphasis on feminist identities. Audre Lourde spent time in Berlin in the 1980s to early 1990s, influencing the creation of Afro-German feminist priorities (Schultz, 2013). In a popfeminist space, Lady Bitch Ray or Reyhan Şahin, a German born Turkish-identifying rapper, have problematised the reception of WoC feminist identities (Smith-Prei, 2011). Therefore, a discussion on race and ethnic background in German feminism, whilst marginalised, is not new territory.

The rest of this section explains the background to #schauhin and #ausnahmslos and then analyses how Muslim WoC created their feminist identities through social media movements and the specific racialisation of Muslim WoC in

contemporary Germany. While not all Muslim WoC's journeys towards feminist identification have been recorded, Gümüşay's prolific accounts on her personal blog and relationship to both #schauhin and #ausnahmslos provide an abundance of primary source material for analysis. After an analytical account of #schauhin and #ausnahmslos' formation, I explore how Gümüşay's feminist identity is rooted within a framework of Islam and then how Muslim WoC are racialised, or how they are perceived according to their religious beliefs, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

#schauhin and #ausnahmslos

The social, political and cultural climate of Germany from early 2000 to 2016 was in part characterised by questioning of the role of Islam in contemporary German life. Political pundits and critics of feminism were embroiled in discussing the impact of demographic changes (fears of declining birth rates blamed on feminist interventions in women's choice to work outside the home) (Baer and Hill, 2015: 3). Thilo Sarrazin's 2010 book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* took a controversial stance, arguing the failure of Merkel's multicultural state had produced a German identity in conflict. He argued that immigrants were problematic and destroying the ethnic purity of Germany (Sarrazin, 2010: 9). Also partaking in the conversation, Alice Schwarzer began arguing in the early 2000s about Islamism and its misogynistic practices (Schwarzer, 2002; Schwarzer, 2014; Schwarzer, 2015). She regularly derided women's wearing of head scarfs, questioned their bodily sovereignty and took issue with Muslim women's expression of feminism.

Along this path, the advent of the neue Feminismus and Alphamädchen, prioritised a feminist philosophy for white, middle class and heterosexual women. *Neue Deutsche Mädchen* stated: "Dieses Buch soll vor allem ein Anfang sein. Wir glauben, dass Feminismus für alle Frauen – egal wo sie herkommen und unter welchen Bedingungen sie leben...[ist]" (Hensel and Raether, 2009: 10) but the only mention of WoC is towards the end of the book. At the time of #schauhin in 2013, mainstream German conversation was heavily influenced by those who disavowed Islam as a religion and associated feminism with white, middle class women.

#schauhin was launched on 2 September 2013 after the conference "Rassismus und Sexismus ab_bloggen" hosted at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in

Berlin. This conference sought to thematically analyse the blogging world's engagement with everyday instances of sexism and racism in Germany. As a speaker on the panel with fellow activists Jamie Schearer and Sabine Mohamed, Gümüşay suggested a hashtag be created in order to "die Erfahrungen von Alltagsrassismus sammeln und aufzeigen, dass Rassismus in Deutschland nicht ausschließlich rechtsradikale Formen annimmt" (Schearer et al., 2013). The #schauhin hashtag was subsequently launched on Facebook and Twitter, and a Tumblr page was set up in the following weeks. Whilst Gümüşay's comments may have been the impetus for the movement, other people were involved in its framing.⁹ The website identifies its participants as "ein Zusammenschluss von PoC, Schwarzen Menschen, Muslim_innen, Jüd_innen und [sie] kommen aus den Bereichen Journalismus, Sozialwissenschaften, Kunst und gesellschaftlichem Aktivismus," committed to working in the service of anti-racism and multiple forms of discrimination that occur on and offline (Gümüşay et al., 2013).

The momentum of #schauhin began to garner attention from the major established press and for a time after its inception, looked as if it might become as socially significant as #aufschrei. Due to the press coverage and the relationship between #aufschrei and *der Herrenwitz* article, #aufschrei propelled the discussion of sexism into the public and private sphere. It was hoped that #schauhin would inspire a similar mass conversation but this did not end up happening (Aksak, 2013). Non-traditional media, such as blogs and social media users, were more receptive to participating in #schauhin's intended conversations about racism, religion and identity. The movement's grassroots and self-defined nature fostered a space for Muslim WoC to narrate their own embodied experiences, in a public sphere (social media platforms) but in a more private way (using the hashtag, retweeting and communication with others).

In contrast to the frustration that characterised #aufschrei and #schauhin's inception, #ausnahmslos was a direct response to the 2015 Silvesternacht sexual

⁹ Team members listed on the site include Jamie Schearer, Hengameh Yaghoobifarah, Keshia Fredua-Mensah, Gizem Adiyaman, Asmaa Amr, Emine Aslan, Gabriela Kielhorn, Isabel Prado Jacob, Gizem Gerdan, Khulud Alsaadi, Kamil Ertürk, Tasnim Baghdadi and Sabine Mohamed.

assaults of women in Cologne. During these seemingly uncoordinated yet duplicated events, media reported “men of migrant background, some very drunk, gather[ed] outside [the] station and on steps of Cologne Cathedral and let off fireworks in[to the] crowd” (Hill, 2016) and subsequently committed acts of sexual assault and violence against women in attendance. The men who allegedly perpetrated the attacks were described as North African or Arab in appearance and subsequent investigations have not indicated otherwise. Similar attacks occurred on the same evening in Hamburg and Stuttgart (BBC, 2016d).

In the days following the attacks, 883 people filed complaints at the Cologne Police Station, including 497 complaints of sexual assault (BBC, 2016c). The BBC recorded a 17-year-old girl’s recollection of the assault:

We heard a woman screaming and crying somewhere in the midst of this crowd, appearing to be escaping from a foreign man, who was shouting back and pointing his finger at her and chasing her with his accomplices. (BBC, 2016b)

Media coverage focused predominately on the race, country of origin and status of the men who allegedly perpetrated the crimes. Emine Aslan, co-instigator of #schauhin, wrote in *Missy Magazine*, how media coverage ethnicised the perpetrators: “In all diesen Fällen wird das Verhalten von Individuen ethnisiert. Sowohl körperliche Selbstbestimmung, als auch sexistisches Verhalten wird zum ‘herkunftsbedingten’ Problem erklärt” (Aslan, 2016). The New Year’s Eve attacks combined a level of populist fear (anti-migrant, racist, anti-Islamic) against the perceived consequences of liberal democratic German tolerance.

Media coverage consequently perpetrated the conceit of white women’s harassment by Islamic men of colour as culturally, religiously and politically ingrained tableaux, explicitly connecting Islam with violence (Thöne, 2016). Leila Ahmed, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, argued the explicit possibility that the violence committed against women was strategic and as if to imply: “Wir achten eure Werte nicht.” Women became “Verhandlungsobjekte” (Thöne, 2016) for political and social opposition evidenced by the men who committed the assaults. The racialisation of these men contributed to the paucity of rigorous analysis of the attacks and the complex re-evaluation of what Europe “is or should be” (Weber, 2016b: 68). Weber has recently begun to undertake the explicit reimaging of what

constitutes European identity making. She concludes:

The possibilities for the creation of European projects to fight sexual violence will rely on alliances that call on all residents to imagine and participate in the work of making a Europe toward which its residents might orient themselves—one which might in turn work against all sexualized violence while refusing to relegate Muslims to a status of not-quite-human. (Weber, 2016b: 83)

The creation of #ausnahmslos indicates a response grounded in inclusivity and the strengthening of alliances to increase participatory response against racism and sexualised violence and further reimagine a re-orientation against these injustices.

#ausnahmslos' formation was a rejection of the one-dimensional societal response to these assaults. After launching a website and coining the hashtag on Twitter, #ausnahmslos claimed it had received 11,000 signatories to their open letter.¹⁰ In order to combat the populist association of refugees and migrants with sexual assault, the collective authors emphasised the destabilising effect this association had on feminism as an egalitarian movement. They wrote: "Es ist für alle schädlich, wenn feministische Anliegen von Populist_innen instrumentalisiert werden, um gegen einzelne Bevölkerungsgruppen zu hetzen, wie das aktuell in der Debatte um die Silvesternacht getan wird" (Gümüşay et al., 2016). They further highlighted the need for society to support a zero-tolerance policy of violence, regardless of ethnic, racial, gender or sexual background.

While #schauhin was largely designed by WoC for the purposes of sustaining a platform for people to narrate their individual experiences with racism, #ausnahmslos remained a joint narrative between white and non-white people condemning sexualised violence and racism. The movements are linked through their persistent tackling of issues surrounding racism (alongside sexism) and the experience of racialised women narrating their own stories and histories (alongside white feminists'). As has been evidenced by prior chapters, white women had dominated the theoretical deconstruction of popfeminism and the public

¹⁰ The authors of this manifesto included: Kübra Gümüşay, Anne Wizorek, Emine Aslan, Stefanie Lohaus, Teresa Bucker, Keshia Fredua-Mensah, Gizem Adıyaman, Dudu Küçükgöl, Helga Hansen, Kristina Lunz, Nicole von Horst, Antje Schrupp, Sookee, Gesine Akena, Jasna Strick, Yasmina Banaszczuk, Lavinia Steiner, Katrin Gottschalk, Ninia LaGrande, Hengameh Yaghoobifarah, Makda Isak, Melahat Kisi.

association of art and social justice associated with it. The reinvigorated discussion around the intersections of race and sexism therefore provided an opportunity for Muslim WoC to define their own relationship with feminist thought within these movements. The result is that racialised women narrate their own approach to feminist meaning making within a popfeminist framework, defined by different lived experiences than their white feminist counterparts.

Creation of feminist identity

In prior chapters I have explored contemporary German feminism as a function of its reliance on precepts of neoliberalism. These precepts include the creation of feminist identity through consumption of popular culture, and the focus on “liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom (of expression), choice of sexuality, or economy equality” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 135). The above assumptions relate primarily, although not wholly, to experiences of white, middle-class heterosexual feminists. *Neue Deutsche Mädchen* by Jana Hensel and Elisbaeth Raether and *Das F Wort* by Mirja Stöcker epitomised this predominantly inwardly-focused and care-based feminism. Baer references this as analogous to Hensel’s critique of Schwarzer’s obsession with Islamism, not based on its “problematic biases” but due to its apparent lack of connection with her identity as a “thirty-year old woman in Germany” (Baer, 2012: 356). The differences between the creation of a white-centred feminist movement and Muslim WoC’s creation of their own feminist identities necessitates an exploration of how these identities are constructed.

The construction of feminist identity for Muslim WoC is rooted within a framework of Islam. That is to say, the identity of being Muslim is inherent to the understanding and identification with feminism. Weber analyses Gümüşay’s relationship with Islamic feminism, noting “she is not merely ‘feminist and Muslim’ (i.e., Muslim feminist), but that her own feminist positioning is rooted in Islam” (Weber, 2016a: 112). Winkler, in her study on Gümüşay’s blog *ein fremdwörterbuch*, reaffirms how Gümüşay “embraces her ethnic and religious identity and uses her ‘insider’ status to create a new, empowered Muslim subjectivity rather than to reinforce Islam’s inferior status in the German discourse” (Winkler, 2013: 17). Gümüşay’s use of personal stories fostered an individual

engagement with feminism through Islam that was reinterpreted through the collective storytelling of social media movements.

In both #schauhin and #ausnahmslos, Gümüşay and other racialised women use the object of their anecdotal experiences to participate in collective storytelling. These actions encourage others to post their own experiences and then become a patchwork of feminist identity. The following #schauhin tweet is an experience of racism the user has faced: “@UeSeymaKarahan – Er: Ihr Kopftuch und das Handy in der Hand passen einfach nicht zusammen! Ihr Kopftuch ist mit unserer Kultur nicht vereinbar. #schauhin” (@UeSeymaKarahan, 2013). This user identified how a man had noted her wearing a hijab and using a cell phone as culturally incompatible. In this example, the woman’s religious faith was presented as being at odds with the use of modern technology. Conversely, she was being told that progress and modernity were asymptomatic with an adherence to Islam. This example illustrates a single user participating in the creation of the agreed upon group identity (one who experienced racism).

Both movements utilise the grass-roots and self-identifying nature of social media to proliferate and create a collective feminist identity. Racialised women use these experiences to form a group identity – those who have been victims of racism, yet with the aim of subverting this experience by speaking out about it. Through the raising of a collective voice and the movement itself, participants gain a sense of belonging and also aid their identity of discursive political performance (Marichal, 2013). In turn, this identity shapes the collective experience of partaking in #schauhin and #ausnahmslos as personal and politically relevant.

The presentation of identity through instances of racial, religious and cultural intolerance, constructs complex and discursive individual and collective identities. Gümüşay also participates in a resignification of the boundaries of a political, cultural and social identity. These constructs are made particularly prominent due to the hypervisibility and invisibility faced by Muslim WoC (Weber, 2016a: 104). Muslim women’s bodies are frequently discussed in the media regarding their right to wear said clothing, their rights to participate equally in society, cultural difference, etc. (Weber, 2004: 39). This creates a hypervisibility of Muslim women in Germany, meaning that women who wear Kopftücher are presented as

representative of Islam and resulting associations with oppression and violence against women. The very act of presenting physically as Muslim through clothing signifies a political, social and cultural other when juxtaposed against white, ethnic Germans.

In relation to their hypervisibility, Muslim WoC are also made invisible through political, cultural and social references. Women's voices in general have been marginalised throughout history. When women were considered in academic and cultural circles, white women were given more consideration (Weber, 2016c: 191). The discussion of how "race functions and circulates" through academic discourse is still in its infancy, especially in regard to how western feminism still disavows the compatibility of religious expression within its ranks. WoC are therefore not only racialised across public and private spheres, but are also not afforded agency to speak or hold platforms in these spaces. There is a prevalent perception from German public figures that Muslim men are the silencers of Muslim women in this regard. An example of this comes from Kristina Schröder, former family minister of the CDU political party. Schröder tweeted in the days after the attacks: "Sie wurden lang tabuisiert, aber wir müssen uns mit gewaltlegitimierenden Männlichkeitsnormen in muslimischer Kultur auseinandersetzen #Koeln" (@schroeder_k, 2016). This perception is reinforced by media imagery from the Middle East and popular discourse that equates cultural practices with religious practices alongside the neo-colonial depictions of black hands on white bodies after the Cologne attacks (Zeitung, 2016; Focus Online, 2016).

The association of Muslim men attacking the virtue of white women further complicates Muslim WoC's negotiation of hyper and invisibility. Gümüşay, in her Taz.de column self-stylised as a "Hijabi columnist," initially feeling the pressure "schreib von der muslimischen Community, erzähl aus deren Leben, deren Gedanken" (Gümüşay, 2013a). Gümüşay then contextualised her role as columnist, positioning herself as "eine der vielen Stimmen [, die] erzählen" of Muslim WoC (Gümüşay, 2013a). The position also garnered her the opportunity to make more visible a historical, cultural and politically invisible identity in Germany, against the assumed and stereotypical association of Muslim WoC. Gümüşay's platform

allowed her to communicate and connect with a readership through her own lived experiences, or the act of storytelling.

The negotiation of the hypervisibility and invisibility of Muslim women through social media movements contributes to the act of Muslim WoC's signification of their feminist identity. Both social media movements seek immediate and uncompromising recognition. #schauhin is phrased as a command and imperative. #ausnahmslos admonishes those who seek excuses for racist and sexist acts. Both phrases support the mechanisms of making these prejudices visible in everyday, normalised circumstances. Kübra Gümüşay related a story in her personal blog *ein fremdwörterbuch* about how her friend chose to stop wearing a Kopftuch due to its "Einschränkung" on her life (Gümüşay, 2012). She was unable to secure employment and felt that she needed to voluntarily stop wearing the veil. Gümüşay commented through the removal of this hypervisible reminder of her faith, she became less associated with Islam in the outside perspective of others: "Und doch, obwohl sie die Gleiche war, ebenso spirituell und muslimisch wie zuvor, war sie es nicht mehr in den Augen anderer" (Gümüşay, 2012). The division between Islamic faith and the western feminist ideal of individual choice is an uneasy negotiation highlighted by this example.

Racialisation of Muslim women of colour

Muslim WoC are racialised according to their religious beliefs, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As has been discussed in the prior section, the hypervisibility and invisibility of Muslim WoC in Germany has contributed to their racialisation by the media, right-wing politicians and the public's ensuing perceptions. Their prescribed identity is that of an oppressed existence, where devotion to Islam has led to subsequent passive participation in misogynistic cultures. Muslim women are then racialised as having no agency yet being complicit in their own oppression through their practice of Islam.

The coexistence of feminist identity and Islamic is a question circulating amongst both Muslim WoC and western feminist circles (Hashim, 1999: 12). The specific political goals of the contemporary German feminist movement have also favoured white, middle class women and not Muslim WoC. Issues such as "die Frauenquote, Pinkifizierung oder die berühmte gläserne Decke" exclude the

discussion of non-white and Muslim women whose struggles for recognition are perceived as pressing (Pfannkuch, 2016). Hengameh Yaghoobifarah, self-stylised “white-passing, genderqueer Hard Femme of Colour, akademisiert, neurodivers, dick” (Yaghoobifarah, 2011) argues there is a “Tendenz zur Ausgrenzung” in the white feminist scene, where “transfeindliche, rassistische und anti-muslimische Haltungen” proliferate (Pfannkuch, 2016).

The racialisation of Muslim WoC therefore questions their participation in the broader feminist and popfeminist scenes whose goals and aims are not dissimilar. This is not to say that the category of contemporary popfeminist is homogenous, because it isn't. There is a powerful distinction, however, in the privilege of differences between the predominant actors in popfeminist spheres and the Muslim WoC outside of these spheres. Race and religious practice are more visible, or hypervisible, representations in society. Even white, lower class, queer women are not subject to the immediate visibility that Muslim WoC are. This visibility represents, to a certain extent, the immediate incompatibility of white popfeminist aims and the goals of Muslim feminists. To recap, the frequent goals of white popfeminists fall into the categories of “liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom (of expression) and choice of sexuality, or economic equality” (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2015: 135).

Because Muslim WoC are racialised as a group and told they are fighting oppression from their religion, the goals of Islamic feminism differ to a certain extent from that of non-women of colour popfeminists. In other words, the stakes for self-representation are more pronounced and immediate for Muslim WoC in a contemporary news cycle that prioritises images of Muslim WoC as subservient, meek and victimised. Gümüşay's participation in her own personal blog as well in social media has defined the relevance of broader categories upon which Muslim WoC's feminist identities are created. These categories are like those indicated by white popfeminist movements. They are not just focused on countering misogynistic practices, but countering racialised preconceptions within the broader contemporary German feminist movement. The categories include freedom of expression (religious, cultural), liberation from racial and gender-based oppression (in Germany and beyond) and individual, collective equality and identity.

The incompatibility of feminist identity and Islamic religious practice has been greatly exaggerated, both within feminist circles and the public, media-driven discourse. Gümüşay has countered this perception with the creation of her own narrative, evidenced through her personal blogs and media appearances.

Gümüşay's conception of feminist identity was not instantaneous and belied an initial hesitation in joining feminism as a Muslim woman (Maslaha, 2014). This reticence dissipated as she became more involved with the inclusive collective of feminists on the Internet. Her conception of feminist identity has not been without struggle. She wrote in her "50 Thoughts" series, "we like our online selves more than our real selves, invest our time, energy and resources into our digital self – a self in constant contrast to our real selves – a constant source of our deepest unhappiness" (Gümüşay, 2014b).

Gümüşay's thoughts on the question of inclusivity of the net feminist scene are varied and encompass the skewed perception of western feminism as well as the intersectional nature of some net-feminist circles. This corresponds to the reality that "Minderheiten nicht mehr darauf warten [müssen], dass ihnen jemand aus der dominanten Netzöffentlichkeit ein Mikrofon hält, um zu sprechen – sie können sprechen, indem sie es einfach tun" (Gümüşay, 2015). The impetus to create the activism she wished to see is recorded in "50 Thoughts" in a note called "Sisterhood". Gümüşay reasons, "zuerst musst du wissen, was du brauchst, damit du es suchen kannst. Und wenn du es nicht findest, was sehr wahrscheinlich ist, musst du es selbst schaffen" (Gümüşay, 2014d).

This also calls into question what Gümüşay terms her identity and what she is "legitimised to speak and write about and what not" (Gümüşay, 2014a). Through "50 Thoughts," she felt able to disregard her "self-constructed boxes." The "Legitimacy" note explains:

We define ourselves through the space, the legitimacy we are given by other. But when we let others, grant them the authority and power to decide what is legitimate for us to speak out about, we are eventually defined by others. (Gümüşay, 2014a)

Gümüşay's creation of her own feminist identity as a Muslim woman of colour champions the finding of her singular voice, the gaining of legitimacy in her own perspective and the claiming of her own space. The claiming of individual space

and identity further explores the ways in which Muslim women “lay claim to identities” in regards to their gender and national identity (Weber, 2004: 34).

Cruel optimisms of attachment

This section frames how Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC have disrupted the cruel optimisms of the neoliberal success/failure binary. Through the subversive resignification of the attributed racialised perceptions of their culture, race, religion and gender, Muslim WoC have defined their own feminist identities. The resignification is accomplished through the perseverance of three distinct goals as articulated by Muslim WoC that are related to but distinct from the goals of contemporary popfeminists. The first goal is the freedom of religious and cultural expression. The second goal is liberation from racial and gender-based oppression. The third goal is the freedom of individual representation. These ideas will be analysed within textual readings of #schauhin and #ausnahmslos and Kübra Gümüşay’s own blog posts and appearances.

The attachment to and focus on feminist goals and productivity are inherently linked to WoC’s formation of identity in online spaces. These goals, however, differ slightly to those mentioned in the previous paragraph. I have defined the following goals from observations made throughout the research of WoC’s narration of their own feminist identity formation. Instead of liberation from gender-based oppression, the anti-racist campaigns seek liberation from racial and gender-based oppression. The function of freedom (of expression) becomes freedom from representation. In other words, #ausnahmslos and Gümüşay’s engagement with feminist identities focuses on the right of the individual to their opinion, not for that opinion to be construed and forced onto other Muslim WoC. Finally, the choice of sexual or economic equality transforms into the choice of individuality, freedom from conflation of religious and cultural practice.

Contemporary feminist thought tends to be characterised by its attempt to clarify original intent and subsequent measures of success or failure. For instance, young women dis-identify with feminist thought because it appears retrograde or they feel as if they have no need to engage with it anymore in a post-feminist world (Scharff, 2009: 319). In this example, and as Scharff’s work interviewing young women in the UK and Germany illustrates, there is an assumption that feminism

has succeeded in its mission of gender equality. Other measures of gender-success include political progress (quotas, access to abortion, rape laws) and social progress (gendered respect, lack of systemic misogyny). In the disruptive socio-political movement, popfeminists have subverted the traditional success/failure binary through the co-optation of identity through capitalism. This specific subversion, however, is not reproduced by racialised women through the narrative-building of self-identification. For example, #ausnahmslos' mission statement is for the eradication of racism and sexism everywhere for everyone at all times (Gümüşay et al., 2016). This statement includes various political and social goals articulated by the collective, which include the altering of laws, increase in education, promotion of balanced and nuanced media portrayals, etc.

Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC's experiences challenge the failure/success binary of traditional feminist movements, in the same way their popfeminist counterparts do. This binary is represented by a belief in all-or-nothing or that either a feminist goal as failed or succeeded, without conceding spectrum. This is evidenced through the incremental awareness raising approach in #schauhin and the radical political, social and cultural approaches favoured by #ausnahmslos. Both approaches allow for Muslim WoC to position their own formation of feminist identity against the goals and aims of the movement. Creating a self-narrated feminist identity is therefore independent of participating in the goals of each movement, therefore questioning the relevancy of a strict success/failure binary. In this model, Gümüşay herself notes how she continually places herself on a spectrum of feminist identity (Maslaha, 2014).

Muslim WoC's journey towards meaningful engagement with feminism rests on a disambiguation of cruelly optimistic attachments to objects. The objects include attachments to freedom of religious and cultural expression, liberation from racial and gender-based oppression and individual equality. These goals are the basis for how Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC construct their feminist identities through #schauhin and #ausnahmslos. That these tenets are self-identified and narrated through the storytelling of social media platforms and personal blogs is important to consider against the racialisation Muslim WoC face in Germany.

#schauhin and #ausnahmslos exhibit cruelly optimistic attachments to

objects. These include the object freedom from racist and misogynistic oppressions. While this itself is an attachment, these activisms undermine the cruel optimism of white feminist objects of liberation as a clear path. Cruelly, the more Muslim WoC participate within these awareness-raising initiatives against sexism and racism, the further away they are from attaining this goal. Gümüşay speaks about this in her TED Talk "Organisierte Liebe." She creates a distinction between the promotion of egalitarian, socially-minded agendas and the people with whom she has protracted discussions about the veracity and worthiness of these platforms. Instead of pushing forward with her work, she becomes "distracted" by those who question the facts, figures and researched data behind her assertions of the systemic racism and sexism in German culture. The "hate" derails the intended focus and attachment to the object, the destruction of racist and sexist political, social and cultural elements. Gümüşay's naming and shaming of this process is an attempt to distance herself from the cruelly optimistic attachment that results from the circular association with the trolls that plague social movements. By refusing to engage with the hate online, she has attempted to break the iterative and focus on the more important work of feminist identity creation.

Right-wing and anti-feminist individuals sought to subvert #schauhin and #ausnahmslos' direct goals (dissemination of anti-racist and anti-sexist rhetoric) and indirect effects (feminist identity creation) through the co-optation of the hashtag's messaging. Until 2016 Twitter had very little security protocol barring unwanted users from participating in world-wide conversations (Spangler, 2016). Regardless of the level of inappropriate discourse directed at individuals directly or through hashtag, any person could Tweet in solidarity or otherwise with both movements. The resulting effect was an attachment to the object of anti-racist and sexist discourse on these platforms, in an environment where the conversation was muddied by unhelpful and damaging commentary. Social media platforms provided both the tools to foster feminist identity and the tools to distinguish or confuse its growth.

Liberation from racial and gender-based oppression

The goal of liberation from racial/gender-based oppression differs only slightly from the new wave feminist goal of liberation from gender-based oppression. The crucial

addition of race in this sense supports the idea that while white and non-white feminist identities are linked, their goals and sense of productivity differ. The creation of #schauhin to highlight racism in Germany exemplifies the importance of anti-racist messaging to racialised women in the formation of their own identities. The creation of #ausnahmslos highlights the importance of discussing racism alongside sexism. These examples indicate that freedom from racial and gender-based oppression more fully characterise the goals of racialised women.

Muslim WoC often need to counter the perception that they are oppressed, within and outside the feminist community. Alice Schwarzer's well-documented mistrust and misunderstanding of Islam and its separation from culture has created a division in some feminist circles. Gümüşay maintained in an interview:

Als muslimische Frau bin ich es gewohnt, bemitleidet zu werden, dass man meinen Intellekt hinterfragt, dass Menschen überrascht sind, dass ich spreche... man spricht mir vieles ab,...ich bin entweder Opfer oder Handlanger der unterdrückenden Männer, das ist ein himmelschreiender Skandal. (Editorial, 2016)

Gümüşay's identity as a Muslim woman and her identity as a feminist activist are called into question by people who associate her wearing of a hijab with regression, a lack of intellect and with pity (Editorial, 2017). The hypervisible association of a hijab with Islamic misogynistic oppression strengthens the desire of Muslim WoC to seek liberation from racial and gender-based oppression. Not only is Gümüşay being questioned on an individual basis (asserting that she lacks the intelligence to understand to flee from an oppressive system) but on a cultural and religious basis (her religion is oppressive towards women and thus incompatible with equality-seeking feminism).

The goal of liberation from racial and gender-based oppression is supported by the integration of feminist and Islamic practice. This integration is explored by Gümüşay and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah and by scholars and activists whose research and practice are influencing the shifting identities of feminist Islamic movements in Germany. Yaghoobifarah, a self-identifying queer, Muslim feminist explained during an interview that feminism is her Jihad, or struggle (Pfannkuch, 2016). They further clarified "Für viele ist es schwer begreiflich, dass islamischer Glaube und Feminismus einander bedingen können." Yaghoobifarah's position is

supported by the foundational importance of Islam in women's lives. Women are imbued with a sense of identity, belonging and support from religious association, rejecting any feminist proclamations to the contrary (Hashim, 1999).

There are also those who practice Islam who are "wary of identifying themselves as feminists because of the historical baggage associated with this term" (Kulaçatan, 2015). Political scientist Dr Meltem Kulaçatan critiqued the assumption there is a singular form of Islamic feminism. She argued:

Zahlreiche Musliminnen formulieren Kritik an den entsprechenden gesellschaftlichen Strukturen und fordern dieselben Rechte für Frauen ein, wie sie für Männer gelten. Doch ebenso wenig, wie es 'den' deutschen Feminismus gibt, gibt es auch nicht 'einen islamischen Feminismus.' Das lässt sich nicht auf eine einzelne Denkrichtungen oder politische Orientierungen beschränken. Manche Musliminnen stören sich allerdings an den Begriffen 'Feminismus' und 'feministisch.' (Kulaçatan, 2015)

Muslim WoC's narration and construction of their own feminism is multi varied and individually distinct. As Gümüşay gradually came to accept feminism as it relates to her Islamic beliefs, other Muslim WoC have come to identify with the goals of the movement, if not the terminology.

The media regularly conflates Islamic religious practice with cultural precedent. Ambar Ahmad writes in "Islamic Feminism – A contradiction in terms?" about Iranian Islamic philosopher Abdul Karim Soroush's principles of the essential and accidental features of Islam. The essentialist principles of Islam, or the "enduring and unchanging beliefs" characterise the religion (Ahmad, 2015). The accidental features, however, are malleable and depend upon social and historical conditions. The conflation between religious and cultural practices, therefore, extend misinterpretations and narratives of Islamic feminist identities.

Freedom (of expression)

The freedom of religious and cultural expression signifies an important component to Gümüşay's identification with feminist principles. The personal attacks and abuse Gümüşay and others received after posting in conjunction with #schauhin and #ausnahmslos exemplify the similarity between racialised attitudes on and offline. In a TED talk, Gümüşay explains to the audience that these instances make

her feel like an “intellectual cleaning lady.” She explains this concept as her constant engagement with people who hold racist, misogynistic or bigoted views:

I show up and I clean. I react, I explain. I name the facts and I name the figures. I react, I react, I react... Our lives are dictated by the hateful. (Gümüşay, 2016c)

These discussions, as Gümüşay explains, take her away from work and serve as a distraction. The distractions of “the hateful” are attacks on Gümüşay’s religious and cultural identities.

The concept of an intellectual cleaning lady relates to the internalised role of Muslim WoC as low-paid working-class jobs as cleaners. In this regard, it is considered Muslim WoC’s duty to ‘clean up’ the messes made by others. The very identity of #schauhin encourages those who have experienced racism to provide examples of said racism, in a bid to explain to others what racist comments are being spoken in Germany. The explanation of racism and subsequently of misogyny in #ausnahmslos, is an inherent component to feminist movements. Feminist movements rely on protest measures and awareness raising to get their messages out. #schauhin and #ausnahmslos face similar duty of care to an outside audience. Not solely for the benefit of people who Tweet in support of their directives, both social media movements were created to interact with a broader population in hopes of raising their awareness of systemic forms of racism and sexism. This outside engagement resulted in the proliferation of trolls flooding the hashtags and attempting to subvert the tone of the movements for their own aims. Gümüşay’s role as an intellectual cleaning lady and responding to these messages, corresponds to the distracting measures that sought to stymie her freedom of religious and cultural expression.

Muslim WoC’s desire for freedom of religious expression is challenged not only by external figures but internally by members of the feminist community. The freedom to express individual choices through clothing is a commonly acknowledged issue explored within contemporary feminist movements. Popfeminism is particularly supportive of women’s freedom to wear all kinds of clothing. An example of this is the creation of the SlutWalk, started by a woman in Toronto when a police officer correlated instances of sexual assault with immodesty of women’s clothing (Gibson, 2011). The freedom of clothing choice is not freely

extended, however, to Muslim women who choose to wear a head scarf. An article in *EMMA Magazine* directly attacked Gümüşay and her identification with feminism based upon her personal appearance. The author maintained: “Aber was will man auch von einem Land erwarten, in dem die in Kleidersack und Kopftuch gehüllte Kübra Gümüşay als Feministin bezeichnet wird” (Schunke, 2016). The author assumed that an identification with Islam precluded a serious identification with feminism.

Alice Schwarzer, founder and frequent contributor to *EMMA*, is an active critic of Islam and argues that the wearing of a headscarf is related to regressive beliefs. Schwarzer writes of the perceived need to emancipate women who wear headscarfs, (proof) questioning their German values in the process. Kulaçatan contextualises emancipation in regard to wearing a headscarf, noting “in einer Gesellschaft, die Frauen mit Kopftuch ausschließt, kann es auch eine Form von Emanzipation sein, dieses zu tragen” (Kulaçatan, 2015). Kulaçatan further problematises how discrimination of women who wear headscarfs by a possible limit of their activities in professional circles, as opposed to opportunities given to religious men. The politicisation of the headscarf legitimised discrimination against women who choose to wear it based upon the belief that they are being coerced through their religious affiliation.

Other feminist-centred criticism came from FEMEN, a globally active feminist group with Swedish origins who mounted a German protest in solidarity with Tunisian activist Amina Tyler. She posted a nude photo of herself from the waist up on Facebook, and wrote “My body is mine and not the source of anybody’s honour” in Arabic (Gordts, 2013). Women in the German protest held signs stating, “Arab women against Islamism”, “Fuck your morals,” and “Freedom to all women.” The protest was held in front of a mosque and not, as Gümüşay, noted the “tunesische Konsulat...ein Symbol staatlicher tunesischer Macht” (Gümüşay, 2013b). Instead, Gümüşay explains how the protest is committed to promoting “antiislamischen Ressentiments, [...] rassistische und islamophobe Stereotype und vor allem: Sie zeigen jenen muslimischen Frauen, die sich seit Jahrzehnten für Frauenrechte in islamischen Ländern einsetzen, den großen Mittelfinger” (Gümüşay, 2013b).

Gümüşay clearly associates with a feminist identity in a blog post condemning the ill cited actions of a FEMEN protest in front of a mosque. Instead of protesting the Tunisian government's decision to incarcerate a young activist, FEMEN protested against the religion of Islam, recalling derivative stereotypes. Gümüşay writes, "Ja, muslimische Feministinnen. Die gibt es. Ein Ding, oder? Mit Kopftuch. Ich zähle mich selbst dazu, wenn mir die Damen das gestatten mögen. Nicht? Mir auch egal." Following the protests, the hashtag #MuslimahPride circulated on Facebook, Twitter and other social networks. Women wrote signs stating "Du brauchst mich nicht [zu] befreien, ich bin schon frei" and "Das Kopftuch ist meine Wahl" (Gümüşay, 2013b). Gümüşay ends her criticism of the FEMEN protest with a criticism of their perceived feminism, maintaining "Bevormundung und Absprechen des Verstands – war es nicht das, wogegen FeministInnen eigentlich kämpfen?" The assumption of some pockets of western feminism that Muslim WoC are not free because their feminist identity is practiced within a framework of Islam is short sighted.

Gümüşay recounts an experience of a woman who removed a head scarf in the Taz.de column "Wenn Frauen das Kopftuch ablegen." The woman did not want to remove her headscarf, but felt compelled to by the outside opinions and association. She explained: "Ich war nur noch damit beschäftigt, den Islam zu verteidigen. Ich habe nur noch [nach] außen hin gearbeitet und dabei meine Spiritualität verloren" (Gümüşay, 2012). Her headscarf became an invitation for others to question her beliefs, which in turn compelled her to play the intellectual cleaning lady and defend her choice and Islam as a religion. This preoccupation with explaining the right to religious expression created a divide between how she felt able to practice. This divide questioned a base feminist principle of equality in a liberal, pluralistic multi-cultural life in Germany.

Freedom of individual identity

The conflation of an individual narrative of a Muslim woman and the collective narrative of experiences of Muslim women in Germany, devalues racialised women's right to freedom from collective group representation. This goal is further complicated through a populist, media-reinforced discourse that confuses cultural and religious norms and subsequently links Muslim and other racialised women

with misogyny and oppression. I define culture as the ideas, traditions and social constructs of a place as defined by physical or immaterial boundaries. In contrast, religion refers to a faith-based precept followed by a group of people, usually situated by a specific text or series of texts. Leila Ahmed analyses how the “peculiar practices of Islam with respect to women had always formed part of the western narrative of the quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam” (Ahmed quoted in Benbow, 2005: 13). In turn the dominant narrative of western feminism, the political far right and traditional media considered these “peculiar practices” as entirely emblematic of Islamic religious belief rather than cultural influence. Their paucity of engagement with religious texts of Islam (Koran, Hadiths) therefore influenced the reinforced and stereotypical assumptions that Muslim women are oppressed by native cultures and a dominant religion (Weber, 2012: 112).

In addition to the conflation of individual identity with group representation, the assumption of the individual as greater than its group characterises neoliberal German liberal democratic institutions. As in neoliberal political structures, the power of the individual is championed over the collective power of the group. Yet Muslim WoC are characterised collectively as without agency (due to Islam’s patriarchal structures) and without choice (due to cultural home background). In a post on her blog titled “Mipsterz & the state we’re in,” Gümüşay discusses the phenomenon of Muslim Hipsters and a short video about “Muslim fashionistas in the US driving skateboards, motorbikes, jumping and posing on trees” (Gümüşay, 2013c). The video sparked a rejection of the trend, labelling the association with fashion as materialistic and critiquing the appearance of the Muslim women on camera, among other things. Gümüşay condemned the internal debate that chose for its inability:

to accept that public Muslim might choose not to talk about ‘hard facts’, politics, Islamophobia, discrimination and racism in our societies but ‘give in’ to popular mainstream culture, even if for a two minutes video. (Gümüşay, 2013c)

In this example racialised Muslim WoC are not permitted to exist as individuals in the public sphere.

In contrast, white women are assumed to be individuals even within a collective group, such as feminism. In a neoliberal framework of individuality,

white women are singular entities and racialised women are representative and emblematic of their racial, ethnic or religious identity. This discourse was directly challenged by #schauhin's attempt to individualise stories of everyday racism. User @F_Kuebra tweeted on 6 September 2013 "Wenn man dich für einen gelungenen Ausnahmefall hält. Alle anderen sind ja nämlich soo böse. #schauhin" (@F_Kuebra, 2013). Categorising @F_Kuebra as the exception as a good Muslim against the notion of all other Muslims as "soo böse" articulates how when Muslim WoC are seen as individuals, it is in opposition to the assumption of their collective representation. @ThatHidjabi explains this with the tweet "Diese[r] Moment, wenn ein nicht-deutsches Aussehen mit Dummheit gleichgesetzt wird .#schauhin" (@ThatHidjabi, 2013). The lack of appearance as German, inferring this reference a non-white association with German heritage, creates an association of being unintelligent. The individual is catalogued according to a rigid and unfounded set of assumptions promoted by the media and far-right political groups, yet embraced a populist wave of anti-Islamic and Middle Eastern rhetoric.

Likewise, women who claim a Muslim identity that is perceived as outside of the culturally and socially acceptable German norm must negotiate their identities. Gümüşay poses this distinction in an anecdote of her time arguing with a CDU politician and former minister. He asked Gümüşay what "die muslimischen Verbände" thought about homosexuality (Gümüşay, 2011). Gümüşay counters if he has asked Catholics for their position, noting "Warum sollen sich Muslime und Migranten über das Grundgesetz hinaus zu etwas bekennen, wiederholt Loyalität zu Deutschland bekunden oder sich von irgendwelchen Dingen distanzieren?" People who practice Islam or people of colour are expected, or even enforced, into explaining their loyalty to certain causes, when white or non-Muslim people's views on the matter are considered excusable. The opinions of Muslim people of colour are viewed with more importance than their white counterpart's due to a pervasive political climate of suspicion.

The negotiation and acceptance of identity are also reinforced by societal pressure on Muslim individuals to atone for the actions of the few in the name of their religion. This atonement is especially demanded in a political and culturally neoliberal environment that champions the liberal democratic institutions and

perceives Islam to be a threat against them. In a Taz.de column, Gümüşay speaks of how an incident she witnessed whilst at a Seder, the opening evening of the Jewish Passover feast (Gümüşay, 2011). She sat next to a Turkish representative, who appeared tense. At the end of the dinner he gives a speech and condemns attacks against Israel in the name of Islam, disavowing his association with the terrorists, who do not represent Islam. Gümüşay ends the anecdote, writing “Ich schaue auf meinen Teller und versuche die Stille am Tisch zu hören. In mir drinnen ist es viel zu laut.” Gümüşay’s phrasing indicates her shame and disappointment with the Turkish representative’s desire to assume the philosophical blame for the actions of a stated minority. Her description of the inclusive and friendly atmosphere at the multi faith Jewish gathering suggest a conferred and tangential guilt of being reduced to a one dimensional Muslim identity.

Where the desire for the freedom to make sexual or economic choices still applies to racialised women, the lack of the assumption of individual agency is inherently larger than when it applies to a postfeminist discussion of white, middle-class, heterosexual feminism. The identified assumption is that racialised women have less agency than white German women due to perceived cultural backgrounds and religious influence. Therefore, racialised women’s goals of freedom to make sexual and economic choices are primarily made visible through explicit self-devised formal and informal narrations and declarations in social media. Twitter user @MelekEwa wrote the following in response to assumptions of sexual and economic choices: “wenn [ein] lehrer muslimischen mädchen sagt, dass es nicht schlimm ist, wenn sie durchfallen, da sie nach der schule eh heiraten werden. #schauhin” (@MelekEwa, 2013). The association that all Muslim women will immediately marry and relinquish economic freedom to their partner conveys the racist stereotypes against racialised WoC. These assumptions further reveal the contradictions of postfeminism, which assume that gender equality has been reached and the need for feminist activism has subsided. In this context, racialised women are not given the benefit of having reached equal status, demonstrating the specific barrier to representation and productivity they face as a distinct group.

This section framed how Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC disrupted the cruel optimisms of the neoliberal success/failure binary through redefining the goals

associated with their own feminist identities. These goals include liberation from racial and gender-based oppression, freedom of expression and freedom of individual identity. The attachment to and focus on feminist goals and productivity are inherently linked to WoC's formation of identity through the use of social media platforms. The next section will contextualise the reading of awkwardness in the creation of Muslim WoC's creation of feminist identity through #schauhin and #ausnahmslos.

Reading for awkwardness

This section will contextualise how reading for awkwardness is used to analyse the "politics of power, perception and relation" (Smith-Prei and Stehle, 2016a: 149) in the creation of Muslim WoC's feminist identity. The politics of power, perception and relation signify the various ways in which feminist identity is constructed through awkwardness. The precarity of cultural and sexual narratives of the #schauhin and #ausnahmslos campaigns will be discussed, in addition to a colonial narrative that sought to other WoC in Germany. The latter half of the section evaluates the disruptive feminist communities that an awkward analytical standpoint afforded. The creation of these communities enhanced Muslim WoC's own identification with feminism and sisterhood.

The politics of power, reception and relation encourage reading for awkwardness in how Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC define their own feminist identities. Gümüşay particularly determined her sense of feminist identity in relation to the awkward elements of the media coverage that surrounded #ausnahmslos and the New Year's Eve Cologne attacks. The tool of awkwardness and the researcher's specific reading for it, highlights complexity of identity formation in response to a particular event. The New Year's Eve attacks became a focal point for discussions of racism, sexism and anti-Islamic sentiment that individually define the work Gümüşay has been active in promoting. The confluence of these intersections into an internationally covered event generated a catalyst for which Gümüşay could focus a concrete feminist identity against.

Politics of power, reception and relation

The politics of power, reception and relation of feminist identity in #schauhin and

#ausnahmslos are informed by the awkwardness and precarity of the media and cultural response to the movements and their inspired events. Precarity refers to the “new subjectivities, new socialities, and new kinds of politics” characterised by the nature of cultural reception and relation (Gill and Pratt, 2008: 2). I am also using the terminology of precarity in reference to instances of cultural and sexual associations that affect Muslim feminist identity. Precarity is culturally analysed through the separate identification of misogyny in German and other cultures. Specifically, #ausnahmslos delineates the perception of misogyny as inherent to non-western culture, as opposed to media and populist speculation that indicates the prevalence of misogyny in non-westernised cultures, in relationship to cultural lack of enlightenment.

I argue that the varying levels of awkwardness of the media reception of the Cologne attacks triggered the creation of #ausnahmslos which aided in the promotion of feminist awareness and voices. The awkwardness in the reception of these events can be disambiguated in several different manners. The awkwardness present in the Cologne attacks is an amalgamation of the following: the embarrassment of a mismanaged police response, the community’s discomfort of women’s lack of safety (at night and in crowds), the perversity of sexual assault committed against women in public spaces, the initially hesitant media coverage, followed by a prevalent depiction of the actions of a few being representative of the many (asylum seekers, migrants), the deliberately uncooperative political response to the events, society’s difficulty of reconciling the events with multi-cultural principles, the inconvenience faced by liberal activists that these assaults were perpetrated by men of colour, and the danger of mainstream conflation of cultural precedent with religious imperative. A definition of awkwardness is not relegated to embarrassment or ungainliness. As described by the list above, awkwardness has many different definitions that, like the term, suggest a lack of fixedness.

Much like the resulting effect on the mass conversations regarding migrants and their place in German society, the attacks themselves were disruptive. The disruptive elements of the attacks were as jarring to the political and social right who felt vindicated by the assaults as much as it was to the political and liberal left.

The rhetoric of asylum seekers as saints was perceived as suddenly incompatible against the reality of the assaults. The view of migrants as disorderly and barbaric, however, were reinforced by media images promoting colonial depiction of black bodies as inherently dangerous to white bodies. Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC interpreted their feminist identities against these constructs of awkwardness.

There is a distinction to be made between cultural and religious precariousities, and the distinct lack of differentiation these are faced within German media representations. The conflation between religion and cultural practices create an acute misrepresentation of racialised Muslim women as well as Muslim men. Racialised men, especially asylum seekers, were portrayed as culturally other, animalistic and un German (Bocchetti et al., 2016). The distinction between Germanness and the other, misogynistic and brutalist cultural milieu of African and Middle Eastern men, also depended on the association of racialised Muslim WoC, whose agency was called in to question. Far-right political rhetoric, in turn, sought to create the distinction between entrenched German equality and the so-called entrenched misogyny of migrants and asylum seekers. The sexual assaults of women in Cologne became, in effect, leverage and propaganda for far-right political parties, seeking to draw a cause and effect link between Angela Merkel's asylum seeker policy and the abuse of European women. This can be seen in the title of an *Economist* front page by-line, "Crossing the line – Migrant men, European women and the cultural divide" (Economist, 2016). This narrative creates a dichotomy between one group (migrant men) against the other (European women) (Wiedemann, 2016).

The political reactions to the Cologne events were divided. Ralf Jaeger, interior minister for North Rhine-Westphalia, was particularly vocal. He commented the perpetrators were "'almost exclusively' migrants" (Hill, 2016). He also criticised the Cologne police for "not calling for reinforcements on the night" in addition to the manner in which the public was informed in the days following the incidents (BBC, 2016a). Journalist Gavin Hewitt (2016) has written about the loss of trust and growing suspicion between "the political elite" and the German public following the attacks. This is due, in some part, to the manner in which they were reported. News of the reports were initially recorded on social media

platforms by individuals and not widely covered or commented on by members of the media or by government officials (Hewitt, 2016). German public broadcaster *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (ZDF) later apologised for failing to report on the New Year's Eve attacks in their direct aftermath (Coleman, 2016).

The issue of misogyny, or systemic sexism, tackled in 2016 is not framed against the discussion of sexism that occurred in 2013, rather, it is portrayed as emblematic of less modernised or enlightened nations. Misogyny is presented by media coverage as part of the Middle Eastern and African cultural milieu, as opposed to the German, westernised neoliberal conceptions of equality and meritocracy. This false dichotomy presents an overly simplified argument of culture and perpetuates stereotypes of the racial and religious other. Namely, that the other black and Muslim men have brought entrenched issues of misogyny and philosophical incompatibilities to Germany, and that these viewpoints are socially incompatible with the status quo.

Wolfgang Albers, Cologne police chief, insisted the events indicated “a completely new dimension of crime” and disagreed with assessments that police units were understaffed and ill prepared (BBC, 2016g). Jaeger suspended Albers on January 9, 2016 according to his handling of the investigation and specifically the accusations of “holding back information about the attacks, in particular about the origin of the suspects” (BBC, 2016f). The reaction of Cologne Mayor Henriette Reker, who urged women to follow a particular code of conduct in order to protect themselves against sexual violence, received significant backlash. In a press conference, she urged women to keep themselves “at an arm’s length” from strangers (BBC, 2016e). This provoked a new social media reaction in the form of #einearmlaenge on Twitter for Reker’s insinuation that sexual violence was the result of women’s behaviour and not that of the perpetrators.

Political reactions to the events have highlighted the desire to decrease migrant numbers. Emily Haber, State Secretary of the Interior Ministry noted in a press conference the “challenge is huge” and that this precipitated “fears and concerns” among the German population (Adler, 2016). Haber maintained the way to address these concerns “is reducing the numbers” in consultation with other European states. Ecran Yasaroglu, a social worker who has lived in Germany for

three decades, told Adler that “In one night in Cologne Germany’s welcoming culture was destroyed” following with the fear “there’s a new kind of racism here” (Adler, 2016). Interior Minister Jaeger agreed that the climate of fear perpetrated by the political far-right is “at least as awful as the acts of those assaulting the women.” He further claimed this conservative and inflammatory sentiments are “poisoning the climate of our society” (BBC, 2016h). Vice-president of the CDU, Volker Bouffier, announced “Cologne has changed everything...People are now doubting” the multiculturalism of the country and the government’s decision to increase the influx of asylum seekers (Hewitt, 2016). This idea has taken root in the “fears of parallel societies taking root with different cultural rules” (Hewitt, 2016).

The circular argument that the other has infected German notions of equality with regressive misogyny was further reinforced by subsequent political rhetoric and imagery. This rhetoric framed the historical colonial perception of white as superior and black as inferior as reason for the Cologne sexual assaults. Further to this, the imagery of black hands on white, female bodies dominated the magazine covers of two newspapers (Focus Online, 2016; Zeitung, 2016), confirming the dominant discourse of cultural precarity and awkwardness. These covers linked the historical depiction of propaganda against black bodies and highlighted the cultural transgression of interracial relationships. These front-page images were explicitly created to evoke the correlation of black hands on white women’s genitalia with impropriety, unnaturalness, and forbidden cultural precarity. The images themselves did not question a woman’s lack of consent in the act of being sexually touched. Rather, they focused simply on the act of black hands on white, female bodies. The images reinforce the culturally precarious nature of acceptability of both entrenched racism and sexism specifically in German society. The further lack of retraction or discourse by both magazines to this point illustrates traditional media’s role in perpetuating unhelpful and harmful racist tropes.

Feminist communities

The reclamation of feminist communities within virtual spaces becomes a deliberate and effective tool of feminist identity formation. Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC have built up communities of solidarity within #schauhin and #ausnahmslos that hinge upon collective associations and individual stories. These

communities of solidarity exploit the thrust upon awkwardness of women utilising social media platforms to architect lasting emotional connections to a feminist movement. Muslim WoC fostered feminist communities through the creation of individual and owned spaces, the discovery of new avenues for connections and relatability and the reclamation of an Islamic feminist identity.

#schauhin and #ausnahmslos were tools for increasing the levels of solidarity and awareness of racism and sexism that occurred on an everyday basis in Germany. Within this framework, the movements allowed for the formation of individual spaces wherein Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC could articulate their own individual experiences of racism and sexism. The creation of spaces within movements with large goals (the eradication of racism or sexism) allows for each group to claim aspects of the movements they most identify with. For Gümüşay, that meant questioning “der Illusion” of the inclusivity of the online feminist scene in Germany and creating links with other Muslim women to foster her own sense of Islamic feminism (Gümüşay, 2015).

The experiences of racism and sexism that inform the creation of Gümüşay’s feminist identity are complex and difficult to fully realise within the confines of social media platforms. A tweet written at the beginning of #schauhin reveals Gümüşay’s opinion: “@kuebra: Alltagsrassismus ist eigentlich oft das, was man nicht in Worte fassen kann. Erlebnisse, die in keinen Tweet passen. #schauhin” (#schauhin from kuebra). The individual experiences relayed by tweets are often descriptions of events or moments where racism has occurred. They do not do the job of contextualising the non-physical and difficult to describe moments of everyday racism that are not easily quantifiable. This scenario is why Gümüşay’s participation in social media campaigns serves more than the function of creating awareness and dialogue with those who may not understand her experiences. Her participation questions the realm of social media inclusivity by creating a new space for Muslim WoC to participate in ways that are personally meaningful but politically and culturally relevant.

Reading for awkwardness in #schauhin and #ausnahmslos demands the analysis of the disruptive elements that foster identity and communities. Gümüşay’s “50 Thoughts” endeavour is a discrete project that disrupts her usual blogging style

and affords her the prioritisation of individual thoughts and concepts. It is also disruptive in its visual and multi-lingual (Turkish, German or English) presentation (source, Weber). Gümüşay prioritised thoughts or ideas that are “naked, incomplete and vulnerable” (Gümüşay, 2014e). She chose to not “care about spelling, grammar, structure of the sentences” in order to write “carelessly.” The thoughts are multi-varied and are often screen caps of prose she has written on her Turkish typewriter. The presentation of visual elements with explanatory text below characterises a majority of the entries (Weber, 2016a: 101).

Gümüşay contextualises the notion of creating an owned space against the expectations of personal and collective legitimacy. The questioning of legitimacy is inherent to Gümüşay’s reclamation of her own feminist identity. This reclamation exists within a spectrum of social media dialogue that privileges all arguments, regardless of their intent. #schauhin and #ausnahmslos are notable for their position as social movements for people to call out instances of social injustice. The actual discourse promoted through the hashtags, however, vacillated from its intended use to the subversion of its message by people seeking to mock or disrupt the movement’s goals. Gümüşay frames her experience of her own legitimacy to speak out against social injustice in a “50 Thoughts” entry entitled “#7 Legitimacy.” She composed the following:

We define ourselves through the space, the legitimacy we are given by others. But when we let others, grant them the authority and power to decide what is legitimate for us to speak out, we are eventually defined by others (Gümüşay, 2014a).

Gümüşay further commands the reader to “Claim your space. Take it.” A feminist identity prioritises the embodied experience and needs of women. Gümüşay refuses to relegate her right to communities and resistance or to allow a subsection of the population to erroneously define her or her community.

The discovery of new avenues for connections and relatability are important conceits in the creation of feminist communities. Gümüşay’s “50 Thoughts” project has two distinct examples that highlight the notion of the joy in partaking in other’s journeys and the importance of sisterhood. In the blogpost “#14 Joy | 50” Gümüşay writes “the joy, contentedness and delight you feel for the pursuit of happiness of those around you, is beyond what you could ever feel for the pursuit of your own”

(Gümüşay, 2014c). The surrounding text explains this poem is “for a number of dear friends who allow me to be part of their pursuit and journeys.” The post is about the creation of a friendship and community wherein friends delight in the pursuit of happiness of other friends. This connection reinforces the concept of community and lays the ground work for the next blogpost that more explicitly references sisterhood.

The promotion of sisterhood is an obvious example of a feminist community. It prioritises the importance of female togetherness in the construction of feminist identity. It also focuses on a collective experience based upon woman-centred connection. Gümüşay’s blogpost “#17 Sisterhood | 50” is written as a poem and describes her thoughts on sisterhood. The first line reads “Es braucht einen Ort zwischen dir und der Welt” (Gümüşay, 2014d). This line references the space sisterhood occupies, outside of the self but between the self and the rest of the world. This liminal space prizes a feminist collective of “die Gedanken frei, die Gesichter eins, die Gefühle wahr.” Gümüşay finishes the poem with a line characterising sisterhood as multi varied and expansive: “Es braucht einen Ort ohne Raum mit unendlich vielen Königreichen und Thronen, auf denen Dienerinnen sitzen.” Sisterhood and feminist identity are the frameworks for activism and social change. Gümüşay contextualises the poem, explaining, “Zuerst musst du wissen, was du brauchst, damit du es suchen kannst. Und wenn du es nicht findest, was sehr wahrscheinlich ist, musst du es selbst schaffen.” This line conveys her philosophy of creating singular and individual feminist identities that are true to individual and collective associations of sisterhood.

The link between academic and individual Islamic feminist identity creation is iterative and reinforcing. The study of Islam and religious texts from a feminist framework strengthen the ties between academic study and the manifestation of this research in an Islamic feminist identity. Gümüşay notes, “Diesen Arbeiten ist gemein, dass sie nicht nur akademische Grundlagen formulieren, sondern immer auch muslimische Frauen in ihrer Identität als Musliminnen stärken” (Gümüşay, 2016a). The academic legitimacy of Islamic feminism serves to reinforce the cultural and social associations with Muslim feminist identity. The framing of the Koran and hadiths, from historical experiences of women to the interpretation of

religious texts, generates an inclusive and productive feminist community. In turn, the ability to analyse Islam within a feminist framework, further legitimises a personal and collective association with Islamic feminist practice.

Feminist communities are also instilled through Gümüşay's promotion and reclamation of Islamic feminist identities. Gümüşay reclaims Islamic feminism from misinformed western feminist critiques to the embracing of different forms of Islamic feminism. This view is evidenced by Gümüşay's involvement in discussions on Islamic feminism. In early 2016 she participated in a Friedrich Ebert Stiftung conference on Islamic feminism, framing the experience as encouraging. Gümüşay explained:

Es war womöglich das erste Mal, dass internationale muslimische Feministinnen auf einem öffentlichen Podium in Deutschland saßen und miteinander über diese Themen diskutierten, ohne dass ihnen von anderen Vortragenden entweder der Islam oder der Feminismus abgesprochen werden, in denen sie nicht ihre intellektuelle Existenz beweisen und verteidigen müssen. (Gümüşay, 2016b)

The link between academics and activists strengthened a collective interpretation of Muslim feminist identity as a movement informed by both intellectual rigour and practice.

This section highlighted the relationship between the awkwardness of events that led up to the creation of #schauhin and #ausnahmslos and feminist communities. Awkwardness was first read for in the politics of power, perception and relation in the creation of Muslim WoC's feminist identities. The practice of othering Muslim WoC in addition to the juxtaposition of their perceived cultural and sexual precarities against white women, led to the uncovering of Muslim feminist identity as a rejection of predefined and assumed spaces of feminist meaning making. Rather, feminist communities created their own spaces, discovered new avenues for connections and relatability and reclaiming a personal and individual Islamic feminist identity.

Conclusions

Kübra Gümüşay and other Muslim women of colour have consistently recreated and redefined their feminist identities through broader engagement in social media movements, conversation with each other, and the mainstream media. The

beginning half of the chapter provided contextual background for #schauhin and #ausnahmslos, disambiguated how Muslim WoC negotiate their feminist identity through storytelling on social media and then how they are consistently racialised according to religious beliefs, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The second section framed the specific goals of Muslim feminists of colour as they related to the liberation from oppression, freedom of expression and freedom of individual identity. The third and final element of analysis interpreted the cultural precariousness of awkwardness within Muslim WoC's reclamation of feminist identity and feminist communities.

Whilst this chapter has specifically contextualised Gümüşay and other Muslim WoC's formation of feminist identity in relation to the #schauhin and #ausnahmslos, it also presents a compelling theoretical framework for the continual re-creation and re-formation of feminist identity in the future. Recognising the lack of fixedness of feminist identity as it pertains to Muslim women of colour or otherwise, it is clear that Kübra Gümüşay will continue to explore her own relationship to Islamic feminism through social media engagement and personal contributions through her blog, *ein fremdwörterbuch*. This chapter has investigated an aspect of how feminist identity is created and redefined in relation to Muslim WoC. The conclusion will more broadly consider a critical analysis of how each of the previous chapters and case studies indicates a holistic understanding of contemporary feminist identity formation.

Conclusion

Der Feminismus kämpft seit vierzig Jahren für Strukturveränderungen. Und dafür bin ich ihm historisch dankbar. Aber im Moment stagniert es. ... Jeder weitere "Frauenförderplan" signalisiert: Es ist ein Problem, Frau zu sein. Ich sage nicht als ersten Satz: Mädels, du hast es schwer. Sondern: Mädels, du kannst viel mehr schaffen, als du denkst.

—Thea Dorn, "Der Feminismus stagniert", 2006

The analysis and study of German feminism is predicated on an understanding of relevant histories, current socio-political trends and the relevance of disruptive digital technologies that have transformed the nature of activism. Similarly, the production of pop culture imbued with political significance has altered the landscape of academic analysis. Gone are the days of investigating activists and their works as passive subjects. As I have argued within the investigative analysis of this thesis, rigorous academic pursuit should focus on the authors and their work, never divorcing the relevance of one's influence from the other. The five works and four authors investigated in this work are Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete* (2008), Dea Loher's *Diebe* (2009), Anne Wizorek's *#aufschrei* (2013) and Kübra Gümüşay's *#schauhin* (2013) and *#ausnahmslos* (2016).

The first half of this conclusion summarises the research findings, from the literature review to chapter five. After recapping the predominant findings, I go through each chapter's specific findings. The next section contextualises the significance of the research findings, from the meaning of research's results, to its limitations, to the answering of the thesis's research questions. Following this, I explore this thesis's contribution to the field of German gender research and further relevance to outside fields and disciplines. I pay particular attention to who should be interested in the results of this research, what makes the research useful to others and suggestions on what might need re-thinking. Finally, I ponder future research possibilities and questions that might drive the field forward.

Summary

This thesis utilised a popfeminist conceptual framework to analyse the embodied experiences and prominent works of four German women. Each work was chosen because it was a pop-cultural production, and relevant to a contemporary analysis

of feminist identities in Germany. Charlotte Roche and Anne Wizorek are the most well-known popfeminist actors I analysed throughout this thesis. I chose to analyse both *Feuchtgebiete* and #aufschrei due to their popularity as literary and social media events, and their roles in resultant public discourse. Dea Loher and Kübra Gümüşay, were chosen for their thematic relevance and pop-cultural production of their works. As an established playwright, Loher's writing is frequently examined in relation to its political radicalism and use of violent imagery, yet her treatment of women and their identities in *Diebe* provided a relevant scope for awkwardness, cruel optimism and divergent feminist identities. Gümüşay is an activist, predominantly active in anti-sexist, anti-racist and pro-Muslim feminist spaces. Her inclusion represents the less exclusive and divergent wave of online feminist activists.

Chapter one "Feminism, literature and social media: a review of theory and scholarship," catalogued and interrogated the perceived trajectory of the German feminist movement from old to new, post to pop. This investigation underlined the specific path of the current feminist movement in Germany, paying particular attention to literary and social media interpretations of feminist identities and events. This chapter also contextualised an understanding of popfeminist conceptual framework and how it investigates feminist literary events through analysis of cruel optimism of attachment and reading through awkwardness. Overall, I illustrated a gap in the literature by contextualising a flesh-and-blood author in relation to an understanding of her individual feminist identity.

The second chapter, "'Frauen sind aber total masochistisch': *Feuchtgebiete* and Charlotte Roche" concentrated on Charlotte Roche's contribution to neue Feminismus and current popfeminist interpretations of feminist identities. *Feuchtgebiete* was instrumental in creating a public discourse about popfeminist texts that traded in political, social and cultural subversion of older conceptions of feminism. This was investigated through a neoliberal narrative of self-actualisation, popular consumption and reading for awkwardness. Whilst the first half of the chapter challenged the notion of popfeminist double entanglements that characterised Helen's relationship with feminism, the second half problematised a notion of awkwardness in relation to the reception and presentation of the novel.

Following on from a discussion of *Feuchtgebiete*, the third chapter scrutinised Dea Loher and her 2009 drama *Diebe*. The chapter is called “‘Literatur ist für mich androgyn, ich versteh nicht, wie man eine Ästhetik des weiblichen Schreibens überhaupt wollen kann’: *Diebe* and Dea Loher.” The work focused on role of theatre in social, political and cultural discourse, Dea Loher’s presentation of self in relation to feminist identities within the play and the uncovering of various individual forms of feminist identities. The final section of the chapter investigated awkwardness as it related to politics of power, perception and relation. The use of symbols in *Diebe* (thieves, wolf, tracks) also alternately represented the divergence between individual and collective feminist identification, the challenge of creating feminist communities of and the tension between older and new feminist movements.

Chapter four “‘Ich bin da, und ich gehe nicht weg,’” focused on Anne Wizorek and the #aufschrei social media movement. This chapter contextualised the complex presentations of feminist identity within #aufschrei. It began with a discussion of the die Sexismus-Debatte, the role of #aufschrei in causing this debate and Wizorek’s role as the public figure and de-facto owner of the movement. From this, I argued the feminist goals of the movement were based on an individual understanding of the collective goals (liberation from gender-based oppression, freedom of expression and choice of sexual or economic equality). Finally, the chapter illustrated awkwardness as a function of sexual and cultural precarities and feminist communities.

The final substantive chapter of the thesis is titled “‘Gegen sexualisierte Gewalt und Rassismus. Immer. Überall’: #schauhin, #ausnahmslos and Kübra Gümüşay.” This chapter illustrated Gümüşay, #schauhin and #ausnahmslos’ role in redefining feminist identity through re-presentation of feminist goals and engagement with awkwardness. The first half of this chapter provided a background of the social media movements, their relationship with popfeminism, and Gümüşay’s role as author. The latter sections problematised specific collective goals of German Muslim women of colour feminists in relation to liberation from oppression, freedom of expression and freedom of individual identity. Finally, I elucidated the awkwardness of cultural precarities within Muslim WoC’s claiming

of individual feminist identities and within conceptions of feminist communities.

Significance

The initial, broad questions posed at the beginning of this research concentrated on the kinds of feminist identities seen in the works and the relevance of each work within a popfeminist methodology. They included: 1) what are the current feminist identities evidenced through five contemporary works; and 2) how has each work shaped German feminist identities when framed through a popfeminist methodology. The two findings described below imply the discovery of individual feminist identities evident within each movement or work as well as the role of the work in shaping its participant and author's perceptions of feminist identities.

The significance of this thesis can be distilled into two main findings. The first finding shows that German feminism is a multivariate and complex collection of sub-movements varied according to individual's political, social and cultural experiences (embodied & practiced). The second finding concerns an author's embodied experienced and its positioning within a reading of their work.

The first significant finding of this thesis suggests that whilst there may be a general sense of German popfeminist identity, feminist identities vary according to an individual's political, social and cultural embodied and practiced experiences. Therefore, drawing general categories of what entails a popfeminist interpretation of feminism, while initially useful, is not the essential element to understanding an individual's expression of their own feminist identities. A less systematic and more nuanced approach to discerning feminist identity narratives is warranted. This approach regards allowing for differences within differences that may affect a woman's perception of her own feminist identit(ies). For instance, an analysis of Muslim women of colour's popfeminist expressions indicated that there are some overarching principles of collective feminist identity present within the movements and Gümüşay's work. However, Gümüşay evidenced her own interpretation of these discourses, placing the ownership of popfeminist identities squarely within the purview of the individual's practice.

The second significant finding concerns an author or instigator's experiences (both personal and within a public discourse) are vital to grasping a fuller and more complete understanding and analysis of their work. This means that the significance

of the author and the experience of her work in a public discourse cannot be dissociated. An analysis of the outer, media-driven discourse of an author's work contextualises the facets of feminist identities within a given work and the author's experiences. Therefore, the reception of the public discourse changes the manner in which the work and author are understood, taken up and participated with in a general sense. There is a constant renegotiation of feminist identities, which remained un-fixed and moving. Charlotte Roche's relationship with the public reception of *Feuchtgebiete* altered the media's comprehension of and engagement with the novel and its popfeminist exploration of the body and self.

Contribution

The completed findings contribute to the burgeoning field of popfeminist research through increasing its understanding and use of popfeminist methodology, and the popfeminist works of under analysed authors. As a nascent conceptual framework, popfeminism has been applied most frequently to Charlotte Roche and *Feuchtgebiete*. Yet the study of cruel optimism and awkwardness within politically and socially active movements is steadily increasing in German feminist scholarship. This thesis adds to this growing body of knowledge through a re-contextualisation of Roche's work, and new explorations of #aufschrei, #schauhin, #ausnahmslos, *Diebe* and their authors. Through increasing the current engagement of popfeminist methodology with less explored authors and their works, the use of these conceptual frameworks can begin to be applied to a broader section of literary and popfeminist events.

Therefore, this work will be of interest to feminist and cultural theory researchers. Particularly, popfeminist researchers should consider these findings in relation to their own and consider the expansion of what can be defined as a popfeminist work through exploration of lesser-engaged with activists, authors and cultural producers of knowledge. More broadly, German gender studies researchers will appreciate the mix of authors I have chosen to include in this research, from well-researched authors like Charlotte Roche, to less obvious inclusions like Dea Loher. In addition to this, the inclusion of a novel, play and social media movements as applicable popfeminist events makes these results applicable to fields outside that of a strictly gender-studies background. Likewise, I imagine that

those researchers taking a transnational approach to social media movements might be interested in the implications of identity formation within a collectively-driven movement. Finally, activists and those working within social spheres of influence may use the results of this work to further improve the reach and praxis of their own feminist circles.

This research is useful in real world and practical terms because it contextualises instances of individual identity and ownership of power within seemingly homogenous popfeminist movements. In turn, this knowledge can be used to further analyse how instances of individual identity influence presentation of feminist identities within a public discourse and works. Understanding the awkwardness of the political within popfeminist movements, problematises the relevance of pop culture and its roll in activism and presentation of feminist identity. Therefore, engaging with this research might allow those involved in popfeminist events to more critically engage with the meta-narratives of their messages and how the way in which their feminist identities are constructed, influence the public discourse around their discussion.

Explicitly, this thesis has contributed a literary awareness of the implied author in relation to popfeminist methodology and the broadening of a popfeminist purview to include non-traditional authors. Through the analysis of Kübra Gümüşay and her work, the findings further explore the implications of cross-cultural, religious and homogenous interpretations of collective feminist identities. In addition, this thesis explored the embodied experiences of authors in relation to the experience of their popfeminist texts. The findings demonstrate that ownership of feminist identities within popfeminist events are constructed through individual engagement with the politically awkward and elements of feminist presentation.

Yet this research, like all research, contains limitations of scope that are important to acknowledge in order to better contextualise the reach of the results. To begin, the works and authors of the study are not representative of all popfeminist actors and works, considering pop cultural production is highly individualised. Additionally, the research does not demonstrate a specific study of unexamined popfeminist actors, including those that are queer, gender non-binary or women of colour. The decision to prioritise only a study of racialised Muslim

women of colour in Germany, for instance, might have yielded more specific results. Moreover, the nebulous and fluid nature of popfeminist events, especially social media movements, are difficult to pin-point and analyse according to a defined set of expectations. The divergent priorities of researchers and the way in which they analyse these events connotes a baseline difference of results even if they were concurrently conducted. Therefore, the individual researchers are responsible for owning the individual assumptions and biases they interrogate yet bring to every academic pursuit.

Future research

Future research in this discipline should primarily focus on divergent voices that create a richer understanding of popfeminist political and social activism. Authors like Charlotte Roche and even Anne Wizorek, are more robustly theorised, in part, due to their validated presence by German gender researchers. A more consternated effort to include women of colour, queer perspectives and perspectives of non-binary gendered individuals might aid in creating a more transdisciplinary and diverse contingent of researchers, that will undoubtedly drive more diverse research. Additionally, an emphasis on collaborative and transdisciplinary research practices between academics and activists will create richer understandings of the embodied experiences of popfeminist actors and the meaning of their feminist identities. In turn, these insights will help to reshape popfeminist methodology from a praxis of a subject studied, towards a new conception of objective collaboration. This emphasis might also create a kind of meta-awareness of individuals who theorise and own their narratives rather than route explication and analysis by academic researchers.

Co-devised and collaborative study of popfeminist methodology and events or works also prioritises an easier alliance between qualitative and quantitative research practices. Through engagement across disciplinary specificity, sociologists and computer scientists who specialise in analysing and coding results from Twitter feeds might better be able to design their research in collaboration with cultural and literary theorists, and activists to create more robust and specific research. In turn, this future research might address a more complex and dynamic representation of power and feminist engagement. Gillian Youngs's argument of the

difficulty in elucidating processes of identity and feminism across digital and physical spaces address the kind of questions these research practices could identify:

The intimate, dynamic relationships between identity on the one hand and experiential and associative processes on the other has made it even more difficult in some ways to know exactly what is happening in intertwined sociospatial and geospatial contexts. (Youngs, 2007)

Collaborative research prioritises the awkwardness and stickiness of the political within these dynamic relationships and process will further contribute to a productive and more meaningful engagement with individually-forged popfeminist identities in a German framework.

Finally, a shift towards inclusive and collaborative research processes might result in more-accessible results that speak across disciplines, individuals and communities. As bell hooks suggested in *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, the environment for robust and challenging feminist philosophy is only created of “an integration of critical thinking and concrete experience or a recognition of the way in which critical ideas, abstractly formulated, will impact on everyday life experience” (Hooks, 1984: 35). A new praxis of doing feminist research as a more collaborative and inviting enterprise has the ability to transcend disciplinary and professional boundaries that are not often crossed in the pursuit of increased knowledge. Susan S Lanser successfully reasoned this approach in a 1991 article, posing the question: “What is at stake in a profession that rewards writing addressed to the narrowest and most esoteric readership?” (Lanser, 1991: 17) A popfeminist methodology encourages the use of complex theoretical principles to more fully interrogate the notion of social and political feminist activism. If the research itself was conducted along these lines, the finding would enrich not only the understanding of power relationships and feminist identities but the way in which feminist research can be done.

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