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## Translating Heimat in Multilingual Dortmund

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## Translating Heimat in Multilingual Dortmund

### Abstract

Named for the people of 132 different nationalities photojournalist Peyman Azhari encountered in northern Dortmund over the course of a year, the photo collection *Heimat 132* (2014) stands as testament to the many ethnicities, religions, and languages this neighborhood is home to. In my paper, I read Azhari's photographs as sites of translation capable of reclaiming a critical understanding of *Heimat* (home or homeland) that is fundamentally multilingual. I do so by first exploring the link between racially and ethnically exclusionary definitions of *Heimat* and the all-too-common assertion that *Heimat* is an untranslatable word. Each approach, I argue, rests on assumptions of origins and originality, which understand *Heimat* as a pre-given way of life that can be threatened and is thus in need of preserving. Through its linguistic and visual engagement with this term, I argue, Azhari presents *Heimat* rather as a radically open and collaborative process of belonging in the making.

Starting with a series of portraits and interviews in the second half of the collection, I consider Azhari's decision to render multilingual conversations with residents into seemingly monolingual German narratives that are nevertheless punctuated by a series of translations of the word *Heimat*. By repeatedly rendering this term both out of, and then *back into* German, the collection allows *Heimat* to brush up against a range of words in other languages, including home (*casa*), motherland (*matribomi*), fatherland (*atdhe*), and ancestral homeland (*guxiang*), among others. If, through the act of translation, Azhari asks readers to approach the concept of *Heimat* relationally rather than as an inherently German term, translation then also punctuates these otherwise monolingual narratives, thereby breaking the link between *Heimat* and nativity at the core of right-wing appropriations of the word. Azhari suggests, on the contrary, that multilinguality and the non-local play an active role in the production of *Heimat*, and that translation—and more specifically translational difference—is central to the concept of belonging it has the power to generate.

By repeatedly foregrounding their own *non*-transparency, the portraits and streetscapes of *Heimat 132* similarly present themselves as sites of translation, rather than as universally accessible documents. Together with the collection's recurrent translations of the word *Heimat*, they capture sites of linguistic and cultural contact in the aftermath of migration that reveal this neighborhood, but more importantly German culture itself, to be a *dynamic* site of translation. As viewers—from either within or outside of Dortmund—we are central to this process of translation, which can only come to fruition through our viewing practice and our critical engagement with the photographs.

### Keywords

Heimat, Translation, Multilingualism, Dortmund, Peyman Azhari, Photography

Translating *Heimat* in Multilingual Dortmund:  
Peyman Azhari's Photography Collection *Heimat 132*

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Named for the people of 132 different nationalities photojournalist Peyman Azhari encountered in northern Dortmund, Germany, over the course of a year, the photography collection *Heimat 132* presents this neighborhood as a radically transnational site of local belonging. In stark contrast to media portrayals of northern Dortmund as a “sozialer Brennpunkt”<sup>1</sup> ‘social burning point’ where the German language and culture are at risk of eroding, *Heimat 132* presents migration and multilingualism in this neighborhood as fundamental to our understanding of Germanness. This is evident already through the number 132, which in its imagination of a German *Heimat* ‘home or homeland’ from a pluralistic perspective, undoes several assumptions tied up in the history of this term. While *Heimat* can express a flexible and capacious sense of belonging to both local and national communities, its lack of an official plural form gestures toward a singularity of experience that is unique to the German cultural realm. Such singularity is underscored, on the one hand, by conservative definitions of *Heimat* that assume a monolingual German populace void of migrants and people of color; it is driven home, on the other hand, by recurring assertions that the wide-ranging and affective connotations of *Heimat* are fundamentally untranslatable, due to their specific links to German language and history. While not always upheld by the same people, these arguments both rest on assumptions of origins and originality that are essentialist in nature, due to the insurmountable differences between languages and cultures that they posit.

Insisting that the protagonists in his collection have multiple *Heimats*, Azhari links northern Dortmund instead to myriad languages and cultures both inside and outside of Germany. These links are visualized on the page in the second half of the collection, in which residents of northern Dortmund render the word *Heimat* into multiple languages throughout a series of brief narratives. Together, these recurrent acts of translation encourage us to approach *Heimat* relationally rather than as an inherently German term. In doing so, they also rewrite the commonplace assumption that the affective power of *Heimat* is fundamentally linked to the German language itself. As they mimic the wide-ranging connotations of *Heimat* in translation, these narratives imagine, rather, multilingualism and migration as central to the concept of belonging it has the power to generate.

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<sup>1</sup> For representative negative media coverage, see Ankenbrand, Haneke, and Westerhoff.

By repeatedly foregrounding their own non-transparency, the portraits and streetscapes of *Heimat 132* also grapple with questions of translation. Through their incorporation of multiple forms of text—such as graffiti, advertisements, and street signs—they remind us that photography is not a universally accessible or independent sign system, but rather a complex interplay of conventions requiring our interpretation. Taken together with residents' narratives, they reveal northern Dortmund itself to be a site of translation capable of reclaiming a critical understanding of *Heimat* from both a multilingual and visual perspective.

In both Azhari's photographs and narratives, the heterogeneity and multilingualism of northern Dortmund are not figured as exceptions or additions to an ethnic German *Heimat* that is all too often coded as white and Christian, but rather as integral to an understanding of Germanness marked by moments of cross-cultural contact. Azhari achieves this through a translative aesthetic that reveals *Heimat* to be a collaborate and generative process of belonging in the making, as opposed to a pre-given way of life that can be threatened and is thus in need of preserving. While this process is set into motion by the photographs and narratives in *Heimat 132*, it is ultimately perpetuated through the acts of viewing and reading. As spectators—from either within or outside of Dortmund—I thus argue that we are all central to a process of translation, which can only come to fruition through our critical engagement with the collection.

### Translating *Heimat*

“Mein Vater reparierte die Fenster nicht. Er klebte sie nur noch. Es lohne sich nicht, dachte er. Denn er wusste, dass jederzeit wieder eine Streubombe in der Nähe einschlagen konnte” (Azhari 132). “My father didn't repair the windows anymore. He just taped them up. It's not worth it, he thought. Because he knew that a cluster bomb could explode nearby at any time.”<sup>2</sup> Azhari and his family escaped Iran just before the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1990. After crossing the border into Turkey, they eventually made their way to Germany as refugees. Inspired in part by his own personal story—which forms the first of forty-eight narratives in the collection—Azhari also conceptualized *Heimat 132* in response to the record number of migrants and refugees in transit globally at the time. Grappling with the complex terms of belonging in the aftermath of migration, this project has only gained significance since its initial publication, as wars and militant regime changes have shaken countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

Amidst intense ensuing debate regarding Germany's asylum and migration policies, the concept of *Heimat* has gained an increased sense of urgency in both public and political discourse. The term and its connotations have, above all, been

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

central to the rhetoric of right-wing political movements. With slogans such as “Unser Land, unsere Heimat” ‘our land, our *Heimat*’ and “Hol dir dein Land zurück” ‘reclaim your land,’ the right-wing populist and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) first entered the German parliament in 2013 as a self-proclaimed party of “Heimatliebe” ‘love for *Heimat*.’ In its online election platform, the AfD clearly positions its goal of protecting and preserving the German *Heimat* in opposition to a left-leaning political class, which “setzt die soziale und kulturelle Zukunft unseres Volkes, die Stärke unserer Wirtschaft und damit unseres Wohlstandes aufs Spiel und stellt Multikulturalität, Diversität, Globalisierung und vermeintliche Gendergerechtigkeit über alles” (Demokratie und Rechtsstaat) ‘jeopardizes the social and cultural future of our *Volk*, the strength of our economy and thereby also our prosperity, by placing multiculturalism, diversity, globalization, and alleged gender equality above all else.’ Concomitant to the founding of the AfD, the anti-Islam and anti-immigrant movement Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) undertook its first Monday demonstration in Dresden in 2014. Participation in these regular protests reached a peak on January 12, 2015 with some 25,000 participants (Klose 35). Already through its name—which makes use of the outdated term “Abendland” ‘Occident’ to posit a morally superior “West” in fundamental opposition to an imagined “East” or “Orient”—PEGIDA takes recourse to a reactionary nineteenth-century worldview. While the organization’s name does not officially engage with the concept of *Heimat*, Joachim Klose accurately describes its rhetoric as responding to insecurities and anxieties about the future that correspond to “a feared loss of *Heimat*” (35).

The AfD and PEGIDA play not only on the nationalized and racialized understanding of *Heimat* propagated under National Socialism; their defensive rhetoric of protection and preservation also recalls more broadly the diffuse affective connotations of belonging this term gained during the nineteenth century in response to rapid changes brought about by industrialization. As Celia Applegate argues, *Heimat* represented “the modern imagining and, consequently, remaking of the hometown, not the hometown’s own deeply rooted historical reality” (8). Often infused with nostalgia, the concept of *Heimat* allowed for the invention of an idealized past and the powerful (re)imagination of a more idealized way of life in the present.

It is against this backdrop that the 2018 renaming of the Federal Ministry of the Interior as the *Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat* ‘Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community’ caused protracted public controversy. On one hand, politicians such as Senegal-born Karamba Diaby remain hopeful that this name change can point toward an understanding of *Heimat* that connotes respect, tolerance, and participation (“Ein Ministerium für die Heimat?”). On the other hand, critics point to the first minister of *Heimat*, conservative leader

of the Christian Democratic Union Horst Seehofer, who only shortly after taking office declared that Islam does not belong in German society. In response, public figures such as Gökay Sofuoğlu, leader of the Turkish Association of Germany (TGD), have expressed concern that widespread use of the term *Heimat* will ultimately not promote solidarity and new forms of community, but rather marginalization and division (*Tageszeitung*). This is also the stance taken by contributors to the recent volume *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum (Your Heimat is Our Nightmare)*, a collection of essays by thirteen minoritized German authors who have clearly never felt included in the German concept of *Heimat*. In her contribution, author and journalist Mithu Sanyal describes the ministry's renaming as a defacto act of exclusion: "Funktioniert Nation als Grenze nach außen, so bildet Heimat eine Grenze nach innen" (104) 'If 'the nation' functions as an outer border, then '*Heimat*' creates an inner border' (51), which generally serves to differentiate between ethnic white Germans and Germans with a migration background or Germans of color.

Whereas Sanyal and others call for a complete rejection of *Heimat*, others insist not only on the possibility, but also the *need* to reappropriate this term from a critically pluralist perspective. In her op-ed "Überlasst Die Heimat Nicht Den Rechten!" ("Don't Cede *Heimat* to the Political Right!"), Syrian German scholar of Islamic Studies and recent member of the German Bundestag Lamya Kaddor argues for the need to reconceptualize *Heimat* in the plural. Against all precepts of German grammar—which does not provide a plural form of this word—Kaddor recognizes that an increasing number of Germans have ties to multiple *Heimats*, both within and outside of Germany. Defining the term as "die Sehnsucht nach einem Stückchen heile Welt, nach Ruhe und Geborgenheit" (*Vorwärts*) 'longing for a piece of intact world, for tranquility and security,' Kaddor argues for a non-divisive understanding of *Heimat* as a concept with the power to unify communities through the shared collaborative impulse it generates.

In his speech on the Day of German Unity on October 3, 2017, German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier similarly insists that Germany cannot afford to leave *Heimat* to those who would misconstrue its meaning in the terms of an "us against them" rhetoric reminiscent of the blood and soil ideology of National Socialism. By disentangling *Heimat* from right-wing nationalist movements in the past and present, he calls instead for a conception of this term that points toward a pluralistic future. *Heimat*, he states, "ist der Ort, den wir als Gesellschaft erst schaffen. Heimat ist der Ort, an dem das 'Wir' Bedeutung bekommt. So ein Ort, der uns verbindet – über die Mauern unserer Lebenswelten hinweg –, den braucht ein demokratisches Gemeinwesen und den braucht auch Deutschland" 'is the place that we all create as a society. Heimat is the place where 'we' gains meaning. It is precisely this kind of place—which can unify us beyond walls and divergent life-worlds—that both Germany and a democratic polity need.'

Through a focus on the collaborative creation of shared spaces and feelings of belonging, both Kaddor and Steinmeier approach *Heimat* as a process rather than as a given territory or way of life in need of preservation. This process is not limited by imagined characteristics of “Germanness” such as race, ethnicity, or language. In her own work on the superdiverse city of Frankfurt, ethnographer Regina Römhild describes a similarly open-ended process of community formation as *Beheimatung* ‘homing/creating *Heimat*.’ As Römhild’s research shows, people both shape and are shaped by their social environments. Regardless of populist definitions of the term, the forms of *Heimat* that arise from such mutual influence are never static, but rather dynamic and generative (27).

Azhari emphasizes a similar conception of *Heimat* as *Beheimatung* through his focus on the specific neighborhood of northern Dortmund, understood as both a place and a sense of community in the making. He does this, I argue, by subjecting *Heimat* to processes of translation on both the linguistic and the visual levels. Translation is most clearly foregrounded in the second half of *Heimat 132*, which features portraits of forty-seven residents with accompanying narratives of home and migration. While organized alphabetically according to residents’ country of origin, this section ultimately takes a critical approach to *Heimat* and origin stories alike. Whereas the concept of *Heimat* has historically enabled a negotiation of local and national identity, the narratives of *Heimat 132* present local belonging as a fundamentally *transnational* phenomenon, capable of reflecting the meaning-making practices of languages and cultures from across the world. This is evident first and foremost in residents’ frequent declarations of northern Dortmund as their *Heimat*, even as their home country stands in bolded letters at the top of the page. It is further underscored by residents’ recurrent translations of the word *Heimat* both out of, and back into German. Visually, these translations are set apart from their surrounding narratives by a space, forming a common refrain in residents’ stories of home and migration:

Heimat bedeutet auf Albanisch “Atdhe.” (Vaterland). (134)

In Albanian Heimat means “Atdhe.” (Fatherland).

Auf Bengalisch wird zu Heimat “Matribomi” gesagt.  
Übersetzt bedeutet das Mutterland. (140)

In Bengali we call Heimat “Matribomi.”  
Translated, that means Motherland.

“Casa” bedeutet für Eliane Heimat und auf Portugiesisch “Zuhause.”  
(144)

“Casa” means Heimat to Eliana and in Portuguese that’s “home.”

Heimat bedeutet auf Chinesisch “Guxiang,” Heimatort. (150)

Heimat means “Guxiang” in Chinese. Ancestral homeland.

These translations are noteworthy in the context of recurrent assertions that *Heimat* is a uniquely German concept with its own distinct meanings and affective connotations. In the words of Swiss diplomat and historian Carl Jacob Burckhardt, for example: “Heimat ist ein Wort, das unser Sprachgeist geschaffen hat, das in anderen Sprachen nicht zu finden ist und das völlig andere Gefühle weckt, stillere, stetigere, zeit- und geschichtslosere, als das leidenschaftliche Wort Vaterland. Wir verlassen die Heimat, um uns hinaus in die Fremde zu begeben” (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.) ‘*Heimat* is a word that our linguistic spirit created, which cannot be found in other languages, and which awakens completely different feelings—calmer, steadier, more timeless and ahistorical—than the passionate word fatherland. We leave home to venture out into foreign lands.’ This understanding of *Heimat* as inherently German undergirds a general consensus among scholars that the term’s culturally specific meanings cannot be done justice in translation. While positing homeland and hometown as potential English-language equivalents, Applegate ultimately argues that the multivalent meanings of *Heimat* are too steeped in the “peculiarities of German history” to be adequately rendered in translation (4). Burcu Doğramacı similarly views translating *Heimat* as a difficult, and at times impossible endeavor (8). One notable exception to this chorus is Peter Blickle, who finds affinities between *Heimat* in Czech and Serbo-Croatian. Blickle nevertheless concurs with philosopher Vilem Flusser that terms such as *domov* (Czech) and *domovina* (Serbo-Croatian) exist only on account of the cultural pressure German exerted on these languages over centuries (Blickle 2).

Even though debates on the relative untranslatability of *Heimat* are not linked to ethnically and racially exclusionary definitions of the term, each approach rests on assumptions of origins and originality that are ultimately essentialist in nature: untranslatability presupposes insurmountable differences between languages, which are embedded in culturally specific modes of meaning. Steeped in a relativist view of language, the rhetoric of untranslatability first took hold in Germany in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, amidst increased investment in the German language as a presumed natural—in the sense of native—and national form of expression for German authors. Untranslatability is thus inherently linked to the premise of a “mother tongue,” which arose in this same period, and to the idea that



authors can only write authentically in their native language (Yıldız 8-9). *Heimat*, with its promise of a natural affinity to a local and a national community, thus also belies a “natural” connection to the German language that upholds said communities. As a result, multiple generations of immigrants—regardless of how long they have lived in Germany—are all too often viewed as non-native speakers of German and as external to the conception of *Heimat*.

The ease with which residents of northern Dortmund translate *Heimat* into other languages defies any hardline investment in cultural-linguistic difference which perpetuates restricted understandings of *Heimat* as inherently German. At the same time, residents’ re-rendering of *Heimat* back into German shows that the act of translation rarely serves as a form of one-to-one transfer, which would deny specificity and ignore all processes of transformation enacted in the shift from one linguistic or cultural context to another. The narratives in *Heimat 132* negotiate, rather, between these assumptions of un/translatability. Through its contact with other languages, *Heimat* brushes up against a range of other terms, such as home, motherland, fatherland, and homeland, among others. Rather than assert any form of equivalence, translation allows *Heimat* to accrue associative meanings across languages. As a result, the focus shifts from the potential dilution or misrepresentation of a singularly German term to a process of translation that mimics the affective and wide-ranging connotations of *Heimat* itself.

Azhari’s approach to translation here recalls Walther Benjamin’s theoretical reflections in “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” (“The Task of the Translator”), in which he argues that a translation need not cover or block out an original text but can instead express “des innersten Verhältnisses der Sprachen zu einander” (80) “innermost relation between languages” (81). While upholding individual languages’ specific modes of meaning, Benjamin believes that they are fundamentally related in what they want to say. By offering us, in turn, the means to view our language and our culturally specific modes of signification from the outside, translation becomes a fundamental site of relation and connection rather than exclusion. Within this argument, Benjamin also frees the very notions of “translation” and “original” from an oppositional status. He likens translation, rather, to a tangent, which touches a circle at one given point but is then free to continue on its own creative trajectory.

Benjamin’s conception of translation is significant to the narratives of home and migration in *Heimat 132*. While presented entirely in German, these narratives are the result of multilingual encounters that often spanned several days. Many of these encounters were enabled by interpreters, who helped to establish connections and facilitate conversations for the project (Azhari 261). By punctuating its otherwise monolingual narratives, recurrent translations of the word *Heimat* remind us of the fundamentally multilingual environment within which *Heimat 132* came into being. By asking readers to approach *Heimat* relationally rather than as an

inherently German term, translation then also breaks the link between *Heimat* and nativity at the core of right-wing appropriations of the word. Overall, the narratives of *Heimat 132* reveal multilingualism and the non-local to play an active role in the production of *Heimat*. They also gesture toward translation—and more specifically translational difference—as central to the concept of belonging it has the power to generate.

### Visualizing Translation

How do the linguistic translations in *Heimat 132* stand in relation to its images? This question is pertinent to the structure of the book, in which 132 pages of streetscapes are followed by 132 pages of portraits. Whereas Azhari's portraits are replete with names, countries of origin, and personal stories, his streetscapes do not contain labels or supplementary information of any kind. Together, these two sections raise the question of how much context we need to interpret a photograph: do photographs constitute a universal language that is equally accessible to all viewers, or do they require culturally specific modes of reading and interpretation? Since the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, writing on this medium has negotiated answers to precisely these questions. Historically, artists and scholars have focused on the apparatus of the camera itself, expressing belief in the objectivity of the photograph as a document of what has been, produced with little to no human intervention.<sup>3</sup> According to this school of thought, photography creates an unmediated copy of the world, which contains its own sign system and thus operates beyond language. Implicit to this claim is the suggestion that "photography acts as a miraculous universal solvent upon the linguistic barriers between peoples" (Sekula 21), thus circumventing any need for translation. On the other side of the spectrum, scholars have emphasized the role of photographers as auteurs capable of subjectively and imaginatively manipulating a scene through the use of angle, light, color, etc. In addition to emphasizing the photograph as a work of art in need of interpretation, this second line of scholarship has also led to the general assertion that photographers hold ownership over their photographs and are solely responsible for what we as viewers ultimately see in the images they produce.<sup>4</sup>

In the following, I argue that *Heimat 132* upends both these claims. By presenting the photograph as a site of translation, the collection highlights the non-universality of its very medium. This allows the collection to engage, in turn, with deep-seated assumptions about the authenticity and originality of German cultural norms associated with *Heimat*. By presenting visual translation as a relational process based in multiperspectival viewing practices, *Heimat 132* does not uphold

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Talbot.

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of these two positions, see Azoulay 11-22.

an understanding of translation as derived from a so-called “original” from which it ensued. On the contrary, *Heimat 132* captures sites of linguistic and cultural contact in the aftermath of migration that reveal northern Dortmund, but more importantly German culture itself, to be a dynamic site of translation. In other words, *Heimat 132* does not posit northern Dortmund to be a site of hybridity that is separate from some imaginary conception of German culture proper, but rather as integral to the very definition of Germanness.

Consider, for example, the following portrait of Party Sami Aziz:



Figure 1. Portrait of Party Sami Aziz (Azhari 211)

Through his narrative, we learn that Party fled Iraq in 2002 after an initial failed attempt in 1994. As a member of the Kurdish minority in Tikrit, Party was lucky enough to be trained as a tank driver, rather than be sent to the front lines of the second Gulf War like so many of his Kurdish compatriots. Fearful for his life while being forced to serve the army of the state responsible for his own oppression, Party finally managed to cross the border to Turkey in 2002, where he worked for six months before making his way to Germany as an asylum seeker via Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. At the time of *Heimat 132*'s publication, Party had been in Germany for twelve years. That he was still working as an intern in a translation bureau in 2014 is testament to the many obstacles asylum seekers face, including severe restrictions on their ability to travel and work.

As an interpreter between Kurdish, diverse dialects of Arabic, Greek, English, and German, Party describes Dortmund as his *Heimat*, while also stating that his “Waffe ist Sprache” (211) ‘weapon is language,’ which he deploys willingly. In contrast to the more common assertion that *Heimat* can reside in language—and more specifically that *Heimat* can be preserved in a sense of belonging one experiences through the German language while physically residing in exile—Party’s narrative and portrait work together to suggest that his experience of Dortmund as a newfound *Heimat* is inherently multilingual.

In his portrait, captured through the window of his workplace, Party is situated at the intersection of three languages, all of which express something different about the process of translation: His face is positioned in between the German phrase “übersetzungen / alle sprachen” ‘translations / of all languages.’ This text is notable due to its use of all lowercase, including the nouns “translation” and “languages,” which would otherwise be capitalized in German. The phrase thus gestures toward a form of grammatical democratization in line with its claims of universal translatability. Complementing this gesture toward universality are the partially visible letters of the word “lingualis” at the top of the window. Derived from the Latin word for tongue (*lingua*), “lingualis” denotes the musculature of the tongue and the production of speech, suggesting that the bureau also employs simultaneous interpreters. While the presence of this ancient language once used as a lingua franca gestures on one hand toward a form of universal accessibility, it thus also emphasizes the idiosyncrasies and local particularities of spoken language. At the bottom of the window, we then see part of the Arabic phrase “دار الترجمة” ‘translation bureau,’ emphasizing the locality of the particular space in which Party is situated.

While these languages are clearly layered with even spacing on the front and side windows, the image’s point of view causes them to overlap and intersect such that the “s” of “Lingualis” runs into the German word “übersetzung,” and the German word “sprachen” covers the Arabic phrase in its entirety. Notably, it is the transparency of the glass that allows us to see these otherwise separate languages and phrases as intersecting and overlaying one another in the photograph. Against the commonsense assumption that transparent texts or cultural objects require little to no interpretation, the pane of glass in this photograph becomes a critical site of translation.

By playing with questions of transparency, this image also reflects on the practices of photography and spectatorship. Party is situated behind the pane of glass, which we can easily see through. Yet even as we are invited to look into the image and the bureau, this photograph is anything but transparent. Through the play of light, it captures reflections of objects—including a bicycle and several parked cars—that appear to be inside the bureau. Indeed, the image is so permeated by reflection that the counter upon which Party appears to be resting his hand could

just as easily be the sidewalk in front of the bureau. Confusing the difference between inside and outside, these myriad reflections change the question of what it means for us, as viewers, to look at an image from a position deemed to be completely outside of it or the scene it has captured.

That the question of spectatorship is central to this image is clear from the figure in the bottom right corner. Not readily apparent at first, this figure's black shirt blends into the car behind him. While he also appears to be looking into the bureau from the outside, the faded color of his silhouette—which we see through not one, but two panes of glass—also takes on the quality of a reflection, challenging again the concept of a spectator situated completely outside of the photograph. In addition to this small figure in the corner of the photograph, Party himself also functions as a spectator. With his eyes clearly focused on the street, Party looks through the glass to objects that are technically outside the frame of the image, but that we see reflected in the window. Together with the photograph's point of view—which positions us (together with the photographer) in the bottom left of the image—Party and the figure in the bottom right create a triangulated form of viewing.

This multiperspectival aspect of Party's portrait attests to what Ariella Azoulay terms the “event of photography” (27). Separate from the technology of the camera and the photograph itself—which we often mistake as a final product—Azoulay understands photography as the result of an encounter between at least three participants: the photographer, the photographed person(s), and the spectator. Preceding the moment captured in the photograph and continuing to unfold after it, the event of photography attests to an interaction that is neither complete nor completely under the control of a single person. Much more than that which was positioned in front of the lens, the photograph is part of this generating event: while photographers may give directions, choose an angle, or frame the scene, for example, they can never predict exactly how this event will unfold. Reading photographs in this way requires us to revisit our assumptions that the photographer in some way owns or has complete control over the photographic image. As the product of an encounter, the photograph attests rather to the fact that no single person fully possesses the means of production (27).

Just as the viewer becomes implicated in the image of Party through the triangulation of gazes, the taking and viewing of images enables new forms of spectatorship that articulate our accountability to one another. Within the context of Party's image and narrative, such accountability is expressed once again through the act of translation: by translating and interpreting for newcomers to northern Dortmund who are fighting for the right to residency, Party seeks to incorporate them into the neighborhood. What Party's image tells us is that incorporation and belonging in northern Dortmund are fundamentally multilingual endeavors. This marks a departure from the state-sanctioned understanding of integration, which is

premised on the expectation that immigrants will learn the German language to adapt to a normalized understanding of “German” cultural norms. Party’s portrait suggests, on the contrary, that belonging is enabled in and through a process of translation that allows different languages to meet, intersect, and produce new points of cultural contact. As such, his portrait also underscores a similar understanding of *Heimat*-in-the-making that his and others’ narratives put forth.

*Heimat 132* gestures toward a mode of belonging generated through mutual accountability already in its cover design. Rather than foreground his own role as photographer, Azhari presents his name alongside those of residents featured in the collection. Written in the same size and font, all forty-eight names are aligned on the left margin and organized alphabetically according to country of origin. Set apart at the top of the cover by a single space, Azhari could rightly be interpreted in this layout as both the author of *Heimat 132*, and as a protagonist within it. By placing the protagonists of *Heimat 132* directly on its cover, Azhari gestures again toward transparency, in that we can see the contents of this book before we even open it:

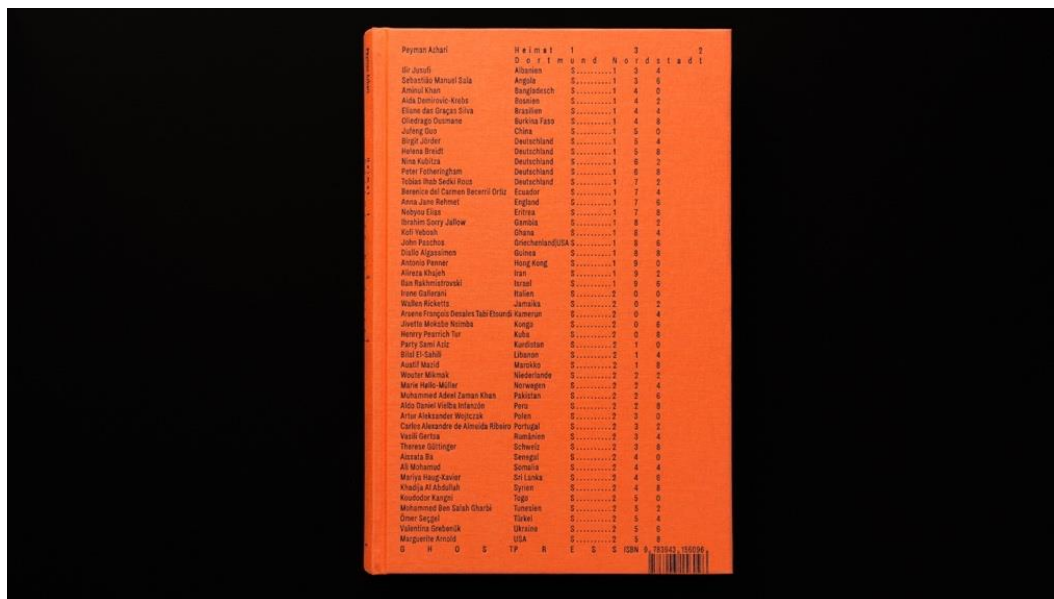


Figure 2. Azhari cover.

And yet as in the image of Party, such transparency does not gesture toward an absence of translation, but rather a profusion of it, as protagonists are ultimately brought into relation with one another through both their shared place of residence in northern Dortmund, and their collective attempts at translating the word *Heimat* within the collection. Here, translation enables a generative process of belonging and accountability similar to the event of photography.



Azhari also sought to generate a sense of shared purpose in his initial exhibition of the photographs. With the goal of reaching a broader audience—including viewers who may not actively choose to visit a museum—Azhari first displayed these images in the entryway to a local hospital. As a site that people visit out of necessity, this entryway both served as a meeting point for people from all walks of life and generated a public space in which viewers might recognize themselves and their peers. While allowing for this kind of self-recognition was important to Azhari in his conceptualization of the project, *Heimat 132* as a whole does not present an insulated view of northern Dortmund. On the contrary, many of its photographs call attention to the event of photography, within which the spectator—who may or may not be familiar with the neighborhood—also plays an important role.

According to Azoulay, photography always constitutes a potential event. Even when a camera is not in use, its very presence suggests the possibility that we may be captured within its range of vision. This may cause us to act differently, depending on how we react to the camera; we may feel irritated, upset, or even threatened by the possibility of being photographed, just as we might find it pleasurable or reassuring (21). The following quadriptych of a group of children on the street attests to this role of the camera as catalyst:



Figure 3. Four photos of children (Azhari 80-81).

Whereas the children appear sheepish and staged on the bottom left, other images show their varying degrees of excitement as they warm up to the camera. Azhari himself has noted the joy these children expressed at the opportunity to be photographed for a positive portrayal of the neighborhood. Already palpable in the image on the top right, this joy is on full display in the image on the bottom right, in which the young girl front and center appears magnetized to the camera. So close to the lens that her face is out of focus, this girl also appears closer to us as spectators, inviting us into the photograph. The resulting subjective camera angle not only immerses us as viewers in the scene, it establishes a kind of accountability that reminds us we are also part of the event of photography. In other words, we also determine the meaning of the photograph through our own personal forms of contextualization.

Scholar Shawn Michelle Smith describes this process of collective meaning making through what she terms the instability of photographic “evidence.” Photographic meaning, she argues, ultimately results from what we do with that so-called evidence:

All photographs are vehicles of identification and disavowal. They provide a medium for imagining and contesting communities, for negotiating and transforming boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Photographs both exemplify and document social processes in flux. Because their meaning is determined by context and circulation and the interests of specific viewers, the evidence in them cannot be fixed. Even though they seem to offer a stable glimpse of the past, their meaning changes over time according to who is viewing and to what ends. What is seen and not seen in photographs depends on the cultural filters through which they are viewed, and on the repertoire of images that have shaped looking. Viewers always see photographs through other images. (15)

Smith reminds us that the discursive context through which we view *Heimat* 132 matters. If we come to the collection from the perspective of negative media coverage, we may very well choose to focus on the graffiti, the large red garbage bin, or the trash on the street. If we come to this collection through the tradition of rural landscape *Heimat* photography, we may similarly see its portrayal of a slightly gritty northern Dortmund as the antithesis of, or even a threat to, an idyllic rural *Heimat*. But if we come to this collection through other photographic representations of migrants in Germany—such as John Berger’s *A Seventh Man* (1975), Candida Höfer’s *Türken in Deutschland* (‘Turkish People in Germany,’ 1979), Gert von Bassewitz’s *Morgens Deutschland Abends Türkei* (‘Germany in the Morning, Turkey in the Evening,’ 1981), Aytaç Eryılmaz’s *Fremde Heimat: Yaban Silan Olur / Eine Geschichte der Einwanderung aus der Türkei* (‘Strange



Homeland: A History of Immigration from Turkey,' 1998), or Ergun Çağtay's photographs from the 1990s recently displayed in the exhibit *Biz Buradayız* 'We are From Here'—we may be more attuned to the subtle forms of belonging connoted through its images and more ready to ask how we might be implicated within them.

### Toward a Relational Viewing Practice

The question of what viewers do with photograph evidence is pertinent to the strategic juxtaposition of images within *Heimat 132*. Similar to the quadriptych above, Azhari consistently formats images to generate what I term a relational viewing practice, in which viewers create meaning not only through the references they bring to a collection, but also through the connections they are able to recognize within it. Azhari often builds such connections through the strategic incorporation of text. Rather than point to an extra-visual element within the collection, texts featured in advertisements, graffiti, street signs, bus stops, T-shirts and more remind us that photography is not a completely independent or universally accessible sign system; photographic meaning is, rather, the result of a complex interplay between iconic, graphic, narrative, and cultural conventions, to name only a few (Sekula 16).

Consider, for example, the following pair of photographs juxtaposed vertically on a page from *Heimat 132*:





*Figure 4. Juxtaposed images (Azhari 70).*

In the bottom image, we see a woman with two children walking by an advertisement that reads “wir sprechen eine SPRACHE” ‘We Speak One LANGUAGE.’ Through her headscarf, we can recognize this woman as part of a racialized Muslim minority in Germany. Together, these details suggest some vague call for inclusion that nevertheless appears to rest on the assumption of a monolingual German cultural sphere. The suggested universality of “one” language is then immediately contradicted by the image’s visual division into two halves by a wall. This sense of division is strengthened by the lush green background and the bare street in the foreground.

Looking closer, we realize that the universal “language” referred to is capitalism. The advertisement features a woman with the Romanian flag painted on her face and the Ortel logo in the top righthand corner indicates that this is a phone plan. A bit of research reveals Ortel’s inexpensive monthly rates for placing unlimited calls to a single country of the customer’s choice. This advertisement thus uses the presumed universal language of capitalism to interpellate Germans with a migration background, who are then deemed as separate from a German national sphere through iconic symbols such as the flag. Azhari calls attention to this paradox through composition. Whereas the idea that money speaks the same language everywhere is underscored by an investment in universal translatability enabled through easy and open access in a barrier-free world, this image highlights

division. But the wall in the center of this image, I argue, does not uphold insurmountable differences in the sense of a radical untranslatability. On the contrary, it calls for viewers to interpret the image by reading against the grain. One way we might do so is by reading it together with the image situated above it on the page, which also features a woman and two children. This top image also incorporates text, namely the words “Internet Café-Bistro” on the lefthand side of the image. As a place where one might purchase a calling card or contact family and friends in other countries, this sign echoes Ortel’s emphasis on connectivity without engaging in its explicitly nationalizing tactics. The top image mirrors the bottom image in other ways, such as its incorporation of a woman with a head covering on the street. In contrast to the bottom image, in which the street runs parallel to a dividing wall, the street in the top image functions as a site of crossing, which may in turn attune us to another possible reading: while separated by both a white borderline and their locations in the city of Dortmund, the women in these images walk toward one another through their vertical alignment on the page. Together, these photographs stage a site of unexpected encounter, which can only be realized through a relational practice of viewing. Recognizing this encounter is, in turn, a crucial part of the event of photography, which can only come about through the triangulation of photographer, photographed person(s), and spectator(s).

What I describe here as a relational viewing practice is closely in line with the collection’s approach to *Heimat*. By treating *Heimat* as a concept that can, indeed must, be translated, the collection invites readers to grasp the full range of its connotations while also dislodging it from white supremacist politics. This involves reading the term relationally through a variety of other languages. Like these translations, which do not aim for one-to-one equivalence, *Heimat 132* often generates meaning through the juxtaposition of images that present similar, but different scenes. Through this process viewers may begin to notice otherwise banal details: when viewed alone, for example, it may seem inconsequential that the woman in bridal attire wears a veil. When viewed in relation to a woman wearing a headscarf, however, we may begin to ask ourselves how diverse head coverings are perceived differently in relation to the right-wing political conception of a white, Christian, monolingual German *Heimat* at risk of erosion.

Small details such as this are central to the collection’s emphasis on *Heimat* as a concept that must be understood in the plural. Through its emphasis on multilingualism and migration, Azhari differs from earlier scholars such as Applegate and Confino, who emphasize *Heimat*’s ability to account for internal forms of cultural diversity through its negotiation of local, regional, and national identities (Applegate 11; Confino 49-50). In his work on cultural memory, for example, Confino coins the plural form “Heimats” to describe the term’s ability to unite myriad localities, as well as “Catholics and Protestants, liberals and socialists,



Prussians and Bavarians” under a transcendent national identity in the era following German unification in 1871 (50, 62). As Joscha Klüppel shows, however, Confino’s conception of plurality rests on an understanding of collective German memory forged in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, thereby excluding migrants to Germany in the postwar era (115). Azhari’s approach to *Heimat* aligns more closely with that of Kaddor and Sanyal, who emphasize a form of consensus building that can account for the lived realities of diverse Germans and the many ways (im)migration has enriched our understanding of *Heimat* in the past and present. *Heimat 132* furthermore revises the commonplace assumption that the affective registers of *Heimat* are fundamentally linked to the expressive capacities of the German language. Without refuting the specific role that German has served as a mobile form of *Heimat* for writers residing abroad or forced into exile, Azhari opens *Heimat* to the registers of myriad other languages, ranging from Chinese to Arabic, and from Portuguese to Bengali. In doing so, he also breaks the link between language and nation so central to the rise of the nation state and the paradigm of monolingualism, which coincided historically with the initial proliferation of *Heimat* associations in Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This break between language and (presumed) national identity at times comes to the fore in the images of *Heimat 132* through surprising and seemingly inconsequential details. Consider, for example, the way that graffiti serves as an accidental commentary or counterpoint in the following photograph:



Figure 5. Graffiti as accidental commentary (Azhari 57).

Featuring a middle-aged man with a potbelly, this image immediately draws our attention to the superman logo on his T-shirt, which is complemented by other easily recognizable symbols, such as the DO of the Dortmund license plate and the German flag hanging from a window in the background. While thus permeated by symbols that do not seem to require any form of complex translation or interpretation, this image also resists the processes of categorization they represent. Absent of more location-specific information such as a street sign or a bus stop, we are reminded that we likely do not know this man or this street corner. In this context, our eye may be drawn to other details in the image. Against the drab gray of the background and foreground, the bright red of the superman logo might lead our eyes upward to the pipe, for example, while the blue of the man's T-shirt leads us down to the second figure sitting on the street with her blue shirt and sandals. Through this second figure, whose gaze could be directed at either the man or the camera, this image creates again a triangulated form of viewing, just as the blue tones in the photograph create a triangle drawing our attention to the blue lettering of the English word "hope" on the concrete wall. This may prompt us as spectators once again to ask what details we tend to pick up on in photographs, as well as what contexts and assumptions we bring to our interpretations and why. While the subjects of this image may not be aware of the graffiti between them, viewers who notice it participate in a collaborative process of meaning-making that is also central to the conception of *Heimat* the collection as a whole generates. Read together, the symbols of German nationality and American popular culture do not match; similarly, English may not be the first language viewers associate with the subjects of the photograph or the German national flag. Read together in juxtaposition, these details remind us that the concept of belonging put forth in *Heimat 132* is underwritten by northern Dortmund's heterogeneous and multilingual populace and propelled forward through processes of translation. It is from within this context that *Heimat* emerges as an equally hopeful site of linguistic and cultural contact that cannot be delimited.

I circle back, in conclusion, to the opening image of *Heimat 132*, which features a conspicuously empty street:



Figure 6. Empty street (Azhari 9).

Devoid of any caption or explanatory information, this photograph would be difficult to place for non-locals. Yet its leading line—which takes viewers under a series of overpasses—also invites us to participate in a collaborative process of meaning making central to *Heimat 132*'s documentation of radical diversity in northern Dortmund, Germany. While the underpass's red lights recall the neighborhood's infamous reputation as a so-called “social burning point,” its warm glow also encourages viewers to look against the grain: rather than a site of illicit activity or homelessness, the underpass serves here as entryway to a collection that grapples with questions of home, migration, and multilingual belonging.

In stark contrast to the advertisement for additive-free cigarettes captured on the left-hand side of its opening photograph, *Heimat 132* does not readily deliver on the promise of purity. Through processes of juxtaposition and emphasis on small but meaningful details such as this particular advertisement, the collection upends any conception of a pure or natural form of Germanness that could differentiate “ethnic Germans” from the many residents of northern Dortmund with a so-called “Migrationshintergrund” ‘migration background.’ In doing so, it also reveals the idea of a monolingual German *Heimat*—stripped of the myriad languages migrants have brought with them to Germany—as fiction. Together, Azhari's photographs and narratives capture sites of linguistic and cultural contact in the aftermath of migration that reveal northern Dortmund, but more importantly German culture itself, to be a dynamic site of translation. Through their recurrent translations of the

word *Heimat* both out of and back into German, residents of northern Dortmund break the assumption that its affective connotations of belonging are somehow inherently and singularly German. Instead, they work with the many images in the collection to present a fundamentally multilingual understanding of *Heimat* for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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