

Discourses of Migrations Past and Present in *Alles, alles Liebe* by Barbara Honigmann
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Recent German literature and film have concentrated specifically on women’s migration-- the film *Fremde Haut* comes to mind. Yet migration is not a new phenomenon in the German context or limited to the recent history of the FRG. This paper will look at Barbara Honigmann’s 2000 epistolary novel, *Alles, alles Liebe*. Set in 1975 in the GDR the correspondents are engaged in various forms of “migration.” The migrations are multi-faceted, multi-generational, and involve almost all the book’s female characters. The novel centers on Anna, an aspiring theater director of Jewish heritage. An investigation and interrogation of these migrations reveals the interstices of gender, identity, and location during the historical period covered by the novel--the last two months of 1975 and the first week of 1976. This work from 2000 also engages in the discourses and problematics of migration and the assimilation of immigrants in the 21st century.

The novel addresses several types of “migration.” The first is that of Anna’s parents, specifically that of her mother, who as a Jew had escaped in the 1930s to England. After the war, Anna’s parents, committed communists, returned to the GDR. In a sense, this “return” is a new migration, since they do not return to the prewar Germany they left. Anna shares this history with her best friend Eva. Both of them feel trapped as ethnic, but not religious Jews in the GDR. Called by others due to their physical appearance “Zigeuner,” “Hexe,” and “Zwerg Nase,” they are attacked on the outside, as well as emotionally and politically by the official anti-Zionist politics of the GDR in the face of the 1975 U.N. Resolution 3379, declaring Zionism a form of racial discrimination. They are treated as foreigners, as migrants within the GDR.

Both have left Berlin to work in the provinces; Eva as an actress in Meiningen, Anna is directing her first play in Prenzlau. This temporary migration highlights the differences between cosmopolitan Berlin and provincial Germany. They are double intruders: Berliners and Jews, not accepted or understood by the locals, who cling to an essentialist geographical identity, signified by male characters. They appear to become continual wanderers, moving from town to town, and in their personal lives, from relationship to relationship.

In contrast, Anna’s Russian Jewish friends and relatives in the Soviet Union represent a more typical definition of migration. Ilana lived in Riga as a “Refusnik.” At the beginning of the novel, Ilana discusses her family’s immigration to Israel. They have become religious Jews and fully commit to a new national identity. Ilana’s immigration story never moves beyond the initial euphoria of a move to an idealized Israel, but it marks the only positive experience of migration from a home, Riga, which is not perceived as one, to a presumed originary, ethnic, and religious geographical homeland. Through this narrative thread Honigmann takes on the conception of an “originary” geographical homeland, where one automatically belongs by virtue of biological heritage. When Anna flees Prenzlau and her relationship with Leon fails, she goes to visit friends and relatives in Moscow with whom she shares theatrical connections. Ironically, Anna’s refuge from her troubles in Moscow is contrasted with those in her Moscow circle who are mostly all “Refusniks” waiting for exit visas to Israel. Israel functions for them as an ideal Jewish homeland, but the parents’ return to Germany underscores the feelings of being rooted in Germany shared by many German Jews. Israel is a land to which Anna feels no attachment, and Eva wishes she did. Instead, these German women are wanderers, migrants in search of a home.

For Anna and Eva, it is especially remarkable that they live their lives as unattached women, moving within a small circle of friends, also mostly of Jewish heritage, finding no permanent romantic partners. In Honigmann’s works, the feminism is more implied than explicit. These are women’s stories told in the traditionally “feminine form” of letters. Mum, Anna, and Eva travel and make life decisions independent of male partners, who generally do not migrate. No relationship with a man can anchor these women to one place or give them a true sense of home. They remain migratory beings within and outside of Germany. Their situations turn the male centered migration story on its head. The novel demonstrates how the current discourses of “migration” and “otherness” in Germany have deep roots that demand interrogation and analysis.