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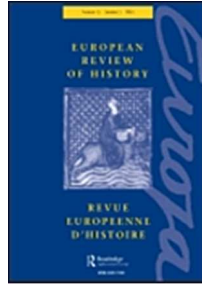
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**The Possibilities and Pitfalls of A Jewish Cosmopolitanism.  
Reading Natan Sznajder through Russian-Jewish Writer  
Olga Grjasnowa's German-language Novel *Der Russe ist  
einer, der Birken liebt* (All Russians Love Birch Trees)**

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3       **The Possibilities and Pitfalls of A Jewish Cosmopolitanism. Reading Natan Sznai**  
4       **der through Russian-Jewish Writer Olga Grjasnowa's German-language Novel *Der Russe***  
5       ***ist einer, der Birken liebt* (All Russians Love Birch Trees)**  
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13       **A Jewish Cosmopolitanism?**  
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16       In *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order* (2011), Israeli sociologist Natan Sznai  
17       der shows how Jewish thinkers before and after the Holocaust have advanced universalist ideas  
18       der out of their particularist Jewish identities, connecting the Jewish experience to contemporary  
19       der cosmopolitan concerns such as Human Rights, genocide prevention, and international justice.  
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21       In the opening section of this article, we examine Sznai's elaboration of a historically-  
22       der grounded and implicitly diasporic 'Jewish cosmopolitanism' as a response to what he sees as  
23       der the increasing Jewish ethno-nationalism of the state of Israel. Next, we turn to Russian-  
24       der Jewish writer Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (All Russians Love  
25       der Birch Trees, 2012). Like Sznai's *Jewish Memory*, Grjasnowa's German-language novel  
26       der posits a Jewish cosmopolitanism that insists upon the 'Jewishness' of the Holocaust *and* its  
27       der universal significance, but this work of fiction also probes the limitations of a  
28       der cosmopolitanism that aims to channel Jewish trauma into a principled solidarity with others.  
29       der Finally, we ask whether Sznai's 'Jewish cosmopolitanism' can avoid the pitfalls of  
30       der undifferentiated sentimentality and self-indulgence (or self-consolation), or avoid a  
31       der potentially fraught stylization of Jews as 'exemplary'.  
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49       In late 2014, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu provoked international  
50       der consternation, and not insignificant domestic concern, when he forwarded to the Knesset a  
51       der bill to introduce a definition of Israel as the 'national state of the Jewish people' into the  
52       der constitution. For Netanyahu's critics, including two of his coalition partners, the proposed  
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3 legislation contradicted the ideal prominently featured in Israel's Declaration of  
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5 Independence of 1948, namely the new state's duty to 'ensure complete equality of social and  
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7 political rights to all its inhabitants'. It appeared that Netanyahu was determined to set aside  
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9 Israel's foundational rhetorical commitment to cosmopolitan principles—which had in any  
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11 case always clashed with the everyday reality of discrimination against its Arab citizens—in  
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13 favour of an uncompromising assertion of Jewish ethno-nationalism. For German-Jewish  
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15 commentator Micha Brumlik, Netanyahu's reframing of Israel's purpose could only end in  
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17 catastrophe, not only for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians seeking to realize *their* national  
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19 aspirations, but also for Jews. It would incite the biggest crisis since the Holocaust, as Jews in  
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21 the diaspora—committed to their Jewishness as an expression of universalist values—would  
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23 reject Israeli chauvinism as no better than any other expression of aggressive particularism.<sup>1</sup>  
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28 Brumlik, of course, is not the only thinker to have observed the tension between  
29  
30 universalism and particularism in Jewish existence, especially in the diaspora, and to argue  
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32 that Jewishness loses its prophetic, universalist significance when it sacrifices the former for  
33  
34 the sake of the latter. Promoting a Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) in the late eighteenth  
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36 century, Moses Mendelssohn emphasised Judaism's universalist *ethical* underpinning, shared  
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38 with the other Abrahamic faiths—reason, tolerance, love—as an indispensable counterpart to  
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40 the Jewish people's special covenant with God, forged through revelation. Indeed, Jewish  
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42 enlighteners (*maskilim*) emphasised the humanistic aspects of Judaism while depicting Jews  
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44 in the diaspora as mediators between the particular and the universal.<sup>2</sup> In more recent times,  
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46 American scholar and public intellectual Alan Wolfe, in his provocatively titled (and hotly  
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48 debated) book *At Home in Exile. Why Diaspora is Good for the Jews* (2014), has argued that  
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50 'in a world in which nation-states are primarily concerned with protecting their own,  
51  
52 however, the diaspora remains the place where a universalistic Judaism will survive best'.<sup>3</sup>  
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56 (Here, Wolfe's *At Home in Exile* to some extent recalls Juri Slezkine's 2004 *The Jewish*  
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3 *Century*, which prefers a cosmopolitan nomadism for Jews to the normalising tendencies of  
4 the nation-state Israel). Jews in the diaspora, Wolfe suggests, are not only charged with  
5 preserving the universalist impulse intrinsic to Judaism, at risk of being extinguished in  
6 Israel as it 'turns to the right' (*HE*, 7). It seems that they are also—in the wake of 9/11 and  
7 the clamorous claims of 'national security'—charged with preserving universalism itself.

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15 Wolfe's allusion to the signal assertiveness of nation-states in the present day—  
16 focussed on their citizens' physical protection, often to the detriment of their liberties, and on  
17 the targetted (and not so targetted) elimination of perceived threats—reminds us of why the  
18 debate on universalism and particularism has become so vital, and not only for Jews in Israel  
19 and in the diaspora. People across the world are today faced today with the bewildering  
20 simultaneity of 1) globalization, that is, the massively intensified flow of people, products,  
21 and ideas across frontiers resulting from the post-Cold War liberalisation of trade and the  
22 communications revolution; 2) the emergence of what German sociologist Ulrich Beck terms  
23 the 'world risk society', or the reality that ethnic conflict, civil war, refugee crises, mass  
24 migration, terrorism, climate change, and other symptoms of global instability, pay no heed  
25 to borders; and 3) the renewed emphasis on the agency of the nation-state and on (national,  
26 ethnic, religious) identity within this new global fluidity. Being both more dependent on one  
27 another and yet also hyperaware of the differences that exist (or are created) between us—  
28 privileged or marginalised; citizen or non-citizen; Christian, Muslim or Jew—we are  
29 conscious, however dimly, that the question of how we can live *together* defines our age.

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48 For scholars working across philosophy, political science, sociology, and cultural  
49 studies, this question has prompted a reinvented engagement with cosmopolitanism, whether  
50 in its Classical formulation (Diogenes the Cynic, the Stoics), its Enlightenment elaboration by  
51 (mainly German) eighteenth-century thinkers such as Kant, Lessing, and Herder, or in  
52 relation to (say) contemporary Human Rights discourse and international law (Benhabib),  
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3 supranational federations (Habermas, Beck, Held), or a 'vernacular' or 'discrepant'  
4  
5 postcolonial cosmopolitanism (Bhabha, Clifford). At its core, this academic concern with  
6  
7 cosmopolitanism responds to an historically contingent but no less urgent, real-life need to  
8  
9 find ways to deal equitably—that is, ethically—with others in a world characterized by  
10  
11 increased proximity and increased conflict while sustaining what we feel defines *us*. Most  
12  
13 explicitly attempting to resolve the apparent conflict between the (moral, political and  
14  
15 ethical) imperatives of universalism and the (emotional, identificatory and motivational)  
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17 appeals of particularism—especially in the aftermath of 9/11 and the war on terror—Martha  
18  
19 Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah have proposed a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' in which  
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21 allegiance to people closest to us (or to a nation) underpins our responsibility towards global  
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23 'others'.  
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28 A concern with the tension between universalism and particularism is—today—thus  
29  
30 not only a matter for diaspora Jews seeking to reconcile their identity as a 'nation' with their  
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32 lived reality as a globally dispersed minority. Yet the fact that 'the Jew' has for centuries  
33  
34 been constructed as a trope for precisely this tension—and for cosmopolitanism, defined  
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36 positively (mobile, multilingual, worldly) or negatively (placeless, unpatriotic, modern)—  
37  
38 means, as Cathy Gelbin and Sander Gilman argue, that even as Jews have 'largely vanished  
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40 from the debate about cosmopolitanism [they] remain the palimpsest of academic discourse'.<sup>4</sup>  
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43 Benhabib often refers to her Sephardic Jewish heritage in Turkey,<sup>5</sup> and allusions to the  
44  
45 scapegoating of 'rootless cosmopolitan' Jews abound in Beck's work (e.g. *Cosmopolitan*  
46  
47 *Vision*, 2006, and *Cosmopolitan Europe*, 2007), whereas for Bhabha Jewishness even appears  
48  
49 to embody a kind of essential(ist) cosmopolitanism: 'a form of historical and racial *in-*  
50  
51 *betweenness*'.<sup>6</sup>  
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55 Israeli sociologist Natan Sznaider goes a step further. Sznaider, who was born in  
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57 Germany to Polish Holocaust survivors and moved to Israel aged 20, presents 'the Jewish  
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3 condition' not simply as a trope for the tension between universalism and particularism—now  
4 the defining feature of the global present—but (potentially, at least) as an *exemplary*  
5 cosmopolitan resolution of this tension. In *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order*  
6 (2011), a compelling case is made for the legitimacy (and value) of particularity—a  
7 distinctively Jewish voice—*within* the universalist aspirations of cosmopolitanism. Above all,  
8 however, Sznajder's suggestion that Jews can continue to assert, and indeed insist on, their  
9 specificity even as they circulate as citizens of the world is even more ambitious than the  
10 rooted cosmopolitanism championed by Nussbaum and Appiah. In *Jewish Memory and the*  
11 *Cosmopolitan Order*, Jews move from being a mere referent (or even commonplace) within  
12 debates on cosmopolitanism—an archetypal case study—to a source of inspiration. 'Jewish  
13 cosmopolitanism', Sznajder argues, may (come to) be seen as a 'global civilising force'—'It  
14 does not wait passively for redemption but provides a politics of redemption'.<sup>7</sup>

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30 Sznajder echoes Wolfe in arguing that 'today Jewish cosmopolitanism is in danger of  
31 disappearing' as it is 'swallowed up by an increasingly aggressive Jewish ethnic nationalism'  
32 (*JM*, 147), and he too sees this as a potentially catastrophic cause of estrangement between  
33 Israel and Jews in the diaspora. But for Sznajder, the revival of Jewish cosmopolitanism is  
34 not only something to be wished for, a universalism to counter the retreat within the borders  
35 of the nation. It also implies something akin to a messianic imperative to save the world.

### 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 **Jewish Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitan Memory**

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49 But what is Jewish cosmopolitanism—and what makes it so special? For Sznajder, the  
50 answer to this question derives from his re-reading of Hannah Arendt.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, *Jewish*  
51 *Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order* both pays homage to this influential German-Jewish  
52 philosopher who fled the Nazis for the United States and asserts her continued, indeed  
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3 deepened significance, for contemporary global politics. ‘The choice of Arendt’, Sznajder  
4  
5 insists, ‘is not arbitrary. Perhaps more than that of any other thinker of the twentieth century,  
6  
7 the urgency of her writing on totalitarianism, critical judgment, and evil remains relevant  
8  
9 today’ (*JM*, 2). Certainly, it is no coincidence that sociologists, political theorists, and  
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11 philosophers have (re)turned to Arendt to help them think through anew the banality of  
12  
13 violence and indiscriminate killing, the relationship between political thought and political  
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15 action—how sentiment becomes deed, and what inspires democratic in preference to  
16  
17 destructive acts—and how we might cultivate a proper ‘amor mundi’ (love of the world,  
18  
19 which was Arendt’s initial choice of title for her 1958 book *The Human Condition*).  
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21 Benhabib, for example, refers often to Arendt in her 2004 Berkeley Tanner lectures, released  
22  
23 as *Another Cosmopolitanism*, and in 2010 she published a volume *Politics in Dark Times:  
24  
25 Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, with contributions by distinguished thinkers on Arendt’s  
26  
27 work on freedom, equality and responsibility, the nation state, the failure of politics, and evil.  
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32 Sznajder’s specific interest, however, is in Arendt’s thinking about Jewishness, and in  
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34 her elaboration of the relationship between Jewishness and worldliness. To this extent, we  
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36 can surmise that Sznajder’s ambition is to fill with *particular* content Arendt’s universalising  
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38 musings on ‘world-building’, for instance in *The Human Condition*, in which she famously  
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40 declares that the world is ‘a human artefact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as affairs  
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42 which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together’, continuing:  
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49 To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between  
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51 those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around  
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53 it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.<sup>9</sup>  
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3 Arendt describes here how a world is created in common in the spaces *between* men (and  
4 women) as they bring to its construction particular experiences that intersect with but also  
5 diverge from others’—particularism *and* universalism, or a rooted cosmopolitanism,  
6 therefore. Sznajder’s concern is with Arendt’s elaboration of which specifically *Jewish*  
7 experiences might add something to this world-building. ‘It is my intention’, he notes, ‘to  
8 show how she constantly navigated between universalism and particularism through her  
9 understanding of political judgment, the revolutionary tradition, federal republicanism, and  
10 other issues she examined through the prism of the Jewish fate’ (*JM*, 3-4).

21 In *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order*, Sznajder shows that Arendt—  
22 typically considered a ‘secular thinker whose relationship to Jewish thought was one of  
23 critical distance’ (*JM*, 3)—was profoundly committed to translating ‘some rather unpolitical  
24 [Jewish] thinking into political action’ (*JM*, 22). In chapters on Arendt’s relationship with,  
25 transmission of, and essays on Kafka, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Moritz  
26 Goldstein, Simon Dubnow, and Salo Baron, Sznajder reveals how Arendt sought to  
27 universalise from (without denying the specificity of) these *Jewish* writers and intellectuals to  
28 intervene in broader contemporary debates on totalitarianism, liberty, and Human Rights. At  
29 the same time, Sznajder’s own intellectual loyalty, which he honours through his detailed  
30 reevaluation of Arendt’s indebtedness to the same individual, is most likely ultimately owed  
31 to Benjamin. Certainly, the title *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order* hints at this  
32 allegiance. Benjamin—far more readily than Arendt—is associated with particular Jewish  
33 (messianic) traditions of memory-work related to disruption and dispersal, *tikkun olam*  
34 (‘repairing the world’, deriving from medieval Jewish mysticism), and hoped-for redemption,  
35 and the book’s unexpected twist will be to align the Arendt, the resolutely political thinker,  
36 with this metaphysical thinking. More obviously, the introduction begins with a quotation  
37 from a letter Benjamin once wrote to his Zionist friend Ludwig Strauss that effectively sums  
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3 up Sznajder's postulation of the indispensability of a Jewish cosmopolitanism: 'It would be  
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5 bad for Europe if the cultural energies of the Jews were to leave it' (*JM*, 1).  
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8 Arendt is recast as a Benjaminian figure. The urgency to repair history drives her  
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10 dedication to a universalist ideal of Human Rights yet—in Sznajder's reading—this  
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12 cosmopolitan commitment does not conflict with Jewish particularism but is infused by it.  
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14 History does not preclude cosmopolitanism—the particular historical experience of this or  
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16 that group need not disrupt universalism or be dissolved within it—for it is possible to grasp  
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18 that which is generalisable while also insisting on what is specific. Arendt, Sznajder claims,  
19  
20 exemplifies 'the cosmopolitan potential' of the *Jewish* experience, 'which straddles the  
21  
22 interstices of universal identifications and particular attachments' (*JM*, 5).  
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26 Here it is important to emphasise that for Sznajder (and, he argues, for Arendt)  
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28 'history' and 'experience' are not general terms denoting some generalised state in which  
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30 Jews have lived 'in the past'—exile, dispersion, and diaspora. Rather, he is talking about  
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32 *events*, and, of course, for the most part about one event (or assemblage of events) in  
33  
34 particular, namely the Holocaust. This distinction is vital, since it connotes just how radical  
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36 Sznajder believes Arendt to have been. In *At Home in Exile*, Alan Wolfe rightly prognoses  
37  
38 that 'particularism's appeal in the wake of both the Holocaust and the birth of Israel [...] was  
39  
40 all but inevitable' (*HE*, 72), and he ends with an impassioned plea to focus less on this *event*  
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42 and more on the existential condition of Jewish existence through two millennia, namely  
43  
44 exile: 'But the events of the 1930s and the 1940s are not the only events constituting Jewish  
45  
46 memory [...] By bringing back to life the universalist ideals developed during their long  
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48 residency in exile, a new generation of Jews can offer the best hope for a revival of a Jewish  
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50 future' (*HE*, 215). For Sznajder, on the other hand, Arendt's insistence on the Holocaust as a  
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52 specifically Jewish experience *and* an injunction to think in universalist terms not only  
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54 precludes its appropriation as the foundation stone of Israeli ethno-nationalism. It also  
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3 suggests that the Holocaust is in fact the only sustainable basis for a truly *situated* Jewish  
4 cosmopolitanism—a Jewish cosmopolitanism that is locatable in time and space rather than  
5 one that can seem ahistorically diffuse. (As, indeed, it does in Wolfe’s formulation). In brief,  
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suggests that the Holocaust is in fact the only sustainable basis for a truly *situated* Jewish cosmopolitanism—a Jewish cosmopolitanism that is locatable in time and space rather than one that can seem ahistorically diffuse. (As, indeed, it does in Wolfe’s formulation). In brief, Sznajder asks us to take seriously—and to place the appropriate emphases within—Arendt’s oft-cited criticism of the Jerusalem court in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) that it failed to recognise that the Nazi genocide was a ‘crime against Humanity, perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people, and that only the choice of victims, not the nature of the crime, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism’ (cited in *JM*, 119).

Sznajder’s reading of Hannah Arendt in *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order* is primarily intended to reclaim the Holocaust from the particularist claims of Israeli nationalism. Yet it most likely also responds to criticism levelled (perhaps unfairly) against Sznajder’s earlier book, written with Daniel Levy, *The Holocaust and Memory in The Global Age* (2007; originally in German, 2001), namely that his (and Levy’s) prognosis of a ‘cosmopolitan memory’ of the Holocaust de-emphasises its Jewishness in favour of its universal significance. In fact, this may be the purpose of Sznajder’s replaying, in *Jewish Memory*, of Arendt’s exchanges with Hans Magnus Enzensberger in the mid-1960s, when she contradicted his attempt to read her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as demonstrating that the Holocaust was *only* about the destructiveness of capitalist modernity. For Sznajder, Arendt’s retort to Enzensberger exemplifies that Jewish memory is not at odds with cosmopolitan memory. It is an instantiation of cosmopolitan memory that transmits Jews’ particular implication in events of world-historical dimension and universal significance.

Cosmopolitan memory, as described by Sznajder and Levy in *The Holocaust and Memory in The Global Age*, emerges from the ‘historical link between memories of the Holocaust and the emergence of a moral consensus about human rights’.<sup>10</sup> It encompasses the by-now global acknowledgment of the enormity of the Holocaust and its role in mobilising

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3 confrontations with other atrocities. Cosmopolitan memory is akin to what Michael Rothberg  
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5 calls multi-directional memory—the circulation of Holocaust motifs through other traumatic  
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7 pasts (and presents)—but the claim made for it is larger, namely that it connects injustice  
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9 everywhere not just to the Holocaust as a crime perpetrated, as Arendt says, upon the body of  
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11 the Jews, but also to its universal significance as the basis of contemporary ethics. In the post  
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13 9/11 era, Sznajder and Levy argue in their next book—bearing the programmatic title *Human*  
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15 *Rights and Memory*—‘memories of past abuses [...] drive human rights remedies and have  
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17 further raised the cost of committing such abuses’.<sup>11</sup> The Holocaust, it is implied, is in this  
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19 context always the ‘originary memory’. Jewish memory—and Jewish cosmopolitanism—is  
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21 not only a *particular* form of cosmopolitan memory, therefore. It is also a *privileged* form,  
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23 insofar as it transmits the Holocaust as the foundational moment of contemporary Human  
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25 Rights discourse and—to reiterate Sznajder’s claim in *Jewish Memory*—insofar as it ‘does  
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27 not wait passively for redemption but provides a politics of redemption’ (*JM*, 142).

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32 However, it should be apparent from the present analysis that Jewish  
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34 cosmopolitanism—rooted in the existential experience of exile, dispersion, and diaspora, but  
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36 also concretely in the historical singularity of the Holocaust—is not simply a Jewish bequest  
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38 to humankind *in universum*. As repeatedly suggested above, it also defines a pluralistic  
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40 Jewish identity to counter the ‘Jewish ethnic nationalism’ that Sznajder (with others) sees as  
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42 increasingly dominant in today’s Israel (*JM*, 147). But more than this—and going beyond  
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44 longstanding debates on an Israeli centre versus a diasporic periphery<sup>12</sup>—we might now also  
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46 wonder whether the *exceptional* quality of the Jewish experience within the contemporary re-  
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48 framing of cosmopolitanism as a call-to-action emerging from *memory* implies the  
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50 exceptionalism of Jewish identity itself. What does it mean for a modern Jewish identity to  
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52 have this representative, even exemplary status? And we might wonder what whether this  
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54 Jewish exceptionalism—suggesting Jewish mediation between the particular and the  
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3 universal but also recalling a long history of negative as well as positive conceptualisations of  
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5 'Jewish chosenness'—might be a less unproblematic solution to the cosmopolitan challenge  
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7 of our age than, in Sznajder's compelling prose, it might at first appear.  
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10 In the closing chapter of *Jewish Memory*, Sznajder gives a brief account of the  
11  
12 twentieth-century graphic artist Bruno Schulz (born 1892 in the Drohobych, at the time part  
13  
14 of the Austro-Hungarian empire, later Poland, occupied first by the Soviets then the Nazis,  
15  
16 and after 1990 belonging to the Ukraine). His purpose is to show something of the Jewish  
17  
18 pluralism that he has described. Schulz wrote in Polish, was fluent in German, and knew  
19  
20 some Yiddish and Hebrew (*JM*, 142-3). But it is also to relate how Schulz's work has been  
21  
22 (mis)appropriated, by different individuals and entities, always as *either* particular *or*  
23  
24 universal but never both. Schulz, Sznajder recounts, was forced to paint the walls of the home  
25  
26 of the SS officer Felix Landau with scenes from German fairy tales—in 2001, the mural was  
27  
28 discovered by a German documentary filmmaker, Benjamin Geisler, but then shortly  
29  
30 afterwards removed to Israel, to Yad Vashem. For Sznajder, Yad Vashem's emphasis on the  
31  
32 Jewish particularity of Schulz's life and fate (he was murdered because he was Jewish), is as  
33  
34 misguided as Geisler's desire to universalise (of de-ethnicise) the Holocaust victim as 'simply  
35  
36 Bruno Schulz' (Geisler in interview with Celestine Bohler; cited in *JM*, 145) within what—in  
37  
38 his book *Shattered Spaces* and in a essay in this special edition—Michael Meng terms  
39  
40 'redemptive cosmopolitanism'. (Speaking specifically about modern-day Germany, Jack  
41  
42 Zipes notes the 'contemporary German fascination for things Jewish' and Karen Remmler an  
43  
44 'imagined cosmopolitanism that would return Germany to a sense of 'normalcy'<sup>13</sup>). The  
45  
46 interplay of particularism *and* universalism, Sznajder concludes, is the only perspective from  
47  
48 which a 'realistic cosmopolitanism' can be developed. This is the lesson to be learnt not only  
49  
50 from Arendt, but also even from more manifestly 'Jewish' twentieth-century figures such as  
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52 Scholem, Feuchtwanger, Baron, Schulz and Kafka (*JM*, 146).  
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3 In what follows, we examine a more recent imaginative work, Olga Grjasnowa's 2012  
4 novel *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (All Russians Love Birch Trees), in order to  
5 further test Sznajder's hypothesis, as it were. On the one hand, Grjasnowa embodies the re-  
6 emergence—in Germany of all places—of significant centres of Jewish life in Europe, with  
7 the cultural and linguistic plurality that that implied before the Holocaust. This increasingly  
8 high-profile young writer, born 1984, is one of about 200 000 'Kontingent-Juden' (so-named  
9 in German bureaucratese: quota Jews) who were permitted from the early 1990s to immigrate  
10 from the former Soviet Union until restrictions were imposed in 2005,<sup>14</sup> and she speaks  
11 Russian and some Azeri (she grew up as part of the Russian minority in Azerbaijan) and  
12 chooses to write in German. On the other hand, even as it both exemplifies this transnational  
13 perspective and largely reproduces Sznajder's ideal of a Jewish cosmopolitanism rooted in  
14 the particular memory of the Holocaust, *Der Russe* (most likely intentionally) may also reveal  
15 the continued difficulty of translating this ideal into a way of living.  
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### 36 *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*

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38 Writing in 2002, Leslie Morris and Karen Remmler name Katja Behrens, Maxim Biller,  
39 Esther Dischereit and Barbara Honigmann as 'only four of a growing number of second-  
40 generation and, more recently, third-generation writers for whom the memory of the Shoah  
41 plays a major role in the self-understanding as Jewish writers living in Germany'.<sup>15</sup> A little  
42 more than a decade later, this timely avowal of a renaissance of German-language fiction by  
43 self-identified Jewish authors following the end of the Cold War and German unification is in  
44 need of some updating. First, the number of authors with a Jewish background has continued  
45 to increase, as a result of the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union but also of Jewish  
46 immigration—often a second or third relocation—from elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the  
47 United States, and even Israel. (Second-generation writer Doron Rabinovici moved as a child  
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3 from Israel to Austria already in 1964, as did Rafael Seligman to Germany in 1957). Vladimir  
4  
5 Vertlib, for example, is a multiple migrant of Russian-Jewish background. Born in Leningrad  
6  
7 in 1966, Vertlib's family moved first to Israel, next to Austria, Italy and Austria again, then  
8  
9 Italy (again), the Netherlands, and Israel once more, the United States and—acquiring  
10  
11 citizenship—back to Austria. His novels *Abschiebung* [Deportation, 1995] and  
12  
13 *Zwischenstationen* [Interim stations, 1999] are largely based on his family's travels.<sup>16</sup>  
14  
15 Similarly, Irene Dische, the daughter of Jewish refugees 'returned' to Germany from her  
16  
17 parents' adopted country, the United States, and now publishes in both English and German.  
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21         Second, the marked (and to-be-expected) concern of first- and second-generation  
22  
23 writers with the Holocaust, and with the incongruity of Jewish *life* in Germany after the  
24  
25 Shoah, has attenuated somewhat in the work of the third generation. On the one hand, this has  
26  
27 to do with the passing of time. But it may also have to do with the fact that, especially for  
28  
29 younger Jewish writers from the former Soviet Union, the Holocaust seems less salient than  
30  
31 more recent persecution. As Y. Michal Bodemann and Olena Bagno explain: 'While other  
32  
33 Jews in Germany experience the Second World War as the great trauma, this is not  
34  
35 necessarily so for the Russian Jews; for them, present-day Russian anti-Semitism and earlier  
36  
37 the Gulag, have often been the greater traumatic experience'.<sup>17</sup> **To the extent that Jews in the**  
38  
39 **Soviet Union were largely spared from the Holocaust, authors of Russian-Jewish extraction**  
40  
41 **may tend to focus more on Soviet persecution and prejudice, or—in ways which remain**  
42  
43 **taboo for other Jewish writers in German—even to draw parallels between the Nazi and**  
44  
45 **Soviet dictatorships.** (Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* / The  
46  
47 Extraordinary Memory of Rosa Masur, from 2001, recounts Stalin's anti-Jewish purges *and*  
48  
49 Germans' current exoticisation of the Jewish immigrants whose ancestors they once  
50  
51 victimised).<sup>18</sup> Third, and related to this more indirect relationship to the Holocaust, writers of  
52  
53 this new generation now set their own histories in the context of other minorities' experiences  
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3 of dislocation and marginalisation, especially in the present day. The Russian-Jewish  
4 immigrant Wladimir Kaminer, for example, is famous for his mocking of Germans'  
5 stereotyping of their *ausländische Mitbürger* (foreign co-citizens)—also implied in  
6  
7 Grjasnowa's parodic title 'All Russians Love Birch Trees'—whereas Julya Rabinowich's *Die*  
8  
9 *Erdfresserin* (The Woman Who Eats Dirt, 2012) thematises the trafficking of women across  
10  
11 borders and the persecution of undocumented migrants.<sup>19</sup>  
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17 Third-generation writers, particularly from the former Soviet Union, are thus above  
18  
19 all concerned with the often harsh reality of immigration to Germany. Lena Gorelik's *Meine*  
20  
21 *weißen Nächte* (My White Nights, 2004) and Alina Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* (2008; *Broken*  
22  
23 *Glass Park*, 2010), for instance, relate the difficulties that both Jewish *and* non-Jewish  
24  
25 migrants encounter in gaining employment, decent housing, and social acceptance.<sup>20</sup> To this  
26  
27 extent, these novels reflect both the specific 'stagnating integration process' of Russian-  
28  
29 Jewish immigrants to Germany, as Schoeps and Glöckner describe it,<sup>21</sup> and the wider  
30  
31 emergence of what Azade Seyhan defines as 'paranational communities', that is groups 'that  
32  
33 exist within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain  
34  
35 culturally or linguistically distanced from them and, in some instances, are estranged from  
36  
37 both the home and the host culture'.<sup>22</sup> In the work of Kaminer, Rabinowich, Gorelik, and  
38  
39 Bronsky, as in Grjasnowa and fellow Russian-Jewish writers Vladimir Vertlib and Katja  
40  
41 Petrowskaja, protagonists with Russian(-Jewish) backgrounds interact almost always only  
42  
43 with other recent migrants, or with second- or third-generation Turkish-Germans, intensifying  
44  
45 the 'vague linkage between "things Jewish" and things "Turkish"' that Leslie Adelson  
46  
47 identified in 2000.<sup>23</sup> (Maxim Biller's 2003 *Esra* makes this linkage explicit,<sup>24</sup> as does the  
48  
49 1998 novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft / Dangerous Relation* by Turkish-German writer  
50  
51 Zafer Senocak).<sup>25</sup> **To this extent at least, Russian-Jewish writers in German—and Turkish-**  
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3 German writers—engage with multiculturalism as a given social reality in the today's Federal  
4  
5 Republic of Germany.  
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7  
8 Yet 'Jewishness' is nevertheless still more than just another ethnic marker. In works  
9  
10 by Jewish *and* non-Jewish writers, Jewishness suggests both the deterritorialising effect of  
11  
12 contemporary transnationalism—'the ideal of fixed territories of culture', Regina Römhild  
13  
14 argues, is 'a fiction, and mobility becomes the common ground for the proliferation of  
15  
16 diasporic life-worlds, cultures and identities'<sup>26</sup>—and the redemptive potential of  
17  
18 cosmopolitan memory. The Holocaust, or textual palimpsests of the Holocaust,<sup>27</sup> intervenes  
19  
20 into such narratives to urge empathetic identification with (other) historical trauma as well as  
21  
22 the disruptions of the present.<sup>28</sup> In Turkish-German Feridun Zaimoglu's *Hinterland* (2009),  
23  
24 the unexpected (even uncanny) appearance of orthodox Jews at the railway station in  
25  
26 Bratislava encapsulates both the forced migrations of the Soviet, Ottoman *and* Nazi empires  
27  
28 thematised throughout the novel and the dis- and relocations of globalisation today:  
29  
30 'Dutzende von orthodoxen Juden drängelten sich auf dem Bahnsteig, woher kamen sie,  
31  
32 wohin gingen sie, wollten sie alle etwa in den Zug steigen?'<sup>29</sup> (Dozens of orthodox Jews  
33  
34 were pushing on the platform, where did they all come from, where were they going, did they  
35  
36 really all want to get into the train?). At the same time, the fact that these Jews are willingly  
37  
38 boarding a train—rather than being forced into one—may offer hope that historical trauma  
39  
40 can be overcome, and that mobility might cause a cosmopolitan subversion of borders.  
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46 In Grjasnowa's *Der Russe*, it appears that this subversion of the nation has already  
47  
48 taken place. Mascha, the novel's Russian-Jewish protagonist, associates almost exclusively  
49  
50 with other migrants. The sole significant exception is her German boyfriend Elias, whose  
51  
52 'hohe Wangenknochen, blaugraue Augen und dunkle Wimpern' (high cheek bones, blue-grey  
53  
54 eyes and dark eyelashes) mark *him* out as the 'exotic other'—for Mascha's mother, in a  
55  
56 striking inversion of age-old stereotypes of Jews, his strange beauty and innate ability to  
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3 please others, embody his 'Hochstaplerzüge' (imposter's characteristics), for which,  
4  
5 however, she cannot help but love him.<sup>30</sup> And even Elias is from the former German  
6  
7 Democratic Republic, a place 'to the east' that is perceived by Mascha and her migrant  
8  
9 friends as backward and provincial (and racist). To this extent, Elias too might be  
10  
11 considered a migrant within the post-unification Federal Republic. His efforts to research  
12  
13 and understand Mascha's pre-migration history in Azerbaijan in the months before his  
14  
15 untimely death (*DR*, 150)—he dies in hospital some time after he breaks his femur—may  
16  
17 be motivated by a desire to become part of this transnational solidarity, just as her  
18  
19 melancholic fixation on him after he has gone may suggest her desire to include him,  
20  
21 posthumously at least, and to recognise him not just as a 'German' but as a fellow exile  
22  
23 with his own story. Before Elias's death, in fact, their relationship was tense, in part on  
24  
25 account of their different positioning in relation to current debates on people with a  
26  
27 'Migrationshintergrund' (migration background) and Germany's evolution into a society  
28  
29 that is not so much multicultural as 'postmigrantisch'  
30  
31 (postmigrant; *DR*, 12).

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37 Germany exists only as a deterritorialised space in which the displaced and the  
38  
39 dispossessed reassemble and share memories of trauma. Mascha's ex-boyfriend Sami  
40  
41 (for whom she longs throughout the novel, even as she mourns Elias too) was born in  
42  
43 Beirut during the civil war; Cem is Turkish-German and a homosexual; and the Kurdish  
44  
45 refugee Sibel is scarred across her body from the beatings inflicted by her father and  
46  
47 older brother. Sibel was Mascha's first lesbian affair, and, here again, Mascha is prone to  
48  
49 melancholic fixation. In each case, a traumatic past predicts Mascha's empathetic  
50  
51 identification, even over-identification, with her fellow migrants, and also with Elias.  
52  
53 Her visits following Elias's death to his family home in east Germany are most likely a  
54  
55 belated acknowledgment of the dislocation he suffered in fleeing both the beatings he  
56  
57 had received from his alcoholic father and, more generally, the constraints of his east  
58  
59 German background (*DR*, 90).  
60

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3 Mascha's own traumatic memory is delayed, even displaced, however. And it is not  
4 the foundational Jewish memory that, following Sznajder, we might expect to motivate the  
5 empathetic investment that she demonstrates through her readiness to prompt her fellow  
6 migrants to recount the abuses they have suffered. The past that Mascha struggles to speak  
7 of—she cannot tell Elias, even when he asks directly—is not the Holocaust. It is the violent  
8 clashes between ethnic Armenians and Azeris in Azerbaijan in 1992, and specifically—the  
9 reader is to surmise—the brutal expulsion of Armenians in retaliation for the Khojaly  
10 massacre of 25–26 February, when 161 Azerbaijani civilians were killed in the Armenian-  
11 majority Azerbaijani enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Throughout the novel, Mascha is  
12 haunted by the image of the body of a young woman in a light-blue underskirt lying before  
13 her 'mit verdrehten Beinen und blutenden Unterleib' (legs twisted, with bleeding abdomen;  
14 *DR*, 107).

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30 Yet Mascha's horrific experiences in Baku in 1992 *do* ultimately relate to the  
31 Holocaust. Just as Sami, Cem, Sibel, and Elias prompt Mascha's delayed confrontation with  
32 her own horrific experiences in Baku in 1992—enabling their cosmopolitan solidarity—so  
33 does Mascha's account as a Jewish witness to a pogrom inflicted on her Armenian  
34 neighbours, prompt her (re-)telling of her grandmother's narrow escape from the Germans. In  
35 the novel's closing pages, Mascha finally arrives at the 'original trauma' of the Holocaust:  
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46  
47 Weißt du, in meiner Kindheit gab es einen geackten Koffer zu Hause, für den  
48 Fall der Fälle. In unserem Fall war es die ehemalige Aktentasche meines  
49 Großvaters, und darin waren frische Unterhosen, Familienfotos, Silberlöffel und  
50 Goldkronen, das Kapital, das sie unter dem kommunistischen Regime  
51 akkumulieren konnten. Die Armenier waren schon lange aus der Stadt fortgejagt  
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3 worden, und nicht wenige von ihnen wurden exekutiert. Meine Oma, die die  
4 Shoah... (DR, 276).  
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10 (You know, in my childhood there was a packed suitcase at home, just in case. In  
11 our hosue, it was my grandfather's old briefcase, with fresh underwear, family  
12 photos, silver spoons and gold crowns, that capital that they were able to  
13 accumulate under the communist regime. The Armenians had long been chased  
14 out of the city, and not a few were executed. My grandma, the Shoah...)  
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25 Mascha's grandmother had given refuge to fleeing Armenians (DR, 282), for which she was  
26 denounced by neighbours, most likely forcing the family's migration. What *she* takes from  
27 the Holocaust, therefore, is not a particularist narrative of Jewish victimisation but rather a  
28 universalist obligation to offer sanctuary. Here, Grjasnowa's novel points beyond the mere  
29 depiction of multiculturalism as a contemporary social reality, or even as an inherently  
30 limited ideal of mutual respect between communities living alongside or even separately from  
31 one another, and gestures toward *cosmopolitanism*. In contrast to Kant's famous but  
32 somewhat limited definition of hospitality as the essence of 'cosmopolitan right' in *Perpetual  
33 Peace* (1795)—'the right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility because he has arrived  
34 on the land of another'<sup>31</sup>—, moreover, we glimpse a modern understanding of  
35 cosmopolitanism as universal Human Rights. This cosmopolitan ideal extends beyond the  
36 absence of molestation to proactive protection and, as important, to empathetic identification  
37 with traumatised others based on a universalised mobilisation of Jewish memory.  
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54 Reading back through the novel from the perspective of its conclusion, we surmise  
55 that Mascha's Jewish memory—distilled from her grandmother's knowledge of the  
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3 Holocaust, as it were—motivates her investment in the traumatic experiences of others.  
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5 Above all, her fluid (bi-)sexuality connotes not only the undermining of the heteronormative  
6  
7 nation. In this, she joins many other ‘unsettling’ transnational protagonists in contemporary  
8  
9 German-language literature, who, in their turn, frequently often ‘typed’ as Jewish, to the  
10  
11 extent that Jews have long been characterised as sexually *and* ‘nationally’ deviant.<sup>32</sup> Her  
12  
13 alternating attraction for both men and women also additionally intimates her strikingly  
14  
15 embodied desire to *know* the other, even as she herself finds it difficult to tell of her  
16  
17 experiences in Azerbaijan. (The traumatic memories of others ‘screen’ her memories of  
18  
19 Azerbaijan, just as these memories screen her grandmother’s memories of the Holocaust).  
20  
21  
22 Indeed, more or less the only character with whom she ‘just’ has sex, without any subsequent  
23  
24 desire for emotional intimacy, is the Israeli Ori, who is trauma-free and a staunch defender of  
25  
26 his country’s defence of its national(ist) aspirations. Mascha’s sustained sexual intimacy with  
27  
28 his sister Tal—easily accepted by Ori, who seems to recognise that he does not have a ‘story’  
29  
30 to engage Mascha—may have to do with the fact that Tal felt compelled to abandon her  
31  
32 daughter following the breakdown of her relationship, and with Tal’s ‘scandalous’ activism  
33  
34 on behalf of Palestinian victims of the Israeli response to the second Intifada.  
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39         Parts three and four of the novel are set in Israel and the West Bank. On completion of  
40  
41 her advanced qualification in interpreting, Mascha sleeps with her comically-named German  
42  
43 professor Windmühle (windmill)—as in ‘tilting at windmills’, most likely a satirical allusion  
44  
45 here to Germans’ vainglorious bluster about ‘making-amends’—and secures his endorsement  
46  
47 for a post with a German aid organisation in Tel Aviv charged with monitoring ‘the situation  
48  
49 in Israel’. ‘Diese Organisation hatte sich wie Dutzende andere perfekt in den Konflikt  
50  
51 integriert’ (this organisation, like dozens of others, had integrated itself seamlessly into the  
52  
53 conflict), she comments sardonically, adding that if the fighting were to cease they would no  
54  
55 longer be able to boast to potential sexual partners that they lived in a war zone (*DR*, 183).  
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3 She flies to Israel, has her laptop blown up by bored security personnel at the airport, moves  
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5 into an apartment with sea views, makes contact with relatives, including her cousin Hannah  
6  
7 who is disappointed that she doesn't look sufficiently Jewish (*DR*, 167), and takes advantage  
8  
9 of the lack of real work at the office to mourn Elias, crave Sami, and pursue Tal.  
10

11  
12 In Israel, Mascha is forced to confront head-on the question that she had hitherto  
13  
14 managed to evade in the transnational, cosmopolitan togetherness she enjoyed in Berlin,  
15  
16 namely what her Jewishness means to her. The fact that she speaks Arabic—initially learnt  
17  
18 from Sami, then consolidated during her studies—but not Hebrew, is a repeated source of  
19  
20 bafflement, and even affront, for her Israeli companions. And she instinctively rejects the  
21  
22 Israeli nationalism embodied not only by Ori, but also by her relatives, the various officials  
23  
24 she encounters, and Russian-Jewish settlers in the occupied territories. This does not mean  
25  
26 that she entirely repudiates Israel. Watching CNN reporting on Israeli's incursions into the  
27  
28 West Bank with Cem in Germany, she had felt the need to counter what she saw as the  
29  
30 media's lachrymose presentation of the Palestinian fate (*DV*, 59)—before she travels to  
31  
32 Israel, it seems that there were some limits to her universalising empathy. But, lacking any sincere  
33  
34 understanding of, or even interest in Jewish ritual, she needs to forge a secular Jewish identity  
35  
36 that does not depend on a departicularised diasporic solidarity with other migrants—in  
37  
38 Germany, she is more Russian than Jewish—or an inflamed Israeli nationalism.  
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44 Jewish memory of the Holocaust, and more broadly identification with the suffering  
45  
46 of others, may enable just such an identity. In Germany, Mascha objects to a fellow student's  
47  
48 gauche philo-Semitism: 'Ich habe einen deutschen Pass. Ich bin nicht Israel' (I have a  
49  
50 German passport. I am not Israel; *DR*, 6); in Israel, she insists on her German citizenship, to  
51  
52 the great irritation of her cousin Hannah (*DR*, 166), and she speaks German with Sam, a  
53  
54 potential lover, and allows him to take her for a Russian immigrant (*DR*, 178), just as she had  
55  
56 always emphasised her Russian rather than Jewish origins in Germany too. In the fourth and  
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3 final part of the novel, however, Mascha crosses into the West Bank, where for the first time,  
4  
5 and notwithstanding the obvious risk, she embraces an unambivalent identity. 'Ich bin  
6  
7 jüdisch' (I am Jewish; *DR*, 274), she declares to Ismael, the Palestinian man who offers her  
8  
9 refugee after she escapes Tal, Tal's new love interest, and the ineffective Israeli peace  
10  
11 delegation for which she was to interpret (none of the Israelis speaks Arabic...). With  
12  
13 Ismael—the former Hamas supporter, who now sees the error of his earlier intolerance and  
14  
15 religious fundamentalism (*DR*, 273-4)—she finally seems able to speak of herself, and of her  
16  
17 own trauma. She lives in Germany, and she is Russian by nationality, but she was born in  
18  
19 Azerbaijan, where she endured both anti-Semitism and civil war (*DR*, 265-74). And above all  
20  
21 she is a Jew—secular, profoundly conscious of her history, *and* cosmopolitan.  
22  
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25  
26 The cosmopolitan understanding Mascha achieves with Ismael—the name given to  
27  
28 Abraham's first son in Jewish, Christian and Muslim scripture, though each tradition has  
29  
30 different interpretations of his role and significance—may even be more genuine than the  
31  
32 solidarity she experienced with fellow migrants in Germany. Mascha and Ismael do not have  
33  
34 sex, even though this is an obvious possibility in his room overnight, and nor does their  
35  
36 sharing of trauma imply a blurring of the self-evident differences between their histories and  
37  
38 current situations. In other words, *their* cosmopolitan exchange is based not on physical  
39  
40 intimacy or on the dissolution of their particularist identities within an undifferentiated  
41  
42 universalism, but on the recognition of difference—the scars inflicted on his arm by an Israeli  
43  
44 bullet; for her: 'Meine Oma, die die Shoah...' (*DR*, 276)—and even of the ultimate  
45  
46 unknowability of the other. The brief relationship forged by Mascha and Ismael, therefore, is  
47  
48 characterised by the unsentimental recognition of our detachment identified by Arendt as the  
49  
50 condition for authentic engagement with the other—'the world, like every in-between, relates  
51  
52 and *separates* men at the same time'<sup>33</sup>—and, as important, for political action: 'Because  
53  
54 compassion abolishes the distance, the worldly space between men where political matters,  
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3 the whole realm of human affairs, are located, it remains, politically speaking, irrelevant and  
4 without consequences'.<sup>34</sup> Accompanying Ismael, Mascha is welcomed at a Palestinian  
5 wedding, in spite of the discomfort some guests feel at her presence. In a dream-like state,  
6 she narrates, at length, the horrors of the civil war in Azerbaijan—her recollection of tanks  
7 shelling buildings invokes the suffering that the Palestinians at the wedding with her have  
8 endured, and will endure. At the very end of the novel, the reader grasps that Jewish  
9 memory—the Holocaust—is not just the keystone of a secular Jewish identity. It also entails  
10 an injunction to think globally, and to *act* in defence of universal Human Rights.  
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20  
21 Thus far, Grjasnowa's *Der Russe* appears to endorse, and even embody, the possibility  
22 of a Jewish cosmopolitanism in which the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust is seen to  
23 possess a universal, even redemptive significance. However, one of the benefits that readers  
24 gain from literature—in addition to aesthetic pleasure—emerges out of the way fiction may  
25 nuance the 'ideal types' that populate generalising works of philosophical enquiry such as  
26 Sznajder's *Jewish Memory*. Grjasnowa's Mascha inhabits *Der Russe* not only as an exemplar  
27 of Sznajder's cosmopolitan Jewish memory, therefore, but also as the embodiment of the  
28 inconsistencies and self-absorption of real human beings. And it is in its focus on the  
29 difficulties that individuals encounter in translating principle into practice that Grjasnowa's  
30 novel helps us to conceptualise some of the limitations—and indeed problems—of Sznajder's  
31 conceptualisation of a Jewish cosmopolitanism.  
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46 At Israel's principal Holocaust memorial centre Yad Vashem, Mascha seems almost to  
47 be paraphrasing Sznajder when she insists on the universalist meaning of the Holocaust and  
48 rejects the ethno-nationalism of Jewish settlers in the West Bank:  
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52  
53  
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55  
56 'Wir dürfen nichts vergessen', sagte Tante # 13.  
57  
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3 'Natürlich nicht', sagte ich. 'Allerdings reicht das alleine nicht'.  
4

5  
6 'Wie meinst du das?', fragte Hannah.  
7

8  
9 'Selbst die fanatischsten Siedler gedenken des Holocaust', sagte ich. (*DR*, 193).  
10

11  
12  
13  
14 ('We must forget nothing', said aunt number 13.  
15

16  
17 'Of course not;, I said, 'Though that's not enough'  
18

19  
20 'What do you mean?', asked Hannah.  
21

22  
23 'Even the most fanatical settlers commemorate the Holocaust', I said).  
24  
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27  
28 Elsewhere, however, we wonder whether Mascha's cosmopolitan solidarity truly  
29  
30 reflects her principled openness to others or simply a more egotistical longing for  
31  
32 consolation. In the West Bank, swastikas drawn by Hamas fighters trigger not so much  
33  
34 a rational engagement with the need to create alliances *across* traumatised communities  
35  
36 as jumbled memories of the Caspian sea, her mother, and Elias: 'Zurück zu meiner  
37  
38 Mutter, ich wollte, dass sie mich beschützt. Ich wollte zurück zu Elischa, mich an sein  
39  
40 Hemd klammern und seinen Geruch einatmen, sein Gesicht wieder klar vor mir sehen'  
41  
42 (*DR*, 280). (Back to my mother, I wanted her to protect me. I wanted to get back to  
43  
44 Elias, to cling to his shirt and breathe in his smell, see his face before me again).  
45  
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47

48  
49 The refusal of sentimentality that characterises Arendt's (and Sznajder's)  
50  
51 cosmopolitanism—the essential unknowability of the other must be acknowledged if  
52  
53 the temptation to colonise is to be resisted—is, in practice, difficult if not impossible to  
54  
55 sustain. The attitude of respectful detachment towards one another that Mascha and  
56  
57 Ismael manage to achieve together will scarcely be tested over time. It is clear from the  
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3 outset that her sojourn with him will be brief, and as soon as she can she phones Sami,  
4 her Beirut-born ex-lover, and enjoins him to leave behind his girlfriend in Germany and  
5 to extract her from Palestine. At the end of the novel, Mascha opts to return to the  
6 emotionally satisfying, but undifferentiated, empathetic solidarity that she had appeared  
7 determined to exceed during her time in Israel. It seems unlikely that she will continue,  
8 once back in Germany, to channel traumatic memory into political engagement.  
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17 Even if sentimentality can be avoided, there is still a danger that 'the Jew' once  
18 more becomes little more than a cipher. Sznajder's emphasis on the specifically Jewish  
19 experience of the Holocaust styles Jewish memory, as previously noted, as both central  
20 to cosmopolitan memory and, more broadly, as *representative*. But in what sense  
21 representative? If Jewish memory *embodies* the suffering of all humankind, then the  
22 Holocaust's title as the most egregious example of the cruelty people throughout the  
23 ages have inflicted upon one another creates a manner of detachment that is different in  
24 kind from the distance that Arendt sees as the essential basis of equality between the  
25 multitude of others who 'have the world in common'. Jews stand apart, fetishized as  
26 descendents of the Holocaust or resented for their aloofness—*their* difference from *us*  
27 is not the same as our difference from other 'others'. Or, if Jewish memory *speaks for*  
28 others who have been traumatised, must detachment mutate into disassociation, as the  
29 Jewish experience is deployed in the service of others? On her return to Germany,  
30 Mascha will no doubt endure the painful philosemitism of her fellow student Daniel,  
31 and continue to have to repress her Jewish (rather than Russian) past even amongst her  
32 fellow migrants.  
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53 If Jewish memory no longer motivates any practical, political cosmopolitan  
54 commitment, therefore, the risk may be that it becomes merely an instrument for the  
55 ritualistic expression of what Gillian Rose calls 'Holocaust piety', or a vessel for the  
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3 containment of a whole world of traumas, or both at the same time. In any event,  
4  
5 Jewish memory appears 'flattened', to the extent that the particularity of the Holocaust  
6  
7 acquires a citational quality, in Derrida's sense of a communicative act that, through its  
8  
9 constant iteration, is intended to testify to truth but in fact signals the ever present  
10  
11 possibility of inauthenticity. Jewish identity is not only once again reduced to the  
12  
13 Holocaust. It is also defined, and delimited, either as a conduit for empathy and affect  
14  
15 or as a container for universal suffering rather than as substantial in and of itself.  
16  
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18

19 In the final analysis, it is difficult to surmise what kind of political engagement  
20  
21 Sznajder envisages in *Jewish Memory and The Cosmopolitan Order* beyond his  
22  
23 admiration for Arendt's lofty insistence on the particularity of the Jewish experience  
24  
25 within the universality of Human Rights, and on the indispensability of cosmopolitan  
26  
27 exchange based on the acknowledgment of difference. How is a cosmopolitan Jewish  
28  
29 memory, and identity, to be actively articulated, beyond the sort of well-meaning  
30  
31 rhetoric formulated by the Israeli activists that Mascha accompanies into the West  
32  
33 Bank? Does Sznajder expect 'regular' Jewish individuals—outside the circle of  
34  
35 intellectuals that feature in *Jewish Memory*—to confront injustice more *concretely*,  
36  
37 locally and globally, and perhaps especially in relation to Israel? But why not expect  
38  
39 this of all people? Why expect more of Jews, and therefore perhaps less of others? It  
40  
41 might seem to be an odd consequence of the Holocaust that Jews should be expected to  
42  
43 internalise its lessons more fully than others. Indeed, the most striking, and positive,  
44  
45 aspect of Grjasnowa's depiction of Mascha is that she is as flawed—as human—as all  
46  
47 the novel's other characters. The author's suggestion seems to be that there can be no  
48  
49 requirement for the Jew to be 'better' than those she or he lives amongst.  
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## 58 **Conclusion**

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3 Sznajder's *Jewish Memory and The Cosmopolitan Order* presents a timely and  
4  
5 challenge to think again about Jewish identity, and to expound a positive 'Jewish  
6  
7 cosmopolitanism' to set against the prejudice that, historically, has accompanied that  
8  
9 designation. However, insofar as *Der Russe* exemplifies through its form and content  
10  
11 precisely the movement back and forth between particularity and universalism that  
12  
13 Sznajder praises in Arendt—and the Polish-speaking Jewish graphic artist Bruno  
14  
15 Schulz—Grjasnowa's novel may offer something more concrete, and potentially more  
16  
17 radical. The most 'cosmopolitan' aspect of *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, in  
18  
19 truth, is not its elaboration of Holocaust memory as the basis of Human Rights practice  
20  
21 and solidarity across borders. Rather, it its own inherent transnationality that is key, and  
22  
23 not only the fact that it was written in the German language by an author of Russian-  
24  
25 Jewish background but also, just as if not more important, the way it connects German,  
26  
27 Middle Eastern, and Eastern European pasts and presents. This in itself already  
28  
29 undermines the parochialism of the nation, and indeed national narratives. We might  
30  
31 debate, with Leslie Morris, whether this represents a 'translation of Jewishness into  
32  
33 [...] an imagined transnational community',<sup>35</sup> or we might set Grjasnowa's novel  
34  
35 within the broader 'transnationalisation' of German-language (and other) writing in  
36  
37 recent years, including fiction by Jewish, other 'minority', but also 'majority' authors.<sup>36</sup>  
38  
39 In any event, the increasing traversability of national borders and national cultures that  
40  
41 we are witnessing in the contemporary era—along with a pervasive ethnocentric  
42  
43 backlash—has reignited the debate on cosmopolitanism and seems to require *all* of us,  
44  
45 Jews and non-Jews, to look beyond our ethnic and national limit(ation)s. It might be  
46  
47 inspiring to think, however, that we would wish to become citizens of the world *without*  
48  
49 reference to the Holocaust—because global citizenship is seen as a desirable goal in  
50  
51 itself—and without requiring Jews to be, once again, somehow *exemplary*.  
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3 Grjasnowa's next novel after *Der Russe*, titled *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*  
4  
5 (*The Judicial Uncertainty of A Marriage*, 2014), certainly has no requirement for an  
6  
7 exemplary Jew. Jonoun, the novel's American-Jewish migrant to Germany, is blithely unaware  
8  
9 of the trauma her girlfriend Leyla has suffered at the hands of the repressive authorities in her  
10  
11 home country Azerbaijan, and of the distress she causes Leyla's (homosexual) husband  
12  
13 Altay. And she appears to have no connection whatsoever to the Holocaust. Without the  
14  
15 possibility of a redemptive cosmopolitanism rooted in memory—whether Jewish or any  
16  
17 other—however, the issue now is that the only cosmopolitanism that seems able to assert  
18  
19 itself against the nation state as an instrument of global consumer capitalism (Germany, along  
20  
21 with other western countries) or of repression (Azerbaijan and other countries in the region,  
22  
23 even after the Arab Spring) is the elite cosmopolitanism of the super-wealthy as they jet  
24  
25 around the globe in search of either tax-friendly or legally-dubious regimes. Sznaiders'  
26  
27 Jewish cosmopolitanism may be utopian—or even problematic—but it is surely to be  
28  
29 preferred to the depressing reality of the only form of cosmopolitanism that, thus far, actually  
30  
31 seems to have succeeded in establishing itself as truly global.  
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17 <sup>1</sup> Brumlik, 'Wem gehört der Staat Israel?'

18 <sup>2</sup> See Miller and Ury, 345.

19 <sup>3</sup> Wolfe, *At Home in Exile*, 7. Hereafter *HE* in brackets following quotations in the main body of the text

20 <sup>4</sup> Cathy Gelbin, from the preamble to the conference call for 'Cosmopolitanism and the Jews', which Gelbin co-  
21 organised with Sander Gilman on May 11-12 2014 at the Leo Baeck Institute London, Queen Mary University.  
22 Details online at: <http://www.leobaeck.co.uk/archives/4188>. (Accessed January 9, 2015).

23 <sup>5</sup> See, for instance, her interview with Harry Kreisler.

24 <sup>6</sup> Bhabha, 14.

25 <sup>7</sup> Sznajder, *Jewish Memory*, 142. Hereafter *JM* in brackets following quotations in the main body of the text.  
26 The allusion to waiting passively for redemption, of course, recalls the debate between those (especially  
27 orthodox and ultra-orthodox) Jews who insist that the Messiah's coming cannot be forced and those who believe  
28 that political action in the here and now is permitted as a means of provoking redemption.

29 <sup>8</sup> Sznajder anticipates, and indeed summarises in advance, his discussion of Arendt in *Jewish Memory and the*  
30 *Cosmopolitan Order* in his 2007 article 'Hannah Arendt's Jewish Cosmopolitanism: Between The Universal  
31 and The Particular'.

32 <sup>9</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

33 <sup>10</sup> Levy and Sznajder, *Human Rights*, 20.

34 <sup>11</sup> Levy and Sznajder, *Human Rights*, 151.

35 <sup>12</sup> Sznajder in fact is one a number of scholars who have attempted to re-evaluate the long-standing division  
36 between Jewish life in the diaspora and Jewish life in Israel. See, for example, Sander Gilman and Milton Shain,  
37 eds., *Jewries at the Frontier*.

38 <sup>13</sup> Remmler, 21.

39 <sup>14</sup> See Popper.

40 <sup>15</sup> Morris and Remmler, 1.

41 <sup>16</sup> See Lorenz.

42 <sup>17</sup> Bodemann and Bagno, 163.

43 <sup>18</sup> See my 'Performing Jewishness in The New Germany'.

44 <sup>19</sup> See Mayr.

45 <sup>20</sup> See Biendarra.

46 <sup>21</sup> Schoeps and Glöckner, 144.

47 <sup>22</sup> Seyhan, 10.

48 <sup>23</sup> See Adelson.

49 <sup>24</sup> See my "Germans, Jews and Turks in Maxim Biller's Novel *Esra*".

50 <sup>25</sup> See Katja Garloff.

51 <sup>26</sup> Römhild, 'Global Heimat Germany'.

52 <sup>27</sup> 'The palimpsest' has become a key term in memory studies. See, for example, Huyssen and Silverman.

53 <sup>28</sup> Margaret Littler has written more generally of the way connections between German, Eastern and Central  
54 European, and Turkish histories in contemporary texts creates relationships of 'affect', such that 'moments of  
55 intensity have deterritorialising force, and intimacy takes on new and unfamiliar forms' (193). Brigid Haines  
56 also notes the increasing trend towards depicting the transnational entanglement of German history and German  
57 identity, especially in the work of German-language writers with Eastern and Central European backgrounds.

58 <sup>29</sup> Zaimoglu, 359.

59 <sup>30</sup> Grjasnowa, 10. Hereafter *DR* in brackets following quotations in the main body of the text.

60 <sup>31</sup> Kant, 329.

<sup>32</sup> See Gilman, *The Jew's Body*. In her next novel, *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, from 2014, Grjasnowa  
interestingly problematises the way western nations' increasingly liberal attitude towards homosexuality is now

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3  
4 frequently deployed to mark Islam as regressive and incompatible with 'our' values. This is what Jabir Puar  
5 refers to as 'homonormativity' post-9/11.

6 <sup>33</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52. My emphasis. There has been much discussion in the scholarly literature  
7 of Arendt's insistence on the irrelevance of compassion. See, for example,

8 <sup>34</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 86-87.

9 <sup>35</sup> Leslie Morris "How Jewish Is It? W.G. Sebald and the Question of Contemporary German-Jewish Writing," in  
10 Y. Michal Bodemann, ed., *The New German Jewry and the European Context. The Return of the European*  
11 *Diaspora* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan: 2008), 111-128, here, 112.

12 <sup>36</sup> See my 'Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Fiction'. My book project *German-Language*  
13 *Literature and Transnationalism* will be published in 2016.  
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