

# Heimat Goes Mobile



Heimat Goes Mobile:  
Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film

Edited by

Gabriele Eichmanns and Yvonne Franke

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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# INTRODUCTION: *HEIMAT* IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

GABRIELE EICHMANNS

*Heimat*—“ideologieträftig, verrufen und glorifiziert, ein Wort, bei dem die Bedeutungen verschwommen sind wie bei kaum einem, das so viele rührt und berührt, ein Wort nun in Mode und in Medien, ein Wort, das nie ganz aus der Mode und den Mündern war” (Pott 7). In his book *Literatur und Provinz*, Hans-Georg Pott attempts a tentative definition of the German term *Heimat*, whose multilayered connotations seem to defy any comprehensive explanation. Rüdiger Görner agrees that *Heimat* is impossible to grasp, since “jede ‘Verständigung über Heimat’ den Einspruch gegen definitorische Festlegung [beinhaltet]; denn eines ‘ist’ Heimat gewiß: ein chamäleonhaftes Gebilde” (14). *Heimat* challenges the mind of both the man in the street and the academic alike. Emotionally as well as ideologically laden, *Heimat* has elicited, and still elicits, various explanations and interpretations throughout the ages as well as throughout different parts of the German-speaking world. Ever since the word emerged in the Middle Ages, *Heimat* has come to describe the epitome of Germanness, encompassing, among many other things, a place of comfort, unspoilt nature, one’s mother tongue, blood relations and familiar traditions and customs. Thus, *Heimat* has served as the justification for dividing and uniting the German people; has been worshipped and despised, misused and abused; has caused unbelievable sorrow as well as feelings of utter comfort, security and belonging; but has never, not even after the shameless *Blut-und-Boden* propaganda during the Nazi era, stopped to influence and infiltrate the minds of countless Germans.

Yet, in a world of constant political change and the ubiquitous presence of global markets, the notion of *Heimat* has undergone—and is still undergoing—considerable transformations regarding its suitability for a people reunited more than twenty years ago and engaged in a struggle to become a single German nation. The fall of the Berlin Wall began a slow but steady re-evaluation of *Heimat* that has to be viewed as crucial for the understanding of Germany’s national identity as well as of its relationship

with the world. Moreover, it initiated a new debate about Germany's responsibilities on a global scale: Former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder spoke of reunification as a process that would certainly force people in the Federal Republic to reassess not only their economic expectations but also their attitudes towards the Nazi past, Germany's role in world affairs and the values of the nation. In particular, Schröder's government was determined to accelerate Germany's drive for "normalization" in order to end the special treatment Germany had received due to the atrocities committed in World War II and to move on to become an equal partner regarding military, political and economic issues. Within this context, altering the way Germany had viewed itself for the last forty years became an essential factor that resulted in a changing application of *Heimat* for the newly established German nation.

Thus, the question arises whether *Heimat* is still a suitable concept for a nation strongly impacted by reunification as well as by ever more pronounced globalizing tendencies. Has *Heimat* to be viewed as a relic of the past in an age of high mobility, advanced communication technology and the compression of time and space? In his book *Heimat. A Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, Peter Blicke decidedly rejects this question when he writes: "The idea of *Heimat* is one of the main elements in contemporary German renegotiations of what it means to be German and to live in a German speaking environment" (154). Hence, it is precisely an environment characterized by impermanence and constant change that causes us to return to *Heimat* as the promise of a safe haven in our search for security and stability. In a world characterized by new technology, the opening up of new markets, pronounced capitalistic tendencies and the urge to become a citizen of the world, we begin to long again for a mythical space of innocence that *Heimat* appears to imply.

In his book *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelius Castoriadis stresses our modern obsession with science and the meaning of statistics and data whose services are needed to help us form an accurate and truthful picture of the world we inhabit. We proudly posit that we do not believe in gods and myths anymore and that we have replaced these implausible aberrations with rationality. Yet, even though we feel superior to former times because of our seemingly precise knowledge of the world, we have simply fallen subject to a new imaginary, namely the rational:

The modern world presents itself, on the surface, as that which has pushed, and tends to push, rationalization to its limit, and because of this, it allows itself to despise—or to consider with respectful curiosity—the bizarre customs, inventions and imaginary representations of previous societies. . . . If there is something that poses a problem, it is instead the

emergence of the rational in history and, in particular, its ‘separation,’ its constitution as a relatively autonomous moment. (156-61)

The belief in the rational is symbolized by our perception of time. Castoriadis differentiates between identity and imaginary time, with identity time being

the time of incessant rupture, of recurrent catastrophes, of revolutions, of perpetually being torn away from what already exists . . . the time of accumulation, of universal linearization . . . of the effective suppression of otherness, of immobility in perpetual ‘change.’ (207)

In contrast, imaginary time refers to “the time of signification, or significant time” (209). Imaginary time is not symbolized by “a homogeneous flux in which something grows unceasingly but [it is] much more like a cycle of repetitions, punctuated by the recurrence of natural events, full of imaginary significations, or that of important rituals” (208). Hence, identity time reflects our modern rational age that believes in the act of measuring and calculating, whereas imaginary time—even though closely linked to identity time—is a time of mythical living, a rather “timeless” notion of time. In our enlightened age, to believe in time is to believe in progress, in the moving of time toward a glorified future as Jürgen Habermas states: “Das moderne Zeitbewußtsein verbietet freilich jeden Gedanken an Regression, an die unvermittelte Rückkehr zu den mythischen Ursprüngen. Allein die Zukunft bildet den Horizont für die Erweckung mythischer Vergangenheit” (108). In contrast, *Heimat* as linked to the past defies a forward movement. *Heimat* is a place that seems to remain the same in a world of constant change and advancement, a mythical or almost divine location that functions according to its own clock.

However, as Castoriadis and Habermas suggest, in a world governed by logic and rationalism, there is no room for mythical inclinations. “The progress of disenchantment, the eclipse of the world of magic forces and spirits” (49), as Charles Taylor charges, has taken place, and rationalism has emerged as the sole victor. Ever since the Enlightenment a gradual separation between the social and the spiritual has occurred; the individual has been stripped of his former belief system which used to link him to a specific community and secure his being “embedd[ed] in the cosmos” (Taylor 55). But with the individual robbed of the comfort and security the collective participation in spiritual activities once provided, the concept of *Heimat* now takes on an almost sacred meaning that caters to our needs for spirituality and belonging. *Heimat* harbors a religious component that can be discerned in the German term *heimgehen*, euphemistically used to indicate the death of a person—whereby *Heim* clearly refers to the realm

of the divine. Thus, *Heimat* encompasses all we are longing for in a world of uncertainties. *Heimat* is the refuge we return to amidst the turmoil and confusion of everyday life, a secularized religion in a seemingly secularized world.

Consequently, *Heimat* has continued relevance for Germans and the study of German culture. Yet, it is not the traditional concept of *Heimat* with its emphasis on stasis, location and exclusionary practices but home as a hybrid, closely linked with departure, mobility and global influences that this anthology intends to highlight. Since travel and movement appear to be strongly intertwined with notions of belonging, *Heimat* is turned from a stationary into an itinerant entity. Whereas in the past *Heimat* was considered a fixed point of reference, as Iain Chambers remarks, “a site of departure, a point of arrival,” *Heimat* does not necessarily comprise the possibility of “a potential homecoming” any longer (Chambers 5). Instead, its rather mobile character supercedes traditional notions of stasis and favors *Ortlosigkeit* over rootedness. As Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* remarks: “What is new is that this is a world in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points of reference, as critical life choices are made, can be very difficult” (4). Not connected to a specific location, mobility becomes the status quo “in societies where our sense of place has decomposed” (Rojek 71).

If *Heimat* becomes a mobile entity and thus incorporates characteristics of its binary opposite travel, the usefulness of such oppositions becomes doubtful. Friederike Eigler, in her article “Critical Approaches to *Heimat* and the ‘Spatial Turn,’” points out the “long-standing (often gendered) oppositions” (34) such as “space—time, place/local—space/global” as problematic constructions. According to Eigler, the perception of *Heimat* as a static and unchangeable location needs to become open to new forms of spatiality that do not ostracize but connect and unite instead. Particularly in sociological studies but also in literature, these hybrid concepts, as Eigler calls them, have been employed by a number of authors who are experimenting with unprecedented amalgamates of space and home while, at the same time, rejecting the aforementioned, rather anachronistic elements of the traditional *Heimat* idea. In addition, Eigler refers to Michel de Certeau who demonstrates how textual bodies transform “places” into “spaces” in his essay “Spatial Stories.” As de Certeau states, “[e]very story is a travel story—a spatial practice” (89). “[E]very day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories” (88). Thus, a text is capable of creating new spatialities and,

in doing so, prepares the soil for the emergence of something unprecedented:

the story plays a decisive role. It ‘describes,’ to be sure. But ‘every description is more than a fixation,’ it is ‘a culturally creative act.’ . . . Then it founds spaces. Reciprocally, where stories are disappearing (or else are being reduced to museographical objects), there is a loss of space. (de Certeau 96)

Hence, space and place overlap and form a bond with one another; places connect, pathways emerge and processes, not final products, come into focus: “everyday stories tell us what one can do in it and make out of it. They are treatments of space” (Eigler 122).

In terms of *Heimat*, Eigler then goes on to argue that, liberated from its spatial confines, *Heimat* has to be viewed as a permeable entity that moves into new realms of possibilities. A formerly local entity, the notion of home becomes more and more globalized and takes on unique shapes. Feeling at home in multiple places thus has to be regarded as a rather common occurrence since *Heimat* and mobility, the familiar and the foreign, are not diametrically opposed any longer. It is *Heimat*’s hybrid nature that comes to be its decisive feature in a global world and that renders *Heimat* a useful concept that conveys both stability and mobility. And it is also *Heimat*’s hybrid nature that features prominently in the anthology at hand, that many authors employ in their articles, and that is being discussed in great detail, analyzed, re-evaluated and expanded upon.

Over the last years, a considerable amount of research has been done that explores *Heimat* from various angles, be it *Heimat* and the nation in Florentine Strzelczyk’s *Un-heimliche Heimat. Reibungsflächen zwischen Kultur und Nation* (1999), *Heimat* and identity constructions in Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman’s *Heimat—A German Dream* (2000), *Heimat* and film in Johannes von Moltke’s *No Place Like Home. Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (2005), *Heimat* and memory in Alon Confino’s *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance* (2006) or be it a study that encompasses almost all of the above by Peter Blickle and his work on *Heimat. A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (2002). However, it was first Friederike Eigler and her co-editor Jens Kugele who specifically introduced the notion of space and spatiality to the analysis of home—both in their edited volume entitled *Heimat at the Intersection of Memory and Space* (2012) as well as in Eigler’s seminal article “Critical Approaches to Heimat and the ‘Spatial Turn’” (2012). As mentioned previously, Eigler and Kugele perceive *Heimat* as a hybrid construction that opens up new spaces and thus new ways of dealing with the age-old

concept of belonging. It is precisely this notion of hybridity that this present volume, *Heimat Goes Mobile. Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film*, seeks to highlight and advance by entering into a dialogue with *Heimat* scholars and their findings. Furthermore, *Heimat Goes Mobile. Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film* does not analyze the notion of *Heimat* and its ideological and political transformations within the confines of only one discipline but draws on different fields and methodologies in order to illustrate how *Heimat* has developed in multiple respects over the last two decades. We strongly believe that examining *Heimat* must be informed by an extensive cross-disciplinary approach in order to arrive at an accurate picture of *Heimat* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is this cross-disciplinary approach that lies at the heart of this book and thus intends to broaden and update *Heimat* studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Heimat Goes Mobile. Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film* is divided into three parts, with each part presenting a very different approach to the current discourse on *Heimat*. Each section consists of two to four essays that examine a variety of genres within the given framework.

In Part I, which is entitled “Breaking Free: *Heimat* between its Traditional Singular and New Forms of Plurality,” the contributors discuss recent novels and films that, at first glance, seem to continue the tradition of the *Heimatroman* or *-film* by perpetuating clichés and stereotypes associated with the genre. Yet, a closer look reveals that the *Heimatgenre* is used as a mere foil in order to develop and create new versions of *Heimat*, a *Heimat* that encompasses elements of both the local and the global to reflect a world where both entities constantly meet and interact with each other. Thus, it is not the notion of *Heimat* in its exclusive, ostracizing sense that is emphasized and promoted in all three essays but a new, hybrid form that breaks with the traditional concept of *Heimat* and opens it up to influences from other cultures, viewpoints and lifestyles.

In the second part, “Between East and West. East German and European *Heimat* and *Heimatlosigkeit*,” the authors situate the current *Heimat* debate against the backdrop of differing notions of home that are strongly intertwined with socio-political upheavals and are at times disorienting or even traumatic. Various key historical moments inform the contemporary novels or films that the authors scrutinize regarding a re-conceptualization of the individual’s struggle for a home or a loss thereof: The persecution and deportation of ethnic Germans in Romania by the Stalinist regime during and after 1945, oppressive behavior of the GDR

government, re-distribution efforts of property by the German government after Germany's reunification and daily life before and after the *Wende*.

The third part of the volume, "Moving on: *Heimat* as Third Space," presents critical discussions of *Heimat* as an experience of displacement and travel in current audiovisual culture. Home and mobility are no longer sustainable antitheses, but the difference between them is sublated. The two essays explore the contemporary tropes of home, travel and identity constructions in German film as they transform under the influences of Europeanization and globalization. Over the past 20 years, the transgression of traditional territorial boundaries in Europe has made the transformation of images of home and the search for identity a central motif of many significant German films. In these films, the understanding of *Heimat* becomes more inclusive rather than exclusive and favors departure over stasis. The destination within this transcultural realm often remains unclear, and the filmmakers tend towards open endings.

**Jeroen Dewulf** introduces Part I with his article "Reimagining *Heimat* from a Hybrid Perspective. Hugo Loetscher's Concept of a Plural *Heimat*." As the title indicates, Dewulf's focus lies on Loetscher's theoretical reflections on identity and his reinvention of the notion of *Heimat* as a hybrid concept that defies Switzerland's traditional idea of "Alpine *Heimat*." Even though *Heimat* is highly cherished in today's Swiss culture, it is not opposed to immigration issues (like it is in Germany or Austria) but embraces people of different nationalities and backgrounds. Thus, *Heimat* must not be viewed as the traditionally problematic entity characterized by fierce nationalism under Hitler but as a new form of inclusion as becomes apparent in Loetscher's word combination of "plural *Heimat*." By examining Loetscher's concept of "plural *Heimat*" in a number of works, among them *Der Waschküchenschlüssel* (1983), *Lesen statt klettern* (2003) or "Schweizstunde" (2009), Dewulf sets out to define the term in greater detail and explores how it has influenced—and still influences—a younger generation of Swiss intellectuals of various origins.

Likewise, **John Blair**'s "Tom Tykwer's *Winterschläfer* as *Heimatfilm*" critically investigates and expands upon the *Heimatgenre*, this time in audiovisual form. In *Winterschläfer*, we encounter a traditional farmer and his family who speak Bavarian and are part of the local community. As the plot evolves, the idyll is interrupted and irretrievably destroyed. In the same vein, the film portrays the life of a number of transients who have come to the Alps to seek refuge from their urban existences, which are characterized by a loss of connection, community, meaning, happiness, family and roots. As Blair explains, contrary to traditional *Heimatfilme*,

there is no solace to be found in the rural, Alpine culture. It is neither the Alpine location nor the original autochthonous community, neither the simple life of the *Hochland* nor the lifestyle of a farmer that bring about healing and peace, but conflict, misery and in one case even death continue to haunt the characters. The genre of the *Heimatfilm* is demystified, and the Alpine landscape as solution for the discomforts of the global world is called into serious question.

In her article “Heimat Revisited. Stationen der Heimatlosigkeit in Hans-Ulrich Treichels Kurzgeschichtenband *Heimatkunde oder Alles ist heiter und edel*,” **Gabriele Eichmanns** explores yet another well thought-out strategy employed by an author, this time to expose the rather deceptive nature of *Heimat*. By allegedly placing himself in the age-old tradition of the *Heimatgenre*, Treichel evokes false expectations that are destroyed as his stories progress. The text starts out with Treichel’s description of his former *Heimat* in a small town in Ostwestfalen, a place of alleged comfort and security. Yet, as Treichel delves into his memories he realizes that *Heimat* has never been tied to feelings of genuine belonging but has rather been devoid of everything that his homeland, according to his former *Heimatkunde* teacher, is supposed to harbor. Trapped among the villagers who display the same ossified spirit that is characteristic of Ostwestfalen, the narrator’s hometown generates the constant urge in the narrator to leave home behind in order to escape its suffocating atmosphere. The article explores Treichel’s mounting critique of the notion of home as well as his focus on *Heimatlosigkeit* as a viable alternative to the confines of *Heimat* that he views as backward and outdated.

**Michel Mallet**’s article “From *Heimatlos* to *Heimatsatt*. On the Value of *Heimat* in Herta Müller’s *Atemschaukel*” opens Part II. Mallet argues that Herta Müller’s depiction of *Heimat* as an ambiguous concept proves to be key for exploring issues of identity and belonging in her writings. In *Atemschaukel*, Müller articulates not only the traumatic experience of deportation but also the haunting effects of its survival. The novel focuses on the deportation of the young German-speaking Romanian Leo who is sent to forced labor in a Soviet camp during the final stages of World War II. Rather than bespeaking the quaintness with which one usually associates the concept, *Heimat* carries here the burdensome implication of both conflict and estrangement for Leo, who finds himself either disassociated from—*heimatlos*—or smothered by—*heimatsatt*—his home and homeland. Yet, his outsider status prevents him from ever reaching a sense of belonging within his own *Heimat*. Exploring the themes of



individuality, collectivity and intimacy in *Atemschaukel*, the article investigates the manner in which exclusionary facets of *Heimat* prove crucial in depicting the very essence of Müller's narrative construction.

**Axel Hildebrandt's** essay "The Fragility of *Heimat* in Christoph Hein's Novels" sheds light on the problematic aspects of *Heimat* in East Germany. Hildebrandt focuses on three novels written before and after German unification: *Der fremde Freund* (1982), *Horns Ende* (1985) and *Landnahme* (2004). To illustrate the relationship between society and individualism and its impact on the formation of *Heimat*, Hildebrandt draws on the theories of Aleida Assmann, Jan Palmowski and Ansgar Nünning, arguing that Hein undermines concepts of national identity by focusing on individual memories that contradict the mainstream narrative of the former GDR. By doing so, Hein also prevents interpretations of his work that support homogenizations of national discourses. As metahistorical novels, they are defined as texts that challenge the linearity of history and depict the construction of memory and history on a textual level. Hildebrandt shows that these texts of Hein's oeuvre are part of a mosaic. They critique the self-proclaimed perception of East Germany as a society unrelated to previous times that instead attempts to create a Socialist *Heimat* based on Marxism.

**Katharina Häusler-Gross'** article "*Hybride Heimat. Changing Concepts of Heimat and Identity in Post-Wende Stories of Zonenkinder and Wendekinder*" analyzes autobiographical memories of the GDR by Jana Hensel (*Zonenkinder*, 2002) and Martina Schellhorn (*Wendekinder*, 2004). Informed by contrasting viewpoints both memoirs reveal the search for a (new) identity in a *neue Heimat* that is positioned within the larger European context. Juxtaposing the autobiographical narratives of the so-called *Zonenkinder* (referring to children born in the early 1970s) with the viewpoints of post-unification *Wendekinder* (who were born after 1989/90), the article examines how the first generation of post-*Wende* children redefines the concept of personal and collective identities while changing the meaning of *Heimat* from a local, static into an increasingly global entity.

In her article "Domestic Disputes. Envisioning the Gender of Home in the Era of Re-privatization in Eastern Germany," **Necia Chronister** examines *Heimat* in the made for television movie *Unser Haus* (1991) and the independent feminist film *Das alte Lied* (1992), both of which appeared during the era of re-structuring and re-privatization in former East Germany. She demonstrates the centrality of gender in the construction and maintenance of *Heimat* in the context of property disputes by examining the ways in which each film casts gender as related

to property inheritance. She also focuses on the ways in which each film inserts national historical discourses into the *Heimat* narrative in its attempt to problematize the connection between *Heimat* and property claims.

Part III opens with **Imke Brust**'s essay "Transnational and Gendered Dimensions of *Heimat* in Mo Asumang's *Roots Germania*" that explores how the gendered representations of *Heimat* in this documentary correspond to, expand or contradict common gendered understandings of *Heimat*. In 2007, Mo Asumang, daughter of a German and a Ghanaian, directed the Grimme award-nominated documentary *Roots Germania* after she heard that the German Neo-Nazi group White Aryan Rebels had published a song that contained the line "Die Kugel ist für dich, Mo Asumang." The film documents Asumang's attempt to claim a *Heimat* in Germany. In addition, the analysis highlights how Asumang creates a notion of *Heimat* as a transnational concept, which would allow for inclusion rather than exclusion within an emerging European Union and a global world.

With **Yvonne Franke**'s article "*Papas Kino lebt!—Traveling Heimat in Wim Wenders' Im Lauf der Zeit and Fatih Akin's Auf der anderen Seite*" the volume closes with a perspective on a possible new film genre. Her analysis considers current *Heimat* expressions not only as a transgeneric, deterritorialized phenomenon, but also as forming its own hybrid genre. She traces the ongoing sublation between home and travel back to the New German Cinema by discussing two road films: Wim Wenders' *Im Lauf der Zeit* (1976) and Fatih Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007). Franke analyzes in particular *Auf der anderen Seite* as an example of the *New Heimatfilm*, a hybrid genre that dynamically visualizes ongoing socio-political transformations in Europe from a German or cross-cultural perspective.

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**PART I:**

**BREAKING FREE:**

***HEIMAT* BETWEEN ITS TRADITIONAL  
SINGULAR AND NEW FORMS OF PLURALITY**

## CHAPTER ONE

### REIMAGINING *HEIMAT* FROM A HYBRID PERSPECTIVE: HUGO LOETSCHER'S CONCEPT OF A PLURAL *HEIMAT*

JEROEN DEWULF

Shortly before his death in August 2009, Hugo Loetscher (b. 1929) finished his intellectual autobiography *War meine Zeit meine Zeit*. The narrative begins in Loetscher's native Zurich; not on the banks of the famous river Limmat, with its fancy boutiques and exquisite shops, but near the river Sihl. There, in Außersihl, where the slaughterhouse, the prison and other institutions that did not fit into the city's straight-laced image were once located, Loetscher grew up in a working class family that had moved to Zurich from the Catholic canton Lucerne in the Alpine part of the country. An intellectually gifted child, the young Loetscher was given the opportunity to study at the city's *Gymnasium* and later at the University of Zurich. At Zurich, he enrolled in the recently founded Sociology Program in 1948 and graduated with a thesis entitled *Der Philosoph vor der Politik. Ein Beitrag zur politischen Philosophie* in 1956. Despite thus having crossed the *Sihlbrücke* into the city's more affluent part, he remained an *Einzelgänger* due to his working class background and his Catholic upbringing in a predominantly Protestant city. This awareness of difference was to become a key element in his literary work.

The autobiography then continues with Loetscher's professional career. In 1962, he was offered the position of editor in chief at the prestigious Swiss cultural magazine *Du*. Although it would have provided him with financial stability for the first time in his life, he refused. At the university, he had been active in international student cooperation and had traveled to Italy, Greece and Turkey. Loetscher wanted to see more of the

world and, therefore, negotiated instead a special contract with the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* that allowed him to spend half of his time abroad.

One of his first journeys as a professional journalist took Loetscher to the world's largest river, the mighty Amazon. While in Brazil, he reencountered the division between rich and poor he had grown up with, but on a scale that far surpassed Swiss standards. Brazil also confronted him with new issues: a history of colonization, slavery and the difficulty of defining identity in a society where people's origins are as diverse as their skin colors.

From the river Amazon, the narrative in *War meine Zeit meine Zeit* takes the reader to the Nile, the Mississippi, the Volga and eventually the Mekong, the river that marks the border between Laos and Thailand. Loetscher explains how his lifelong difficulties with clear-cut borderlines are reflected metaphorically in the Mekong's irregular current. He admires the river that with its playful meandering forced Thai and Laotian politicians to incorporate a sense of fluidity in their negotiations over border issues; hence, he defines the Mekong as "ein Grenzfluss, der das Grenz-Sein nicht akzeptierte" (17). His journey ends with the flow of a totally different current, that of electricity in a cable that connects him to the World Wide Web, contained on the screen of a laptop with no beginning and no end, "ein portabel[es] Universum," without borders (18).

From river to river this story mirrors Loetscher's development as an author from his predominantly European intellectual foundations to steady expansions on a global scale, broadening his German-Swiss perspective to one that is hybrid and transnational. This intellectual evolution includes a lifelong reflection on the concept of *Heimat* that culminates in Loetscher's decision to reimagine it from a plural perspective.

In this chapter, I intend to explain Loetscher's intellectual development of a "Heimat im Plural" (plural *Heimat*). Loetscher made his first reference to "Heimat im Plural" in a lecture at the University of California, Berkeley in December 2008. In 2009, this lecture appeared in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* under the title "Schweizstunde." Loetscher's approach to the concept of *Heimat* cannot be understood properly without attention to the specificity of the Swiss case in the broader context of German intellectual history and literature. While *Heimat* is a concept shared by all speakers of the German language, the specific history of Switzerland gives the term a different connotation. Although Loetscher's understanding of *Heimat* went far beyond the particular Swiss context, his reimagining of the concept from a progressive perspective does, in fact, correspond to a long tradition in Swiss intellectual life.

### *Heimat und Geistige Landesverteidigung*

Although there can be no doubt that literature from German-speaking Switzerland should be considered an inherent part of German literature, its analysis requires attention to the country's historical and cultural specificity. As Switzerland's best-known contemporary literary scholar Peter von Matt argues,

insofern als alle Literatur mit Politik zu tun hat, hat auch die Literatur in der Schweiz mit der Politik dieses Landes zu tun, und insofern als sie mit der Politik dieses Landes zu tun hat, unterscheidet sie sich eben von aller anderen deutschsprachigen Literatur. (50)

Acknowledgement of this difference is of paramount importance to understanding Loetscher's reinvention of the concept *Heimat*.

Despite the fact that there are strong parallels to Germany and Austria, the concept of *Heimat* in Swiss culture, tradition and politics has in some fundamental ways a singular connotation that can only be explained with reference to the unique history and multiculturalism (four national languages and cultures) of this nation. Located at a crossroad of many cultures, the Swiss cantons developed a strong principle of territorialization in the Middle Ages. Local rights were not simply granted to anyone; they had to be inherited from one's forefathers. It was the rights of one's *Heimatort* that made one a *heimatberechtigter* citizen. Accordingly, participation in city festivals such as the famous *Fasnacht* celebrations in Basel or the *Sechseläuten* in Zurich traditionally required *Heimatberechtigung*. Even today, Swiss citizens bear their *Heimatort*, the place where they or their male ancestors became citizens, rather than their place of birth on their passports and identity cards.

It is generally assumed that the term *Heimweh* originated in Switzerland (Pfeifer 525), where it is linked to the Helvetic tradition of the *Söldner*, the approximately one million Swiss mercenaries who served abroad between 1450 and 1850 and who used the word *Heimweh* to describe feelings of nostalgia for their region of origin. In Swiss intellectual life, the strong territorial attachment to *Heimat* has traditionally been complemented or challenged from the perspective of the *Heimkehrer*. Despite its traditionally strong territoriality, Swiss cultural identity is, in fact, also deeply marked by a tradition of border-crossing, of leaving from and returning to the *Heimat*. According to Peter von Matt, this is reflected in the recurring use of the *Heimkehrer* as the central figure of the Swiss *Bildungsroman* and mirrored in the "doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft aller schweizerischen Literatur" (121).



This Swiss dichotomy of regionality and internationality in the perception of *Heimat* finds its parallel in both a conservative and a progressive interpretation of Switzerland's historical legacy—the foundation of the Swiss Confederacy by three rebellious Alpine cantons in 1291 and its victory over the mighty Habsburg enemy, which enabled the preservation of political autonomy, ancient liberties and proto-democratic local traditions. The dual interpretation of this legacy can also be traced back to the time of the French occupation under Napoleon and the establishment of the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803). While Frédéric-César de La Harpe, Peter Ochs and other intellectuals involved in the creation of the Helvetic Republic tried to legitimize the introduction of the ideas and values of the French Revolution by claiming that their political goals coincided with the tradition of the confederacy and its “typically Swiss” attachment to liberties (Frei 87), their opponents used the very same history to legitimize their resistance against the French by comparing it to the uprising of the rebellious cantons in 1291 against the “foreign tyrants” from Habsburg (Frei 102). As both progressive and conservative rhetoric relied on the same historical legacy—albeit from different perspectives and with different interpretations, one highlighting the importance of liberties and proto-democratic traditions, the other that of resistance against foreign threats—a broad consensus developed on the attachment to the nation's foundation history. In the late nineteenth century, even social democrats in Switzerland conformed to this national tradition, despite their allegiance to the International Labor Movement. Significantly, the movement's leading theorist, Robert Grimm, placed the history of class struggle in the tradition of the ancient Swiss confederates in his *Geschichte der Schweiz in ihren Klassenkämpfen*, comparing the principles of socialism to those of the medieval *Allmende* or “commons,” which consisted of commonly owned land and resources (19).

Unlike in Germany and Austria where it was appropriated by the Nazi regime, this broad consensus of the Swiss in their attachment to their nation's founding story continued when *Heimat* developed into a unifying sentiment of national resistance during the Second World War. *Heimat* was, in fact, one of the core concepts of what came to be known in Switzerland as the *geistige Landesverteidigung*, the nationalist(ic) cultural policy of “spiritual defense” against dangerous National Socialist and Fascist influences from abroad. This policy deliberately stimulated the use of *Heimatliteratur*, *Heimatkunst*, *Heimattheater* and *Heimatsprache* in order to widen the gap between German-speaking Switzerland and (Nazi) Germany; Italian-speaking Switzerland and (Fascist) Italy; and French-speaking Switzerland and (Vichy) France. The essential goal of the *geistige*

*Landesverteidigung* was *Heimatschutz*, or, as Philipp Etter explains, the defense of the “jahrhundertealte Verbundenheit unserer Familien mit dem Boden unseres Landes, die Verwurzelung des Volkes in seiner eigenen und freien Heimateerde” (qtd. in Rüegg: 75).

Despite its predilection for conservative *Heimattümmelei*, the *geistige Landesverteidigung* also included some noteworthy progressive elements. While the deeply conservative, narrowly nationalistic and nearly Fascistic variant of this Swiss cultural policy (which included acts of blunt xenophobia in relation to Jewish refugees) paralleled in many ways Nazi Germany’s *Blut und Boden*-policy, its progressive variant constituted a uniquely Swiss approach to the concept of *Heimat* in German-speaking intellectual life in the 1930s and 40s. The importance of this uniqueness has often been underestimated or even, as von Matt maintains, completely forgotten: “Heute wird der Begriff [geistige Landesverteidigung] selbst in wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten oft unreflektiert negativ gehandelt, als fixe Gegebenheit, ohne Nachdenken über seine komplexen Funktionen in politisch extremer Zeit” (11). A focus on this progressive variant is all the more important because Loetscher’s reinterpretation of *Heimat* can be placed within this tradition.

With Swiss intellectuals and politicians such as Edgar Bonjour, Karl Barth, Max Weber, Willy Bretscher, Hans Oprecht, Emil Klöti, Leonhard Ragaz and Karl Meyer belonging and contributing to it, the *geistige Landesverteidigung* had, in fact, a progressive variant that attempted to structure Switzerland’s cultural policy on the basis of democratic, humanitarian and social welfare values. People who supported this variant also insisted that the nation’s linguistic and cultural diversity be respected and nurtured, as reflected in the platform of the cultural organization *Pro Helvetia*, founded in 1939, which supported connections between intellectuals from Switzerland’s different language groups. The adoption of the minority language Romansh as Switzerland’s fourth official language in 1938 should also be understood as a political statement that opposed the general trend towards monoculturalism in Europe in the late 1930s.

Although these progressive intellectuals placed themselves primarily in the tradition of Gottfried Keller and privileged the values of the progressive revolution of 1848 over those of the ancient confederates, they also legitimized their ideas with reference to the liberties and proto-democratic principles in the *Bundesbrief*, the Federal Charter of 1291. While conservatives justified the *geistige Landesverteidigung* with the claim that Switzerland was a *Sonderfall*, (being the oldest free nation in European history) progressive intellectuals insisted that this claim had to

be complemented by honoring the nation's long democratic tradition. Significantly, Hans Oprecht, president of the Swiss Social Democrats, argued in 1937: "Wer die Demokratie antastet, nimmt unserem Volk das Selbstbewusstsein und bricht ihm damit das Rückgrat" (qtd. in Mattioli: 242). That this progressive approach to the spiritual defense of the Swiss *Heimat* was able to coexist with the conservative variant was only possible because the definition of Swiss identity had always remained vague. In fact, the central phrase of the *geistige Landesverteidigung*—"Der schweizerische Staatsgedanke ist nicht aus der Rasse, nicht aus dem Fleisch, er ist aus dem Geist geboren" (Rüegg 73)—left room for a variety of interpretations.

A similar situation characterized the literature produced during the era of the *geistige Landesverteidigung*. Next to the conservative-patriotic literature of Felix Moeschlin, Josef Reinhart, Maria Dutli-Rutishauser and Josef Camenzind, other authors presented a progressive perspective in their works regarding the need for a spiritual defense of the Swiss *Heimat*. This was, for instance, the case with the socialist author Jakob Bühler. Despite his strong criticism of the dominant conservatism in Swiss governmental policies, Bühler's novel *Sturm über Stifflis* (1934) included an appeal to establish a specifically Swiss spiritual defense to resist Fascist aggression. His appeal was followed by Albert J. Welti's, who, despite his disagreement with conservative Swiss cultural policies, expressed support in his drama *Steibruch* (1939) for the enthusiastic celebration of Swiss national traditions in order to strengthen solidarity and feelings of historical continuity between Switzerland's linguistic communities. Like many other Swiss authors in the 1930s and 40s, Welti's work also reflected a turn towards a *Heimatsprache*; in 1939, as a means of protest against Nazi Germany, he changed the language of his diary from Standard German to Swiss dialect (Sandberg 216). An attachment to Swiss traditions also characterized Meinrad Inglin's *Jugend eines Volkes* (1933), an anthology of short stories in which the concept of *Heimat* was transposed to the era of the ancient confederates. Later, in his novel *Schweizerspiegel* (1938), Inglin searched for harmony between *Geist* and *Gefühl*, spirit and sentiment, which he linked to the Swiss nation and its traditional concerns in striving for the perfect balance between freedom and order.

Similar to Inglin's *magnum opus*, Albin Zollinger's *Pfannenstiel. Die Geschichte eines Bildhauers* (1940) concluded with a reflection on Swiss identity. The fierce attacks by the novel's protagonists against the conservative, provincial mentality that characterized much of the literature and art produced in the context of the *geistige Landesverteidigung* subside

in the final chapter, where strong support is expressed for the *Landesausstellung*, the Swiss National Exhibit of 1939 in Zurich. The *Landi*, as this exhibit was called by the locals, marked the height of the *geistige Landesverteidigung*. Whereas its recreation of the *Dörfli*, the Alpine village, reflected a highly conservative interpretation of the Swiss *Heimat*, the exhibit also included several features that were remarkably progressive, such as the modern design of Hans Coray's *Landi-Stuhl* or the *Pavillon der Schweizerfrauen* that demanded equal (political) rights for women. Zollinger considered the *Landi* a chance to reimagine Swiss identity from a progressive point of view. As Ueli Niederer has interpreted the final chapter of Zollinger's novel: "Dieser Schluss bindet die Pfannenstieler endgültig in die Ordnung der Heimat ein: er gibt ihnen in ihrem kulturellen Engagement recht, aber er nimmt sie auch in die staatspolitische Pflicht" (414). In fact, Zollinger's highly critical novel about the *geistige Landesverteidigung* ended with an appeal of national solidarity in defense of the Swiss *Heimat*.

Thus, unlike in Nazi Germany and Austria, progressive intellectuals in Switzerland managed to prevent the concept of *Heimat* from becoming entirely appropriated by reactionary forces as part of a *Blut und Boden*-ideology. In the postwar period, *Heimat* was not a "contaminated" concept in Switzerland that progressive intellectuals would spontaneously shy away from. The expression of attachment to the *Heimat* continued to be part of the rhetoric used by those intellectuals who turned against the resurgence of a conservative approach to Swiss identity that emerged in the context of the obsession with the communist threat during the Cold War. This explains the suggestion by Peter von Matt to define this current in postwar Swiss intellectual life as "kritischer Patriotismus" (131), a current to which Loetscher should also be counted. In West Germany it was only by the mid-1960s that progressive authors such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass abandoned the belief that literature in itself had the power to influence politics and then increasingly opted for concrete political commitment in alliance with social groups (political parties, extra-parliamentarian movements, committees of citizens, etc.). In contrast, Max Frisch, the most prominent representative of Switzerland's "critical patriotism," launched already in 1954 an initiative to win public support for his plan to rethink Swiss identity in cooperation with the Swiss population. Building on the creative spirit of the *Landi* in 1939, Frisch argued in *achtung: die Schweiz* for the development of a new "eidgenössische Idee" (49) and tried to build a public platform of support for the creation of a renewed concept of *Heimat* that was no longer based on the traditional Alpine village but on the modern city—hence his

suggestion to create “die schweizerische Stadt unseres Jahrhunderts” (152). Frisch combined the concept of *Heimat* with that of the city, a traditional symbol of a cosmopolitan lifestyle. While *Heimat* in Switzerland and other German-speaking countries used to be intimately related to rural areas, Frisch applied it to urban areas, conceiving the concept of a progressive, cosmopolitan “urban *Heimat*” as an alternative to the traditionally conservative, provincial “rural *Heimat*.”

Soon, Frisch’s “critical patriotism” took on the rapidly changing demographics following the increase of (predominantly Italian, but also Greek, Spanish and Portuguese) immigrant workers; from 300,000 in the early 1950s to over one million by 1970. As the overwhelming majority of these immigrants spoke one of Switzerland’s national languages (Italian) and shared one of the country’s traditional religions (Catholicism) they felt less foreign than the many Turkish *Gastarbeiter* in Germany and Austria and were more inclined to ambition Swiss citizenship. The early realization that immigration was not just a temporary phenomenon and that the massive influx of immigrants would forever change Swiss society explains why Switzerland anticipated the wave of populist anti-immigration movements in Europe by over a decade with the creation of the *Nationale Aktion gegen die Überfremdung von Volk und Heimat* in 1961. The founder of the initiative, wealthy businessman James Schwarzenbach, built on the ideas of the *geistige Landesverteidigung* in order to gather broad popular support. Despite strong opposition from a remarkable alliance of progressive intellectuals and a business elite that relied on the cheap working force, Schwarzenbach’s initiative received broad public support that even included leading members of the workers’ union *Schweizer Gewerkschaftsbund*. The 1970 referendum on *Überfremdung* brought about by Schwarzenbach’s efforts failed by only four percent to receive an absolute majority of votes. Had it passed, the referendum would have limited the number of foreign workers in Switzerland to a maximum of ten percent, which would have required the deportation of up to 300,000 immigrants (Drews 58).

In his essay “Überfremdung” (1965), which served as the introduction to the book based on Alexander Seiler’s documentary film *Siamo Italiani* (We Are Italians, 1964), Frisch countered Schwarzenbach by referring to the progressive tradition that had also been part of the *Landesverteidigung*. His insistence on the tradition of Switzerland’s humanitarian values, famously summarized in the sentence “Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kommen Menschen” (219), culminated in the suggestion to search for a new definition of Swiss national identity that would include the newly arrived immigrants and their descendants. Frisch argued, “[j]edes Problem,

das wir selbst zu bewältigen haben, schickt den Begriff der Schweiz in die Reparatur" (221). In his follow-up essay "Überfremdung 2" (1966), Frisch reiterated more explicitly that the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants represented a challenge but also an opportunity to rethink the Swiss conception of *Heimat*:

Das Problem der ausländischen Arbeitskräfte ist unlösbar, wenn wir uns der Einsicht verweigern, dass die Schweiz von morgen anders sein wird als die Schweiz von gestern. . . . Ich halte das Problem der ausländischen Arbeitskräfte . . . für eine Chance, die Position der Schweiz aktuell zu bestimmen. (243)

Frisch's suggestion had a profound impact on the next generation of Swiss intellectuals, including Peter Bichsel, Adolf Muschg, Paul Nizon, Jürg Federspiel and Hugo Loetscher, who considered it to be their task to present (critical) reflections on national identity in their literary narratives and public discourses. Although Loetscher's approach to *Heimat* went far beyond the specificity of the Swiss context, it continued the tradition in Swiss intellectual life to combat conservative tendencies by insisting on Switzerland's progressive roots. His concept of a "plural *Heimat*" should, therefore, be understood as an expansion of Frisch's appeal to rethink the concepts of identity and *Heimat* from a progressive, cosmopolitan and urban point of view.

### **From *Abwässer* to *Der Immune*: Identity in Loetscher's Literary Work**

When Loetscher published his first novel *Abwässer* (1963), he did so at a time when concerns about environmental pollution were still a peripheral topic. Many doubted whether the functioning of the sewage system was even a worthwhile topic for literature. It certainly did not live up to the quality standards set by Emil Staiger, Switzerland's leading literary scholar in the 1960s, who alluded directly to Loetscher's novel in his famous lecture "Literatur und Öffentlichkeit" (1967): "Wenn solche Dichter behaupten, die Kloake sei ein Bild der wahren Welt, Zuhälter, Dirnen und Säufer Repräsentanten der wahren, ungeschminkten Menschheit, so frage ich: In welchen Kreisen verkehren sie?" (94). With his sharp words, which initiated the "Zürcher Literaturstreit" on the future of literature in postwar Europe (Böhler 250-62), Staiger unintentionally captured the essence of Loetscher's novel. *Abwässer* was indeed an attempt to introduce a new perspective on society, a perspective from below. The novel describes how, in the aftermath of a revolution, new