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Eine wohltuende Unsicherheit:
On Naming and Authenticity in the
Works of Milena Michiko Flašar
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Introduction

Born in Vienna to Austrian and Japanese parents, Milena Michiko Flašar exposes in her three novels, *[Ich bin]* (2008), *Okaasan* (2010), and *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte* (2012), the unique difficulties faced by transnational subjects of the second- rather than first-generation. In these works, bilingualism, however imperfect, and overlapping cultures, however incomplete, are far more an inherent state than a form of liberation from monolingualism or a single hegemonic culture.¹ While recent scholarship on transnationalism frequently describes the plurality of languages and identities as evidence of polysemantic possibility and the complexity of identity,² Flašar's novels provide situations where this linguistic wealth is frequently neither immediately self-evident, nor empowering. Indeed, her depictions of second-generation experience show individuals struggling to mimic their mono-ethnic or ethno-nationalist peers, onto whom they initially project the felicitous self-certainty of the monolingual condition (Yildiz 2-3). In this way, all of Flašar's texts take as their point of departure the very real anguish felt by transnational individuals whose complex, multipartite identities extend beyond nationalist models of social authenticity. Rather than accepting the violent curtailment of identity which integration into hegemonic society demands, her figures stubbornly pursue a subjective authenticity across national, linguistic, and ethnic borders. At each stage of their respective journeys and upon each border crossing, they acquire a new name that they hope will either unify or at least supplement their existing identities. Although this quest for self-discovery frequently ends in experiences of failure, isolation, and heartbreak, Flašar's figures are neither tragic nor do they descend into cynicism. Instead, her works are distinguished by the compassion she evokes and the lightness of touch she brings to her representation of these struggles.

¹ In an article for *der Standard*, Flašar describes herself and Austria: "Mein Österreich, das ist das Österreich einer 32-jährigen Autorin, geboren und aufgewachsen in St. Pölten, als Tochter einer Japanerin und eines Österreicherers mit böhmisch-mährischen Wurzeln, der stets Wert auf den sogenannten Habschek im Namen legte und ihn bis heute nicht weggelassen oder gar eingedeutscht hat" [My Austria is that of a 32 year-old author, born and raised in St. Pölten as the daughter of a Japanese woman and an Austrian man with Bohemian-Moravian roots who has always valued the so-called háček in his name which he has neither omitted nor Germanized even today] ("Das Positive erst einmal gar nicht für nötig halten").

² See Yoko Tawada's *Talisman* (15), Perloff's "Language in Migration" (738), Yasemin Yildiz's *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, many of the essays in Doris Sommer's *Bilingual Games* and her monograph, *Bilingual Aesthetics*.

By tracing the way names are created, acquired, translated, and discarded, this article proposes a new model of transnational identity in Flašar's works that naturally rejects the either/or of ethno-nationalism while also transcending concepts of hybridity that continue to restrict conventional transnational theories. In a recent interview, Flašar demonstrates how she sees herself as exemplifying this alternative: "Meistens jedoch sehe ich mich weder ausschließlich als Japanerin noch als Österreicherin, viel eher als beides und *dann aber auch als keines von beidem, worin eine wohltuende Unsicherheit liegt*" [For the most part, I see myself as neither exclusively Japanese nor Austrian, much more as both and *then as neither one nor the other, wherein resides a beneficial uncertainty*] ("Das Positive," emphasis added).³ For Flašar and the figures in her works, simultaneously inhabiting multiple languages and cultures is only part of the story. Her works place the greatest emphasis on tracing what aspects of identity remain unique to each individual, resistant to integration even as a hybrid, and irreducible to national belongings. In a close-reading of her three novels—on which, to date, very little scholarship has been published—this article will show how her first work exposes the attraction and problems of a simplistic transnationalism that fetishizes foreignness, while her two novels *Okaasan: Meine unbekannte Mutter* and *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte* process the anxiety of not fitting in ("keines von beidem" [neither nor]) in order to uncover the possibilities of locating and exploiting this uncertainty within even the most hegemonic society.⁴ Rather than catering to voyeuristic Austrian or foreign readers hungry for insights into transnational subjectivity and experience, Flašar's works provide access to this beneficial uncertainty itself.

What's In A Name?

The act of renaming facilitates border crossing and transitioning from a paralyzing to an enabling uncertainty, but this also plays out within and can be mapped onto the frequently contested field of what constitutes 'authentic' identity. Flašar's transnational narrators frequently find themselves trapped within what Vannini and Williams deem the "realist-constructionist dichotomy" (2): They try to locate their 'true selves' while negotiating the social forces that constantly reshape who they are. Flašar's contrasting protagonists unite through the initial desire to dig deeply through any other-directed self in order to uncover a true, interior self that exists in spite of social dynamics. They are, in many ways, Romantic 'subculturalists' for whom "being authentic stands for being creative, for rejecting the status quo, for the values of self-reflection, self-discovery, originality, and for a concern with deep felt humanity" (6). Yet Flašar's narrators never achieve the satisfaction of an authenticity in which a dominant-subcultural distinction remains within the context of a normative ethnonationalism and monolingualism. Instead, their own transnational experiences remain a supplement that cannot be reduced to or integrated into a unitary national identity. This prevents them from fully realizing the

³ I have included my own translations of these texts. When an existing English translation is readily available, I have included these translations, as well as corresponding bibliographic information.

⁴ Although there are numerous reviews of Flašar's works in Austrian and German newspapers and magazines, the only published article on her work is Johanna Drynda's "Und wenn du ich bist, wer bin ich?" Ein Versuch über das Werk Milena Michiko Flašars." Majorie Perloff has an excellent discussion of relatedly complex subjectivity in the works of Yoko Tawada ("Language in Migration" 738).

promise of Romantic or subcultural self-discovery that they adopt as their model.⁵ In the same way that code-switching fails to account for the actual rich experience of bilingualism, Flašar's figures never feel completely 'authentic' when authenticity is defined as a perfect self-congruency in modes of 'between-thinking,' subcultural or otherwise: a remnant of ethnonationalist interpretation which remains latent within some theories of transnationalism.⁶

Nevertheless, the frustrating experience of processing these discordant identities allows Flašar's figures to grasp the contours and constructed nature of identity more generally. They recognize not only the way social dynamics inflect their identities, but how individual encounters with groups and other individuals determine who they are and how they see themselves.⁷ Although Flašar is always keenly attuned to the way in which generation, class, life-cycle, and gender impact the way an individual negotiates national and transnational structures (Anthias 104), her narrators invariably reach the same conclusion, albeit with varying degrees of awareness and satisfaction. This is namely that identity is always dependent on others (i.e., it is dialogic) and that authenticity as self-congruence imposes an unsustainable and impossible expectation of self-certainty.⁸ In this way, only by working through and rejecting the inherited expectation of an authenticity, do Flašar's characters gain access to the beneficial uncertainty she champions. They ultimately realize that they exceed the varied discourses that would define them.

“Im Zeichen des Feuers”: The Hubris of Renaming

The unusual use of square brackets in the title of Flašar's first book, a collection of short stories titled [*Ich bin*] ([I am]), evidence the way these dominant discourses of identity-formation require a strict, even violent, delimitation of the self. Accepting a bracketed existence corresponds in the text to identifying with an inherited name, while transcending these limits requires acquiring or creating a new name. In this way, transnational identity construction provides the subtext for a series of coming-of-age stories, wherein characters chase self-knowledge in love, art, language, and nature. The first and longest story in the collection, “Im Zeichen des Feuers,” describes the intense love affair between the narrator Laura and her boyfriend Jan/Srećko. At the end of the introductory paragraph, Laura reveals her hope that in telling this story she will free herself from the trauma of her failed relationship with Jan, a liberation that she connects with

⁵ In one of the few secondary works on Flašar, Joanna Drynda focuses on the phrase “In keinem Spiegel finde ich mich selbst” [In no mirror do I find myself] (*Okaasan* 110) to highlight the failure of the realist model of identity that underlies the genre of *Selbstfindungsliteratur* [literature of self-discovery] (“Und wenn du ich bist, wer bin ich?” 70).

⁶ In a summary of work by Rebecca Erickson, Marc Scully expresses this dilemma in terms of contradictory national belongings (“The Problem of a Subjective Authenticity and the Articulation of Belonging among the Irish in England – A Psychosocial Approach”).

⁷ Scully writes: “This, then, is the social rather than the subjective dimension of authenticity; rather than feeling true to oneself; authenticity here is composed of discourses around what the characteristics of a member of a group should be” (35).

⁸ This corresponds with the conclusion reached by Vannini and Burgess “of the need to treat authenticity not only as an experience but also as an intersubjective accomplishment shaped by the dominant conventions of a particular social world” (8). This, of course, becomes much more complicated with negotiating a plurality of overlapping ‘worlds.’

receiving a new name: “Denn ich bin—in meiner Haut—bereit: für einen neuen NAMEN” [“Because I am—in my skin—ready: for a new name”] (9).⁹ This first gesture to renaming introduces how proper names are repeatedly replaced, exchanged, and erased in all of Flašar’s works. As that part of language most resistant to translation, they function as repositories of linguistic ‘magic’ that transnational encounters can expose (Perloff 738). As a writer, Laura believes that creating a new name for oneself or someone else supplements the familial, linguistic, and ethnic identities encoded in a given name. However, this supplementation still operates for Laura within a positivistic economy of authenticity, where a single true name—a name that enables linguistic border-crossing—exposes an as-yet-unseen or undiscovered (though unified) self. The act of re-naming other people can also function to translate them out of their culturally determined selves, and this linguistic performativity shapes Flašar’s first story and continues as a major theme throughout her works.¹⁰

“Im Zeichen des Feuers” begins with a mutual renaming that bonds Laura and Jan together long before they are comfortable saying “ich liebe dich” [I love you].¹¹ Laura becomes “das blaue Mädchen” [“the blue girl”] while Jan becomes Srećko. Laura states: “Ich habe ihn Srećko genannt. Weil sein anderer Name zu wenig verworfen war” [“I named him Srećko because his other name was insufficiently corrupt”] (*Ich bin* 11). She replaces a ubiquitous Northern European name with the uncommon Serbo-Croatian Srećko, derived from the Slovenian word for luck, *sreča*. Rather than a stereotypically phlegmatic and predictable boyfriend, Laura hopes that by naming him Srećko, her love will combine with this linguistic agency to infuse her life with unpredictability, and (with some luck) transform their relationship into an event that will inspire her writing. This initial renaming is simultaneously a translation of Jan that liberates him from his mono-cultural Germanness¹² and that inaugurates their use of love to create a new shared language. In fact, it is not until the final word of the story that the reader learns Jan’s original name.¹³

For Jan, a painter, renaming offers a new visual language, as he achieves success only after painting a portrait of Laura, entitled “das blaue Mädchen” [the blue girl] (27).¹⁴ For Laura, the act of renaming gives her a new authority over language that imbues her writing with new purpose and energy. She explains:

⁹ That the narrative should serve as an exorcism of Jan/Srećko is stated explicitly at the end of the story (67).

¹⁰ In one of his essays on Tawada’s Japanese works, “Traveling without Roads: Body and Place in Tawada Yoko’s Fiction,” Douglas Slaymaker comments that Tawada also exploits shifting proper names and ambiguous pronouns to create space in her Japanese works (323-28).

¹¹ Laura asks Jan many times throughout their relationship whether he loves her (22): He initially answers “Ich will, ich will dich lieben” [I want to, I want to love you] (24). He finally admits less than reassuringly: “Verstehst du, ich liebe dich. Das ist gar keine Frage. Aber manchmal denke ich, das ist alles ein Zufall” [Don’t you understand, I love you. That isn’t even a question. But sometimes I think it is all coincidence] (31).

¹² Here it is perhaps interesting to think of this in terms of the concept of *biodeutsch* [ethno-Germans, literally biological or organic Germans] that has gained in popularity in recent years.

¹³ Laura can only finally exorcise him by writing his real name (*Ich bin* 68).

¹⁴ The context of multiculturalism is never made explicit in the story, but from Laura’s perspective it is clear how much Jan as the dominant partner gains from his translation and association with her. This very much recalls the way in which ethnic Germans are encouraged to become transnational while integration is demanded of immigrants (Stehle and Weber 121).

Ich möchte eine Sprache erfinden! Alle Wörter dieser Welt möchte ich um mich versammeln, um ihn zu preisen und ihm einen Namen zu geben, ihn aus.zu.drucken in alle Ewigkeit ... auf dass meine Sprache, meine Sprachmächtigkeit nichts anderes sei als ein Werkzeug, ihm meine Lieder zu singen.

[I would like to invent a language. To collect all the words of this world around myself in order to glorify him and to give him a name, to ex.press him in all eternity ... that my language, my power of speech be naught more than a tool to sing to him my songs.] (21)

The success or failure of this renaming is almost of greater significance for Laura than her relationship with Jan: It inaugurates a new creative power in language and serves as the basis of her aesthetic production.

Unfortunately for Laura and Jan, the novelty of this new name has a limited duration and as its power fades, the two find themselves drifting apart emotionally and linguistically. Their relationship begins to break down as Jan's artistic success encourages him to relocate from Vienna to Berlin, thereby undoing his translation by Laura. Moving to Berlin reinserts Jan into the dominant culture as it symbolically re-establishes his true German name. Their emotional distance is represented through their inability to maintain a literal or conceptual vocabulary to make their lives mutually comprehensible:

Nachts, wenn Srećko nach Hause kam, erzählten wir uns beide, was wir erlebt hatten. Wir erzählten jeder dem anderen, wovon wir glaubten, dass es ihn interessieren könnte. Wir suchten fieberhaft nach einem Punkt, an dem unser beider Welt sich verbinden ließ. Wir haben nicht unversucht gelassen: die Möglichkeit, auf eine gemeinsame Sicht zu kommen. [...] Aber es war uns—trotz allem—nicht bestimmt, jenseits unserer Geschichte zu einer neuen Gegenwart zu kommen.

[At night, when Srećko came home, we told each other what we had experienced. Each of us told the other what we believed could be of interest to them. We searched feverishly for a point that would connect both of our worlds. We left nothing untried: The possibility to arrive at a new shared perspective. [...] But we weren't destined, despite everything, to arrive at a new present beyond our history.] (59)

Without their new names as the crux of their shared world, what was once a complex unity and partnership slips away and a new distance intervenes between previously overlapping worlds and pasts.¹⁵ Not only do they drift apart, they lose access to a shared uncertain language and find themselves communicating through clichés (57). In what will become a familiar theme in Flašar's works, their brave attempt to rename the world ultimately ends in disappointment. Laura rejects the Berlin art scene that flatters and entrances Jan, returns alone to Vienna, and turns to nature and spirituality. Not merely transient, Laura realizes that the freedom of the new name, the belief that the dominant culture could be subverted, was to a certain degree illusory: "Aber ich glaube, das war unser Unglück. Wir hätten—alle beide—bei unseren Namen bleiben sollen. Wie hätten—alle beide—mit uns zufrieden sein sollen. Aber wir waren es nicht oder wir haben es uns verboten. So sehr trotzig war unsere Jugend" [But I believe that was our misfortune. We should have been—both of us—satisfied with ourselves. But we weren't or we forbid this ourselves. So very contrary was

¹⁵ Here it seems that what were once 'touching tales' become self-enclosed, individual ones. See Adelson, "Touching Tales."

our youth] (11). Recognizing the Romantic hubris implicit in their mutual renomination, Laura acknowledges that the name Srećko never granted special access to Jan's authentic self in the realist sense, but instead blinded her to the actual importance of a "particular social world" in determining identity (Vannini and Williams 8). Although tinged with bitterness over the breakdown of their relationship, Laura recognizes here that external supplementation, the simple introduction of the foreign onto the dominant discourse, may expand, but cannot break the brackets delimiting both herself and Jan.¹⁶

Translating the Name of the Mother

Flašar's second work, 2010's *Okaasan: Meine unbekannte Mutter* [Okaasan: My Unknown Mother], imports this belief in the power of names into a more conventional narrative about the struggle of a second-generation daughter to connect with her first-generation immigrant mother. While [*Ich bin*] kept questions of transnational and multicultural belonging predominantly subtextual, *Okaasan* directly negotiates the relationship between an immigrant parent and a bicultural, if not adequately bilingual, child. In the first part of the novel, Franziska, the novel's narrator, describes episodes in her mother's gradual psychic descent into dementia. The most painful aspect of her mother's decline is her withdrawal into Japanese, the language of her childhood, and a language to which Franziska has limited access. Here, Flašar foregrounds the aporia at the centre of the mother-tongue by exposing the anxiety when a child cannot speak or has never adequately learned her mother's mother-tongue, a common experience for many second-generation immigrants around the world. The first part of the book's title, *Okaasan*, stands as Franziska's solitary victory in this context, as she eventually learns how to say mother in Japanese (*Okaasan* 21). *Okaasan* recontextualizes the naming dynamic so that rather than creating a new name ex nihilo, the process becomes a search for an individual's true name across linguistic and national boundaries. Instead of remaining neither fully Austrian nor Japanese, Franziska then longs to experience for herself or vicariously through her mother the feeling of being congruent with the identity constructed within each distinct culture.¹⁷

The novel's title shows how these different identities can be encoded in the frequently too-easily translatable family names. Flašar's novel depends on the familial name's function as a unique word that occupies the border space between proper names,

¹⁶ Nevertheless, this experience in no way dulls Laura's belief in the power of names themselves: She still hopes that they possess a mystical, pre- or non-linguistic significance. They remain talismans for the power of love to redeem an ossified language. In a letter to her current distant and perhaps fictional lover Raoul, Laura writes in English: "You are giving me back my senses. And I will never breathe without your name again. It is everywhere I go (in my mind as well as in my very soul)... I am totally out of my shadows. That's what you do to me! You crazy man! But no words can tell. There is no language, where love is" (*Ich bin* 17). Not only does the name still serve as the impetus for inspiration, but for Laura its untranslatability enables it to circumvent the embodied mind and stir the soul. Whereas her relationship with Jan gave her the hope that love was powerful enough to reshape language and remake Jan himself, she suggests now that speaking the name of a loved one does not merely renew quotidian language, but transcends it: There may not be language "where love is," but there are true, untranslatable names and they become a language all of their own.

¹⁷ Franziska represents a negative interpretation of Flašar's feeling of being neither Austrian nor Japanese (cited above). See Vannini and Williams for a longer discussion of congruency as affect (7).

untranslatable and meaningless referents, and normal descriptive signifiers full of semantic meaning. The novel's title creates a parallel between *okaasan* and *Mutter*, but their dual presence acknowledges the surplus value attached to these names that direct translation can neither convey nor integrate. Through the course of the novel, Franziska learns that while *okaasan* and *Mutter* appear superficially synonymous, they harbor within them very different connotations that remain simultaneously valid.¹⁸

Throughout *Okaasan*, Franziska attempts to counter her mother's withdrawal and deteriorating mental state by retracing the way her mother's names have changed in a lifetime of migration. The protean nature of her mother's name is neither a sudden nor new occurrence, but a function of her emigration from Japan to Austria. For example, her marriage to an Austrian man entails giving up her Japanese name, Miyuki M., and becoming Frau G. Franziska. Franziska describes this translation not as evidence of her mother's successful integration into Austrian society and familial structures, but as her mother's first experience of homelessness (12). She becomes homeless—*heimatlos*—for a second time when this name loses referential meaning following her husband's death. Franziska's account of her mother's descent into dementia credits this loss of her name with far greater significance than the actual death of the father. As her mother loses her grasp on reality, she is brought into hospital which destabilizes the very materiality of her name: "Selbst dein Name, den in großen Lettern am Fußende deines Bettes steht, ist höchst ungewiss und verändert seine Form mit jedem Tag" [Even your name, which stands in large letters at the foot of you bed, is highly uncertain and changes its form from day to day] (17). The death of Franziska's father dissolves the borders within which her mother possessed a name and a coherent identity. In the face of this new uncertainty, Franziska appoints herself the task of discovering what name, if any, will provide a new *Heimat* [homeland], for her ailing mother.

When Franziska finally learns to say *okaasan* ("mother" in Japanese), she both re-connects with her mother and temporarily re-anchors her identity. As *eine Mutter*, the relationship between Franziska and Miyuki M. has been defined through German, through the father's and daughter's native language, located in Vienna. By acquiring Japanese, Franziska imagines she sees her mother as her mother sees herself, through her mother's eyes and very much in her own terms: "Ich habe begonnen, ihre Sprache zu lernen. O-k-a-a-s-a-n. Das ist das japanische Wort für Mutter. Wenn ich es sage, bin ich ihr näher, als ich vorher je war. Es ist, als ob es sie wie ein magischer Bann an die Oberfläche zurückriefe" [I have begun to learn her language. O-k-a-a-s-a-n. That is the Japanese word for mother. When I say it, I am closer to her than I ever was before. It is as if the word is a magic spell that calls her back to the surface"] (21). In attempting to wake her mother during a visit to the hospital, Franziska imagines herself calling to her mother using a series of names from most familiar to most foreign:

¹⁸ The surplus value that makes familial names as untranslatable as proper names recalls a similar scene in Yoko Tawada's novel *Schwager in Bordeaux*. Just like *okaasan* has greater meaning for Franziska and her mother than the German *Mutter*, for Yuna, Tawada's protagonist, the different Japanese words for sister *ane* and *imooto* present a challenge and possibility for her French/German friend Renée (23-24). The two terms for sister evidence how for a Japanese family, the relationship between siblings is not horizontal and egalitarian, but hierarchical. While clearly a function of a specific social dynamic, language is also exposed here as allowing access to a range of different experiences and emotions that no translation can account for.

Ich habe große Lust, an dir zu rütteln und dich wach zu rufen. Dich—mit welchem Namen auch immer—aus deiner Starre zu zerren. Mutter! Du hörst nicht. Frau G.! Du merkst kaum auf. Miyuki M.! Du verziehst nur leicht deinen Mund. Okaasan! Du findest dein Gesicht.

[I have the powerful wish to shake you and to rouse you. To drag you—with whichever name—from your stupor. Mother! You don't hear. Mrs. G.! You barely take notice. Miyuki M.! You lightly twitch you lips. Okaasan! You find your face.]
(25-26, italics in original)

On the one hand, Franziska believes that by retracing her mother's migration through names, languages, and cultures, she has finally landed on her true name, albeit not her original name. As the name harmonizes with her physical face, Franziska imagines she is witnessing a moment of authenticity, of perfect congruity between internal and external selves. On the other hand, the process or journey underlying this discovery means that by pursuing her into Japanese and claiming her as her *okaasan* as well as her *Mutter*, Franziska maintains their connection and stakes a claim for a far more complex identity.¹⁹ This linguistic bond nevertheless becomes the key to unlocking the series of stories from her mother's childhood in Japan (previously unknown to Franziska) that form the bulk of the novel's first section.

The search for names that account for a life of migration is contrasted with the journeys of Franziska's mono-ethnic Austrian friends, who travel to supplement their identities and to acquire new names. As her mother's illness progresses, Franziska compares her struggles with those of her friend Daniel who is introduced to the story playing Chopin for Franziska's mother in an attempt to help her reconnect with a childhood love of music (39). He quickly disappears from the story and is later described as having made an extended trip to India (42). Recalling Jan's renaming in [*Ich bin*], upon his return Daniel refuses his earlier name and wishes to be called Gaurish: "Daniel heißt jetzt *Gaurish*. Es ist einer der vielen Namen Shivas, die Ihn als den Gott der Zerstörung und der Verwandlung bezeichnen" [Daniel is now called *Gaurish*. It is one of the many names of Shiva that denote him as the god of destruction and transformation] (41-42). At the time of Daniel's return, Franziska is overwhelmed with her mother's decline and impending death. She greets his transformation with suspicion and is clearly uninterested in receiving a new name herself. Her own undervalued transnational surplus, rather than simply an impediment to integration, positions her as already occupying the privileged position that Daniel aspires to. The journey she makes with her mother models her own metamorphosis from an overdetermined nationally-bound identity to an ambiguous, mutable, and transnational one.

Not yet fully recognizing her own fundamental difference from Daniel, in the second half of the novel, having briefly recaptured and then lost her mother once again, Franziska follows his example and undertakes a pilgrimage to India in search of a surrogate mother who can give her a new name (70, 77).²⁰ Although she begins her journey with the hope of

¹⁹ As will be discussed below, Deleuze's theory of nomadology plays an important role in Flašar's idea of a "wohltuende Unsicherheit" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 380).

²⁰ Following her mother's death, she remembers Daniel's explanation of how he acquired his new name: "Du wirst nicht glauben, wem ich auf meiner Reise begegnet bin. In Kerala habe ich die Mutter der unsterblichen Glückseligkeit besucht. Ihre Haut ist dunkel wie die der Schwarzen Madonna und [...] sie ist es, die mir meinen neuen Namen gab" ["You will never believe who I met on my trip. In Kerala, I visited

replacing her mother with the “mother of all”—*mata amritanandamayi*—and of exchanging her given name for a more authentic one, Franziska remains suspicious of the orientalist impulses of her fellow travelers. She refuses to wait at an ashram for the ‘mother of all’ to appear and consequently makes a more profound discovery about herself: She learns that like her own mother, she can also maintain numerous names for herself at the same time. Just as her mother was both *Mutter* and *okaasan*, Frau G. and Miyuki M., in India, Franziska allows herself to occupy multiple subject positions—each distinct but united through co-implicated histories. In an encounter with a local fortune teller, she discovers that her repressed memory of an abortion undertaken as a twenty-year-old implies a rejection of her own motherhood. She blames the repression of this trauma for imprisoning her in an unexamined and untruthful language (133-34). Narrating this trauma not only allows her to break with the lies she has told herself as she learns to distinguish her current self from a different possible one, but also builds on the recognition that she carries both earlier selves, as well as new unrealized selves within her at all times: “Es tut gut, in meiner Haut nicht alleine zu sein. Ich bin zu zweit und zu dritt und zu viert” [It feels good not to be alone in my skin. I am two, three, four] (127). In the final pages of the novel, she claims that telling her own story has reintegrated her into her mother’s, and she leaves for Japan as her mother’s inheritor, both reversing and completing the circle of her mother’s migration (139). While this appears to resolve the novel’s narrative arc, a final comment shows that it remains a work in progress. Franziska explains that the rebirth she experiences is directly related to bringing her aborted child, her “namenloses Kind” [nameless child], into language and narrative, and that henceforth “Jeder Tag ist eine Chance, es neu in die Welt zu bringen” [Every day is a chance to bring it into the world anew] (139). Rather than the false promise of one-time transformation through renaming in [*Ich bin*] (and through the example from Franziska’s friend Daniel), this conclusion posits narration as providing agency to retell and reconfigure one’s own identity. Although perhaps not yet consciously achieving the beneficial uncertainty of Flašar’s self-description, her novel’s conclusion offers a model for identity as the constant effort to constellate one’s various names through narrative self-creation.²¹

Internal Migration and Transnational Subjecthood

Evident in its very title, Flašar’s third book, *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte* (2012) [*I Called Him Necktie* (2014)] maintains and expands her focus on (re-)naming by transcending the either/or and both/and of transnational/translational nomination by locating this beneficial uncertainty within a single culture. By recontextualizing the quest for authenticity in Japan, the novel offers lasting insights into how complex identities can be forged and maintained in the face of concrete nationalist pressures. Superficially, the novel leaves behind almost all elements of multiethnic anxiety, as it focuses on the way socially constructed names brutally delimit the lives of two Japanese men, Ohara Tetsu and Taguchi

the mother of eternal blessedness. Her skin is dark like that of the Black Madonna and [...] it was she who gave me my new name”] (*Okaasan* 42).

²¹ This conclusion recalls the sentiment that concludes Peter Handke’s *Die Wiederholung*: “Erzählung, wiederhole, das heißt, erneuere; immer neu hinausschieben eine Entscheidung, welche nicht sein darf.... Es lebe die Erzählung. Die Erzählung muss weitergehen” (333) [“Story, repeat, that is, renew, postpone, again and again, a decision that must not be. [...] Long live my storytelling! It must go on” (*Repetition* 246)].

Hiro. Naming operates on two different levels in the novel: On the one hand, Flašar maintains Japanese naming conventions while writing in German, always stating the characters' family names (Ohara and Taguchi) before their given names (Tetsu and Hiro).²² For a German reader, this is one of many small defamiliarizations, moments where a key aspect of Japanese culture goes untranslated.²³ On the other hand, both Tetsu and Hiro do receive new names in the text, but ones that lock them into unwanted and overly-determined roles within Japanese culture: Tetsu is referred to with the common English loan word *salaryman*—a violent reduction of individuality made even more explicit when he is referred to throughout with the synecdoche *Krawatte* [necktie]. Hiro is a *hikikomori*, a Japanese category for the predominantly young male recluses who shut themselves in the family home. As victims of Japan's aggressively normative dominant culture, these figures allow Flašar to consider the problems of translation and linguistic crisis, and their effect on the experience of authenticity within a single culture, rather than the dubious privilege of transnational experience.²⁴

Just like Laura in *[Ich bin]* and Franziska in *Okaasan*, Taguchi Hiro, *Krawatte*'s narrator, has undertaken a frustrated search for authenticity. On the one hand, he longs to blend in such that his identity is perfectly congruent with dominant Japanese culture. On the other hand, he embraces foreign supplementation and aesthetic defamiliarization in order to clear space for his individual sub-cultural identity. His retreat from society follows the repeated failure of these efforts. The narrated time of the novel begins, however, when he re-enters Japanese society after a two-year period of isolation and Chandos-esque linguistic breakdown: Hiro, the no-longer isolated recluse, escapes his solitude and finds an interlocutor and confessor in the unemployed *salaryman* Tetsu. The novel consists of forty-three short chapters in which these two self-contradictory figures explain how the fear of deviating from the conventional path through school and into a career has stunted their identities and crippled their relationships with others.²⁵

More than merely a literary trope, hikikomoris have become a significant social concern for Japanese society, with some sources estimating that there may be more than a million hikikomoris living in Japan.²⁶ For the vast majority of these individuals, it is believed that the crushing weight of familial expectation and a highly pressurized education system lead them to reject the world outside the home, a world in which they can only disappoint their families. Hikikomoris are unique insofar as this rejection of familial expectation is accomplished through a deeper migration into family and a total dependence on those the hikikomori rejects. The hikikomori opts for imprisonment within the family

²² Japanese conventions for names (family name, first name) are maintained in *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte*. I follow Flašar's text but refer to the characters with their first names throughout.

²³ There is, however, a glossary at the end of the book that explains many of these untranslated features.

²⁴ The image of Japan provided by Flašar conforms closely to that described by Yoko Tawada, where although foreign travel has increased, the 'preposterousness' of speaking another language fluently remains (Totten 95).

²⁵ As Flašar comments in an interview, instead of a prolonged adolescence in which Austrians are allowed to try out various *Lebensstilen* [lifestyles], they represent how Japanese society lays out a clear path from kindergarten to retirement and "von diesem klar strukturierten Weg abzuweichen ist schwer" [[It] is difficult to stray from this clearly structured path] ("Es handelt").

²⁶ For an excellent introduction to the phenomenon see Maggie Jones, "Shutting Themselves In."

home, and thereby makes explicit the restrictions already implicit in their family structure. Hiro explains: “Es gibt keinen besseren Ort, sich zu verstecken, kein idealeres Schlupfloch als die Familie” (*Krawatte* 60) [“There’s no better place to hide than in a family, the ideal hiding place” (*Necktie* 58)]. The hikikomori is symptomatic of the radical linearity or absence of true alternatives in Japanese society. Rather than enter into a highly regulated and routine adulthood, hikikomoris turn back towards childhood, shunning independence completely.

In the course of his confessions to Tetsu, Hiro relates a series of crises where exposure to linguistic difference offers escape routes from familial obligations and societal expectations. In each case, these alternative paths are violently blocked and Hiro passively witnesses as his friends are punished for running afoul of Japanese society. The most poignant episode concerns Hiro’s friendship with a neighbor, Miyajima Yukiko, who commits suicide following a lifetime of relentless bullying. The series of events that lead to Yukiko’s death expose the wide range of homogenizing forces underpinning Japanese society. Although Hiro is initially allowed to play with Yukiko, one of the few other children his age in his neighborhood, his parents discourage him from actively cultivating the relationship as they denigrate the Miyajimas for their poverty and their obscure origin (70). In this instance, Japanese migrants from within Japan are shown as encountering prejudices more commonly found in stories of immigrants to Germany or Austria. In response to Hiro’s persistent demand for her to account for her origins, Yukiko invents a fairytale to lend her difference an alluring mystique: “Wie kommt es, dass du so anders bist, fragte ich einmal, wir saßen im Schatten der Kiefer. Yukikos Antwort, ein auswendig gelernter Satz: Weil ich von einem Stern gefallen bin” (71) [“How come you’re so different, I asked once, as we sat in the shade of the pine tree. Yukiko’s answer, a sentence learned by heart: Because I fell from a star” (67)].²⁷ Compared with his own mundane and settled family, Hiro finds this fantastical story confusing, but intensely attractive: The two children swear eternal friendship (“Freunde für immer und ewig” (71-72) [“Friends. Forever and ever” (68)]) and then carve their names into the bark of a tree together. Nevertheless, Hiro’s demand for an accounting of her origin and Yukiko’s rehearsed explanation demonstrate how fully they have already internalized their parents’ prejudices and insecurities. Hiro admits that this suspicion of the Miyajimas gradually corrupted his friendship with Yukiko, and he soon finds his own evidence of their lower status: He claims that he could not tolerate the smell of the Miyajimas’ apartment that clung to his friend (73). He describes this change as a loss of innocence and of the ability to accept things as they are, i.e., without the help of convention: “plötzlich sah ich aus Augen, die prüfen, aus Augen, die zweifeln, aus Augen, die gar nichts mehr sehen” (72) [“Suddenly I saw with scrutinizing eyes, with eyes of doubt, with eyes that no longer see” (69)]. Appropriating these standards from his parents violently shrinks his horizons and severs his relationship with Yukiko. In other words, testing the world with every thought or glance means that the reality and value of every experience is constantly measured against expectation. As Hiro allows socially constructed perspectives and rationality to delimit his experience of the world, he asserts that becoming an adult implies becoming imprisoned in the known and losing access to unexpected possibilities and myth. Ultimately, this transformation requires

²⁷ This is a perfect example of the privilege paradox at work. It also recalls one of the stories in *Okaasan*, in which the young Miyuki M. is referred to as a “Mondprinzessin” [moon-princess] (30).

a rewriting of the past, one which elides his friendship with Yukiko with dire consequences for both (76).

When Yukiko reappears a few years later, her internal *Migrationshintergrund* [migration background], her poverty, and her smell once again isolate her from and make her a target for her classmates. What was at first merely the story of a passing childhood friendship becomes far more sinister. In contrast to Flašar's other works, where different types of transnational experience endow characters with new names and the potential for multiple authentic identities, Yukiko is unable to find harmony with her bullies and erases her own name:

An jedem Morgen, wenn Yukiko in die Klasse kam, stand ihr Tisch verkehrt herum an einer anderen Stelle. Auf der Tafel die Karikatur eines grunzenden Schweins. Es hatte ein Bein angehoben. Darunter ihr Name. Sie wischte ihn Strich für Strich fort. Aus Yukiko wurde Yuki. Aus Yuki wurde nichts. (80)

[On that morning, when Yukiko came into the classroom, her desk had been switched, and turned around. There was a caricature of a grunting pig on the blackboard. It was lifting one leg. Her name was underneath. She wiped it off, stroke by stroke. Yukiko became Yuki. Yuki became nothing. (76)]

This self-erasure will serve as a model for Hiro when he attempts to drop out of society himself, but it does nothing to help Yukiko escape her bullies. The loss of her name opens Yukiko to even greater, more violent persecution: She is physically and perhaps sexually assaulted by some of the boys in her class. Although he witnesses the assault, Hiro's own fear of being bullied prevents him from actively interpreting the scene and prevents him from intervening (80). In retrospect, Hiro describes himself as a coward for not standing up for Yukiko, but at the time, he despised Yukiko because her difference forced him to acknowledge the aspects of himself which he was willing to sacrifice to fit in.²⁸

Yukiko's subsequent suicide teaches Hiro that the ability to forget and to rewrite the past is as important in maintaining an illusory reality as the "nichts mehr sehen" [no longer seeing] he had previously learned (82). On an individual level, Hiro feels both responsibility and guilt for her death, and attempts to reintegrate Yukiko into his past by revisiting the tree bearing their names (82-83). On a broader social level, however, these efforts conflict with a communal effort to repress this trauma. To erase the Miyajimas and the shame of Yukiko's suicide, their house is emptied, then torn down (83-84, 79-80). This leads Hiro to reason that becoming an adult requires not only accepting the world "as it is," but also forgetting and ignoring everything beyond this narrow socially determined horizon: "Das ist Erwachsenwerden. Die Dinge, so wie sie sind, zu überstehen und sie selbst dann, wenn man sich nicht von ihnen erholt, für überstanden zu halten. Zu vergessen. Auch das. Wieder und wieder zu vergessen" (85) ["This is being grownup. To get over it, whatever it was, and even when you have not recovered, to regard it as over and done with. To forget. That too. To forget over and over again" (81)]. His relationship with Yukiko and her death immure Hiro in a world of normative and restrictive appearances, where it is

²⁸ Hiro claims: "Ich hasse dich dafür, dass du mich zwingst, zu den anderen zu gehören" (*Krawatte* 75) ["I hate you for making me belong to the others" (72)].

more important to fit within well-known roles than to pursue an identity at odds with social conventions.²⁹

In contrast to the Austrian pursuit of transnational experience in *Okaasan*, Flašar's Japanese social homogeneity relies on the complete rejection of foreign experience and transnational identities. Hiro's passive witnessing of bullying continues in the account he gives of his classmate Kobayashi Takeshi, who is persecuted for his fluency in English. Kobayashi spends the first thirteen years of his life in America before returning with his parents to Japan. He stands out in the narrator's class for how naturally and fluently he speaks English. Hiro describes how the influx of Kobayashi's English opened up a new world for him:

Wenn er New York oder Chicago oder San Francisco sagte, sagte er es so, als ob es gleich dort hinten um die Ecke wäre. Sein Englisch ein Fluss, ich konnte mich nicht satt hören. Er sagte Hi. Und Thank You. Und Bye. Aus seinem Mund kamen die Wörter wie ein geschmeidiger Wind. Zu geschmeidig, fanden einige und lauerten ihn auf. Anderntags hatte er einen Zahn weniger. Er lispelte: ich bin hingefallen. Der Zahn wurde ersetzt, das Lispeln blieb. (57)

[When he said New York or Chicago or San Francisco, he said it as if it were just over there, around the corner. His English flowed, I couldn't hear enough of it. He said Hi. And Thank you. And Bye. The words came from his mouth in a whirlwind. Too fast thought some, and were ready to pounce on him. The next day he was missing a tooth. He lisped: I fell. The tooth was replaced, the lisp remained. (55)]

As the bullying continues, Kobayashi gradually disavows his English in favor of a safer monolingual life consistent with Japanese dominant culture. For Hiro, the exclusion of these English sounds from his class reduces his world back to its former size: Kobayashi "ging sogar soweit, unseren Akzent zu imitieren. Er sagte San Furanschisuko und es war auf einmal weit, weit fort. Ein unerreichbarer Ort. Es war grausam mitanzuhören, wie er sich dazu zwang" (58) ["He even went so far as to imitate our accent. He said San Furanschisuko and it was gone, far far away. It was ghastly to listen to it. How he forced himself to do it" (55)].³⁰ Nevertheless, this exposure broadens Hiro's geographic horizons, but rather than encouraging him to migrate it enables him to recognize the possibility of difference within Japanese, of seeing his own culture from the outside, and separating himself from its presumption of naturalness.³¹ The brutality with which this border crossing is policed evidences the violence necessary to reinforce the normativity of Japanese society.

²⁹ Indeed, there is perhaps no better description of how affixing post- to a word conjures up the idea of its transcendence while in fact repressing its ever-presence. Postnational and postracial being the most topical examples.

³⁰ San Francisco remains a site of otherness and of possibility. Unwilling to acknowledge that Hiro has become a hikikomori, his parents tell friends that he is studying in America and go so far as to fake a picture of them with him visiting the Golden Gate Bridge (48).

³¹ Yoko Tawada describes this dynamic: "It is useful, I believe, to fundamentally lose one sense of direction at least once. To break with the familiarity and routine of the culture and the institution of the society in which you grew up. Thus one is at least partially reborn somewhere else and this gives you a double advantage: you can observe the patterns of new institutions in a foreign world with the critical consciousness of an adult and selectively appropriate them like an actor does" ("Scattered Leaves" 14-15).

Like Laura in *[Ich bin]* and Franziska in *Okaasan*, Hiro also investigates whether aesthetic defamiliarization can evade this all-consuming normativity. He invests his final hope for creating an authentic identity in Kumamoto, whom he describes as a highly gifted poet “auf der Suche nach dem perfekten Gedicht” (33) [“on the quest for the perfect poem” (32)]. Although Hiro is initially intimidated by Kumamoto because he has difficulty understanding the contradictory significance in his poems, he slowly learns to appreciate the alternative relationship to language that they offer.³² When he finally embraces this friendship, he begins to describe his awe at how poetry insulates the individual from social norms by sustaining such opposing meanings (34). Literature even seems to offer Kumamoto protection from the pervasive double threat of bullying and parental pressure that has so paralyzed Hiro in the past. Hiro explains his perspective on Kumamoto: “Ich bewunderte seine Unbeirrbarkeit. Von ihm ging das Licht eines Menschen aus, der genau wusste, wohin er ging und dass es dort, wohin er ging, schrecklich einsam sein würde. Er hielt nichts von Meinungen. Er lachte mit denen, die über ihn lachten” (34-35) [“I admired his single-mindedness. A light emanated from him, showing someone who knew where he was going and that there, where he was going, it would be terribly lonely. He couldn’t have cared less about what other people thought. He laughed with those who laughed at him” (33-34)]. In contrast to what Hiro acknowledges as his cowardly attempts to avoid bullying, Kumamoto’s devotion to poetry, his romantic quest for the perfect poem in an imperfect world, makes him a hero. He becomes Hiro’s role model for the possibility of living on the margins of Japanese society and in defiance of its expectations.

This hope of evading if not fully escaping hegemonic society comes to a tragic end when Hiro witnesses Kumamoto’s apparent suicide. As with Yukiko’s earlier death, Hiro positions himself as a helpless witness as Kumamoto throws himself into passing traffic. Kumamoto’s act crushes Hiro’s belief in the redemptive promise of aesthetic works to offer alternatives to the status quo through their defamiliarizing nature. Consequently, Hiro blames language itself, as he sees it as doubly at fault in Kumamoto’s death: first because his faith in the defamiliarizing power of poetic language has been disappointed (39), and secondly because he could not understand Kumamoto’s last words—words which might have rendered his death comprehensible. Hiro faints upon seeing Kumamoto injured on the street and upon awakening he concludes that poetry could not safeguard Kumamoto from a society that, according to Kumamoto’s own father, “brauche keine Sonderlinge” (34) [“doesn’t need misfits” (32)]. Whereas Yukiko’s suicide makes sense to Hiro and was made sense of by his community, Kumamoto’s death fundamentally alienates Hiro from the rational, hermeneutic language that he still valued:

Was soll man sagen, wenn einem die Wörter ausgegangen sind? Nachdem die Tür hinter mir zugefallen war, fühlte ich eine sprachlose Leere. Ich legte mich hin, sprachlos, rannte in Gedanken noch einmal auf die Kreuzung zu. Kumamotos Mund. Was hatte er gerufen? Wieder und wieder versuchte ich, es von seinen Lippen abzulesen, wieder und wieder misslang der Versuch. War es ein Wort gewesen? Ein Wort wie Freiheit? Oder Leben? Oder Glück? War es ein Nein gewesen? Oder ein Ja? Ein schlichter Gruß? Vielleicht: Leb wohl! War es mein Name gewesen? Oder: Vater? Vielleicht: Mutter? Oder irgendetwas, was nicht von Bedeutung war, und es war sinnlos, es wissen zu wollen. (38-39)

³² Hiro is particularly puzzled by the line “Die Hölle ist kalt” (34) [“Hell is cold” (33)].

[What can you say when you've run out of words? After the door shut behind me, I felt a speechless emptiness. I lay down, speechless, ran in my thoughts towards the intersection again. Kumamoto's mouth. What had it shouted? Again and again I tried to read it from his lips, again and again I tried and failed. Was it a word? A word like freedom? Or life? Or happiness? Was it a no? Or a yes? A simple greeting? Perhaps: Farewell? Was it my name? Or: Father? Perhaps: Mother? Or something of no importance and it was pointless to want to know. (37-38)]

More than merely a linguistic crisis, Kumamoto's act also brings Hiro a new clarity of vision, whereby he sees through the superficial personalities of his family and passersby to recognize their hidden ossified selves: He slips into a strange dream-state in which he sees everyone around him as a skeleton (38). Liberated from the blinkered vision of convention, Hiro understands the fundamental congruence between the imperative to either conform or die. Suicide merely reinforces the dominant, rather than undermining it. Instead, Hiro sees the possibility of plotting a new course: He returns home, locks himself in his room, and spends the next two years not trying to find himself, but deferring this false choice between conformity and death.

Hiro becomes a hikikomori not merely to avoid being bullied or witnessing this bullying, but as a retreat from conventional language and as a rejection of the equally clichéd Romantic ideal of discovering self-congruence. Confronting the seemingly absolute power of social structures, their suppression of difference and heteroglossia, Hiro attempts to unlearn language and the very concepts that have imprisoned him (23). In this sense, his isolation is not merely a rejection of his family's expectation of success in school and his subsequent career, but an attempt to find a completely new path. Unlike other hikikomoris who turn back to childhood—retracing their own paths, spending their days playing videogames and building model planes—Hiro attempts to escape the language and conceptual framework of identity in order to find an escape route:

Nichts soll mich ablenken von dem Versuch, mich vor mir selbst zu bewahren. Vor meinem Namen etwa, vor meinem Erbe. Ich bin der einzige Sohn. [...] Ein Blick in den Spiegel: Es gibt mich noch. Ich unterdrückte den Schrei, der in meiner Kehle saß. Auch vor ihm wollte ich mich bewahren. Vor meiner Stimme, vor meiner Sprache. (42-43)

[Nothing can distract me from the attempt to protect me from myself. From my name, my inheritance. I am an only son. [...] A glance in the mirror: It is still me. I suppressed the cry sitting in my throat. I wanted to protect myself from it too. From my voice, from my language. (41-42)]

In a subtle difference to Yukiko, Hiro attempts to undo his name rather than erase it. Being a hikikomori implies being both present and absent, it is an existence under erasure that serves as the first step in truly mitigating the homogenizing forces of society.³³

Although it takes Hiro a full two years to understand the implications of this experience, he eventually emerges from this crisis transformed. In contrast to the radical acts of Yukiko

³³ Flašar states in an interview: "Es handelt sich bei diesem In-sich-selbst-Verschwinden trotz aller Stille um ein sehr lautes Nein, auch zum eigenen Menschsein, das ja aus Kontakt mit dem anderen, aus Interaktion besteht" [This disappearance into the self, notwithstanding any silence, is a matter of a very loud no, even to one's own humanity that follows from contact with the other, from interaction] ("Es handelt sich").

and Kumamoto, becoming a hikikomori is not an end in itself, but a process resulting in an unexpected renewal. Hiro cannot silence his inner voice nor unlearn language, rather he acquires a new relationship to both: “Zwei Jahre lang hatte ich mich darin geübt, das Sprechen zu verlernen. Zugegeben, es war mir nicht gelungen. Die Sprache, die ich gelernt hatte, durchdrang mich, und sogar, wenn ich schwieg, war mein Schweigen beredt” (23) [“I had practiced forgetting to speak for two years. Granted, I had not succeeded. The language that I had learned permeated me, and even when I was silent, my silence was eloquent” (23)]. Like Kumamoto’s “kalte Hölle,” [cold Hell] Hiro’s own “beredetes Schweigen” [eloquent silence] demonstrates him finally accepting a reality beyond conventional meanings where antithetical states can be sustained without resolution.³⁴ Instead of suppressing uncertainty by negating himself and his very subjectivity, he finds a new tolerance for contradiction. In each of his actions, he embodies this contradictory state more than ever before as he remains a hikikomori, but one in search of new connections with others. These years have alienated him from others, and most importantly, he now relates to Japanese as to a foreign language (11) and even to his own name as someone else’s (30). In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, he has become a nomad within his own society (*Kafka* 19). Emerging from this inner immigration, Hiro encounters his formerly familiar world as a foreign country.³⁵ His first contact is with the similarly conflicted and unemployed *salaryman* who helps him process the various failed friendships narrated over the course of the novel. During these confessions, both figures realize that their own difference from themselves, their inner incongruence, is in fact a wealth that they can rely on to resist what Hiro describes as the threat of re-harmonization into Japanese society (Flašar, *Krawatte* 43).³⁶

Conclusion

In tracing the way names are enforced, created, adopted, and exchanged, Flašar’s texts all lead, albeit in varied ways and in differing degrees, to this deferral of subjective authenticity as self-congruence. In this sense, the development from Flašar’s first two novels to *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte* runs very much parallel with the development of contemporary transnational subjects: While [*Ich bin*] shows more or less explicitly transnational subjects failing to attain authentic identity against ethno-nationalist structures, *Okaasan* and *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte* offer more optimistic strategies. Only *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte*, however, realizes a new mode of authenticity based on Flašar’s idea of a “wohltuende Unsicherheit” [beneficial uncertainty]. Hiro creates an alterity within

³⁴ “Seine Illusion besteht darin, dass er sich einsperrt und denkt, er bewirke dadurch nichts. Er glaubt, sein Verschwinden hätte auf die Außenwelt keinen Einfluss [...] Das ist seine große Illusion, er sagt ja dann auch selbst, dass es eigentlich unmöglich ist, niemandem zu begegnen. Indem man da ist und atmet, begegnet man der ganzen Welt” [His illusion is that he locks himself in and imagines that he affects nothing with this act. He believes that his disappearance will have no influence on the external world [...] That is his greatest illusion—he even says so himself—that it is actually impossible not to encounter anyone. Insofar as one lives and breathes, one encounters the whole world] (“Es handelt sich”).

³⁵ As Tawada states in a conversation with Bettina Brandt, this is the perfect setting for aesthetic creation, i.e., a space where Hiro can reassume authority over his own identity construction and use language to (re)create a world (Brandt 14-15).

³⁶ The use of harmonization to explain integration suggests the possibility of thinking about polytonality as a way of understanding this acceptance of persistent contradiction.

himself, the Japanese language, and Japanese society that promises new freedom without migration or transnational experience as such.³⁷ In effect, the story exemplifies how even non-minority individuals can transcend the expectation of discovering and maintaining a feeling of self-congruence (Vannini 7, Butler 41), and acquire an ability to perform difference themselves.³⁸ *Ich nannte ihn Krawatte* demonstrates that not only does the transnational subject exist without specific transnational experience, but also that by maintaining different, even contradictory names the reductive logic of the ethno-nationalist model, which understands “transnational” through the oppositions home/abroad or domestic/foreign, can be outflanked (Anthias 103).

Flašar’s texts constantly lead readers to recognize that the strategic cultivation of this “wohltuende Unsicherheit” [“beneficial uncertainty”] functions just as effectively in Austria as it does in Japan. In an autobiographical essay for *der Standard*, Flašar explains that this mode of being is not merely one option among many for her fellow Austrians, but a fundamental characteristic of the Austrian society with which she identifies:

Gerade ihr Misstrauen gegenüber einem solchen Begriff [die Heimat] ist mir sympathisch, ihre Abneigung gegen einen unhinterfragten Patriotismus. Eine Haltung, die mancherorts bedauert wird – warum wir Österreicher nicht mehr Selbstvertrauen hätten? Warum wir uns unnötig klein machten?—eine Haltung, die aber das suggerierte Österreichertum fällt, miteinzuschließen, Grenzen auszuloten, sie vielleicht sogar zu durchbrechen, indem man den vielen Gesichtern und Biografien von vielen unterschiedlichen ÖsterreicherInnen, ob nun mit diesem oder jenem Hintergrund, mit simpler Wertschätzung begegnet.

[I find precisely their distrust of such a term [homeland] appealing, their disinclination to an unexamined patriotism. An attitude that is lamented in certain quarters—why we Austrians don’t have more self-belief? Why we humble ourselves unnecessarily?—an attitude that demands that the suggested Austrian identity be inclusive, explore boundaries, and even break through them insofar as one encounters the many faces and biographies of diverse Austrians regardless of background with basic appreciation.] (“Mein Österreich ist ein anderes Österreich”)

For Flašar, the inability to accept a monolithic *Heimat* [homeland] as natural creates an openness in Austria to transnational identities, or argues for a society that is itself always already transnational. The restorative nostalgia of contemporary identitarian movements proves that this transnational Austria is already an established fact. Her assessment parallels the way other transnational writers such as Vladimir Vertlib and Doron Rabinovici understand Austria, as well as how Navid Kermani’s famously described Germany in his recent speech in the German Bundestag on the 65th anniversary of the German Basic Law.³⁹ In all of Flašar’s works, characters exist transnationally regardless

³⁷ Flašar explains: “Dieser Übergang [von der Kindheit ins Erwachsenenalter] gestaltet sich bei ‘uns’ vielfach über das Experimentieren mit verschiedenen Lebensstilen, wofür es in Japan schlichtweg und wortwörtlich weniger Raum gibt” (“Es handelt”). See also Drynda (75).

³⁸ Stuart Taberner discusses the potential of nonminority writers creating transnational (641).

³⁹ “Sie ist das Deutschland, das ich liebe, nicht das großsprecherische, nicht das kraftmeiernde, nicht das Stolz-ein-Deutscher-zu-sein-und-Europa-spricht-endlich-deutsch-Deutschland, vielmehr eine Nation, die über ihre Geschichte verzweifelt, die bis hin zur Selbstanklage mit sich ringt und hadert, zugleich am eigenen Versagen gereift ist” (21) [This is the Germany that I love: not the grandiloquent one, not the boastful one, not the “proud of being German and Europe is finally speaking German” Germany, but a

of whether they remain ‘at home,’ travel between German-speaking countries, or venture farther afield—and regardless of whether they are themselves conventional minorities or non-minorities. As Floya Anthias writes:

It is true that if a transnational framing is adopted, the idea of people emanating from discrete national or indeed ethnic origins is problematized as all people, whatever the legal/national borders inhabit transnational spaces in the modern world. This includes both those who continue to live in their countries or localities of origin, those who leave them for newer paths and those who are in flow. (Anthias 103)

While such complex identities are omnipresent in contemporary societies, Flašar’s works demonstrate that ‘solving’ their distortion through a violently reductive identitarian nostalgia, a longing for homogeneity, or for authenticity as permanent self-congruence—even in hybrid form—will always fail, although not before inflicting irreversible damage on those it either excludes or forces to conform.⁴⁰ While this transnational identity requires significant effort to constellate, the centripetal reduction of these complex and plural subjectivities promised by monochromatic identitarian models for identity only engender further conflict.

nation which despairs of its own history, which wrestles with itself and beats its breast to the point of self-reproach, but one which has also matured through its own failings] (69).

⁴⁰ Flašar then consistently describes a world where, to paraphrase Michael Holquist “the condition of being transnational appears increasingly to be the natural condition of having any national identity at all” (21).

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