



PROJECT MUSE®

---

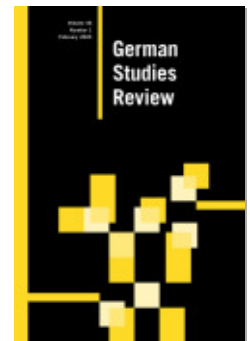
## Reading Racialization: Yadé Kara's *Selam Berlin*

Yasemin Yildiz

German Studies Review, Volume 46, Number 1, February 2023, pp.  
97-115 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gsr.2023.0005>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/882138>

# Reading Racialization: Yadé Kara's *Selam Berlin*

Yasemin Yildiz

## ABSTRACT

In a context that denies the workings of race, engagements with its impact are not always easily discernible. This essay argues that Yadé Kara's 2003 novel *Selam Berlin* can be read as an overlooked literary negotiation of this "political racelessness" (Goldberg) through its nuanced attention to racialization. Building on critical accounts from Frantz Fanon to Sara Ahmed, the essay contours the specific nature of racialization from the vantage point of those subjected to it and demonstrates how the novel narrativizes the components of this quotidian process. Rather than merely describing it, however, the novel makes racialization's impact palpable via an affective pedagogy targeted at the reader.

---

Before the antiracist uprisings against police brutality and systemic racism under the banner of Black Lives Matter arrived in Germany in 2020, debates about racism had already agitated German public discourse two years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Summer 2018 saw the spread of the hashtag #metwo on German twitter. Inspired by the powerful testimonials to sexual abuse under #metoo, the German hashtag invited those with "two" (or more) identities to share their experiences of racist discrimination in Germany. Gießen-based college student Ali Can had created the hashtag in the wake of soccer player Mesut Özil's high-profile resignation from the German national team.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most potent symbol of so-called integration after his inclusion in the national team in 2009, Özil had come under massive attack for a picture he took with autocratic Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan earlier in 2018 and was subsequently made the central scapegoat for the German soccer team's embarrassing loss at the World Cup that year.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this period, his Germanness was incessantly questioned. Özil finally resigned via a long social media statement that became an instant event.<sup>4</sup> There he highlighted, on the one hand, his right to a dual identity—"I have two

hearts, one German and one Turkish”—and, on the other hand, the long-standing racist treatment he was subjected to by German media, soccer officials, politicians, other elites, and regular soccer fans, which had now fully surfaced.<sup>5</sup> Özil concluded his resignation, “I am German when we win, but an immigrant when we lose.” In response, many of those whom he criticized dismissed Özil’s accusations sharply and questioned even the possibility of him having experienced racism at all.<sup>6</sup> It was against this dismissal in particular that #metwo invited others to share their own stories of racism in Germany. Taking off after journalist Malcolm Ohanwe posted about his experiences as a Black German, thousands of people of a variety of backgrounds followed the invitation and posted tweets with their own experiences in schools, at workplaces, in public spaces, and when seeking jobs or apartments, writing short testimonial vignettes in the digital format.<sup>7</sup> These tweets in turn drew the attention of the mainstream press, which republished such stories within their own formats.<sup>8</sup> Through the social media interventions by these minorities—from global sports celebrity Özil to activist student Can, from journalist Ohanwe to the numerous other contributors to the hashtag—the contested presence and functioning of everyday racism in postwar Germany came, temporarily, to the fore.

That it took the voices and efforts of so many “players” to make the existence of everyday racism visible and at least briefly acknowledged in the contemporary public sphere begins to illuminate the massive forces they were up against in the discursive landscape of race in Germany. Underwritten by the weight of the Nazi past, race-based arguments have been deemed illegitimate in the postwar public sphere.<sup>9</sup> As Rita Chin points out, however, “the injunction against invoking race did not prevent the fundamental components of racial formation—ideologies of essentialism and absolute difference, as well as social and economic hierarchies of differential rights—from operating in postwar Germany.”<sup>10</sup> The effect of this injunction was instead to delegitimize any explicit public race *talk* after Nazism’s defeat.<sup>11</sup> This denial of the operations of race and with it racism, even as they persist, is facilitated by and generates further “amnesia,” as Fatima El-Tayeb argues.<sup>12</sup> An active, repeated forgetting, this amnesia frames both the presence of minorities across European history and their experiences of racism as an unexpected novelty eternally encountered as if for the first time.<sup>13</sup> We can see this in the surprised response by many mainstream outlets to the #metwo hashtag stories. Meanwhile, there is, for instance, little trace within German cultural memory of poet Semra Ertan’s 1982 self-immolation in Hamburg as an act of protest against relentless racist discrimination.<sup>14</sup> David Theo Goldberg has described this split structure—the workings of race and racism, on the one hand, and the denial of its existence and significance, on the other—as “political racelessness” and argued that it constitutes the hallmark of “racial Europeanization.”<sup>15</sup> “Political racelessness” in this context means that there is no sanctioned political language, no vocabulary, no categories, and no lens available for registering and articulating the

multi-layered production and working of race. To nevertheless speak about race and racism in such a context therefore always carries with it the threat of being cast out as unintelligible or illegitimate.

How then can one tell a story about race and racism under conditions of political racelessness? Rather than highlight explicitly anti-racist and critical interventions that are not afraid to challenge the taboo head-on,<sup>16</sup> the remainder of this essay revisits a literary work that eschews any directly confrontational language and, instead, in tone and format squarely positions itself in a popular, that is, seemingly “raceless,” field. Written in a breezy and colloquial style, Yadé Kara’s 2003 debut novel *Selam Berlin* (Hey Berlin) takes up the fall of the Berlin Wall in often humorous ways from a Turkish-German perspective.<sup>17</sup> Set between the dates of the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989 and the political unification of East and West Germany on October 3, 1990, *Selam Berlin* follows the story of Hasan Kazan, a 19-year-old Turkish-German Berliner and his family and friends. Hasan has grown up moving back and forth between his native Berlin and Istanbul but has a strong identification as “Berlinli.”<sup>18</sup> Eager to participate in this historic moment, he quickly finds that the events have a much bigger and more personal impact on his life than anticipated. It is soon revealed that his father, a travel agent in Kreuzberg who used to dream of a socialist revolution, had a long-term affair with a woman in East Berlin and a second family shielded by the Wall.<sup>19</sup> The fall of the Wall thus leads directly to the break-up and uneasy reconfiguration of the Kazan family rather than uniting them. Sympathetic but at times hapless, Hasan, a protagonist with picaresque features, meanwhile searches for his own path and place during this historical-cum-familial upheaval, which leads him to a variety of encounters and experiences that allow the novel to chart the plethora of scenes and moods of post-Wall Berlin. From an unhappy affair to a difficult search for an apartment and a job to a disillusioning stint on a film set, numerous experiences reshape the initially optimistic and easygoing teenager until he reaches a violent breaking point and has to reconsider his future.

Considered variously as the first Turkish-German *Wenderoman*,<sup>20</sup> as Berlin literature,<sup>21</sup> or as a novel of postmigration, transculturality, and hybridity,<sup>22</sup> *Selam Berlin* has been hailed by most critics for its playfulness and “new kind of creative energy,”<sup>23</sup> while others have described it as rather “slight . . . caricatural . . . cliché”<sup>24</sup> due to its frequent use of hyperbole and stereotype for comic effect. While these different framings identify important facets and genre affinities of the novel, the following essay draws attention to a thread that surfaces throughout the book but that to date has been only peripherally registered. Many scholars briefly remark on the presence of “xenophobia,” “discrimination,” “othering,” and even “racism” in the novel but subsume those experiences under “stigma” and “stereotype” and do not pursue them further.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, I contend that the novel conveys something much more specific than these mostly generic descriptors imply: *Selam Berlin* time

and again delineates and makes palpable the de/formative process of *racialization* from the vantage point of those subjected to it. Racialization, as I elaborate more fully below, describes the process of being *made* different and on that basis being denied access to self-determination and to resources. That racialization should be so central in a story set in the aftermath of the fall of the Wall is not a coincidence. After all, this period has been recognized as—often violently—recalibrating racial formation in a newly unifying country.<sup>26</sup> Yet the novel's contribution goes beyond this specific context and beyond mere description. As I demonstrate, *Selam Berlin* renders the experience of racialization through a variety of narrative means that amount to an affective pedagogy targeted at the reader. It is in this manner that *Selam Berlin* ultimately negotiates political racelessness: by making the elements of this experience felt rather than spoken.

In the following, I draw on key theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Sara Ahmed to identify the specific components of racialization and then show how *Selam Berlin* mobilizes these at different narrative levels. Through the in-depth analysis of an early key scene, I establish that it is indeed racialization that is at stake in the novel before going on to highlight how the novel conveys the centrality of repetition in this process. As my reading shows, the novel grapples specifically with the racialization of Turkishness. Yet it probes this racialization as emerging from a relational process of shifting constellations, involving, in particular, figurations of Jewishness and Blackness. Finally, I demonstrate how the narrative's construction of its protagonist-narrator's partial knowledge about racialization serves as a means of its affective pedagogy.

By contouring the specificity of racialization and pursuing its textual configuration in a literary text, this essay seeks to contribute to the growing German studies scholarship on contemporary workings of race.<sup>27</sup> The tools of literary analysis, it hopes to show, can be mobilized in addressing the problem of political racelessness in nuanced ways. As the example of *Selam Berlin* suggests, they can help identify overlooked modes of knowledge about the workings of race in unexpected places. Before entering into the specific close readings, however, a fuller definition and account of racialization is necessary.

### **Coordinates of Racialization**

Racialization takes us to the domain of the everyday. The tendency to associate racism exclusively with Nazism or with egregious United States practices of segregation and mistreatment under Jim Crow has established a high bar for the recognition of particular acts, practices, and experiences in postwar Europe as racism and has particularly obscured its quotidian forms. The foundational work of sociologist Philomena Essed since the 1980s has been crucial in identifying the nature and workings of everyday racism in this regard.<sup>28</sup> Essed's approach is based on the detailed description and analysis of everyday acts of racism and discrimination from the vantage point of those

experiencing them. Her research has identified a number of its core characteristics: first, it consists of often seemingly small acts in mundane settings in which the way the body is read leads to differential treatment; second, these mundane acts are experienced as everyday racism only through their repeated nature; and third, those experiencing these acts frequently question their own perception of the situation before concluding they have encountered discrimination.

Although Essed exclusively uses the concept of “everyday racism,” her findings echo what others have described as racialization. In its psychoanalytically grounded, phenomenological understanding, this concept goes back to anticolonial critic Franz Fanon.<sup>29</sup> In his famous chapter “The Fact of Blackness” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon illuminates the process of becoming marked as a racialized subject upon arriving in France in phenomenological detail and with stylistic verve. He highlights, in particular, the impact of the white gaze as disquietingly challenging the subject’s own claims in the world and sealing him instead into “crushing objecthood.”<sup>30</sup> Although he can at first laugh away such instances, their incessant repetition leads to a fragmentation not just of the racialized subject’s self-image but his very “bodily schema.”<sup>31</sup> A much-cited scene in a train where a white child calls to his mother, “Look, a N---o!,” finally manifests an interpellation whose work goes beyond the gaze and makes his bodily schema “crumbl[e],” so that he becomes “on that day, completely dislocated.”<sup>32</sup> Though written in an entirely different mode and philosophical framework, we can note that, as Essed did after him, Fanon draws attention to mundane settings and encounters, the significance of repetition, and the unsettling impact on the sense of being a body in the world of the person thus racialized. In contrast to everyday racism, however, the concept of racialization highlights more explicitly the notion of a process as well as the (re)making of subjects. As El-Tayeb notes, much public and scholarly discourse focuses on “minority populations’ ‘difference’ rather than the process by which they are produced as different again and again.”<sup>33</sup> A focus on racialization addresses this blind spot. Fanon’s emphasis on arrival in a new place further suggests that this process is context-specific and relational.<sup>34</sup>

Fanon’s insights have been developed by subsequent scholars who have increasingly paid attention to racialization as not just shaping those marked by it in denigrating ways but also those (un)marked as “white.” Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed, for instance, describes racialization as linked to how much space one can occupy in the world without blockage.<sup>35</sup> “Fanon’s phenomenology of the black body,” she suggests, “would be better described in terms of the bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty, and blockage.”<sup>36</sup> It is thus, that “when someone’s whiteness is in dispute, . . . they come under ‘stress,’ which in turn threatens bodily motility, or what the body ‘can do.’”<sup>37</sup> Anthropologist Didier Fassin provides another facet to the bodily dimension of racialization, building once again on the importance of repetition.<sup>38</sup> As he puts it, racialization “does not proceed from isolated external

events: it is their accumulation and their internalization over time that give a sense of discrimination.”<sup>39</sup> Because of the importance of internalization, “racial embodiment . . . involves the thickness of the body,” which in turn draws on and produces a wider frame of “structural and temporal depth.”<sup>40</sup> This observation illuminates, for instance, why certain “ethnic drag” experiments must fail: “thickness” and “depth” are missing from experiments in which people who are not usually subjected to everyday racism put on “ethnic drag” for a limited time to “experience” it.<sup>41</sup> These coordinates of racialization—mundaneness, uncertainty, repetition, internalization, blockage, thickness, and (de)formation of the subject, facilitated by ascriptions to and gazes at a body in specific contexts and conditions of relationality—are what we find, to a surprising degree and at different textual levels, in *Selam Berlin*.

### Un-Settled: Anatomy of a Scene

Let us turn to a crucial early scene to see first how it is indeed racialization—rather than identity search, cultural hybridity, or even generic discrimination—that is repeatedly at stake in the novel. After witnessing the fall of the Wall on TV in Istanbul, where he has just completed his *Abitur* at the German school, Hasan decides to join the “Berlin party” and thus heads back to his hometown with the explicit goal of no longer living in “transit.”<sup>42</sup> Upon arriving in the city, he takes his usual subway line to go home. On the train, he observes East Berliners in their exploration of the Western part of the city for the first time. He notes both their “beige and grey” clothing and their “wide awake” eyes drawn to everything “bright and glittering,” noting all the consumer goods now within their reach.<sup>43</sup> With his bemused look at East Germans, the protagonist participates in a well-known, somewhat condescending, “Western” gaze that has become a trope of the post-*Mauerfall* period.<sup>44</sup>

When the subway enters a dark tunnel and the “Marlboro Cowboys disappear,” however, the East Berliners stop looking out the window and notice Hasan instead (Kara, 21). Suddenly, he turns from the subject of a gaze to the object of others’ gazes. Hasan immediately notices them looking at him in a strange way: “Were my pants unzipped? . . . Was I from another planet? I felt assessed like a camel in the Berlin Zoo. Was it my black hair? Or my Charlie-Chaplin suitcase? . . . I suddenly felt so foreign in the Berlin subway with which I had practically grown up” (Kara, 21). The novel does not describe the gaze itself but rather, through internal focalization, foregrounds its disorienting effect on the protagonist, displacing him from the most familiar surroundings. As the proliferation of the question form in this passage indicates, the gaze has this effect by forcing questions about the body, its shape, and its place in the world. The displacement that this self-interrogation produces comes in stages: at first, via the zipper, the protagonist wonders whether something is wrong with him that he has overlooked, something embarrassing that could happen to anyone and that could easily be fixed. Then, zooming out from his bodily presence

in the space he occupies to the status of his existence on the planet, he asks himself whether he is an alien from outer space. Next, he expresses a feeling of being looked at like a zoo animal. In both of these latter two instances, he expresses the sense that his humanity is put in question. The camel reference adds an orientalisising dimension to this particular displacement as well as a sense of captivity, even if he imagines that animal at home in Berlin. This leads him to wonder whether it is his black hair, that is, a visible bodily feature, that causes the gaze. In other words, the protagonist is trying to place himself in the gaze of the other, he is trying to locate the place to which the gaze assigns him in order to realign gaze, self, and his ability to read his environment.<sup>45</sup> What he ultimately settles on is feeling “foreign” (*fremd*), as a foreignness produced by others but squarely located within him, as the reflexive forms (“*ich fühlte mich*”; “*ich kam mir ... vor*”) indicate. The final emphasis on growing up with the subway functions to remind the reader of the basis of this subject’s claim to the place that he inhabits.

Although the passage vacillates between humorous, hyperbolic description and rendering a sense of displacement and alienation, we can note how many of the components of racialization it displays. It is the nature of the gaze directed at his body in a mundane setting that leads the protagonist to start questioning himself, his own bodily comportment and even bodily constitution, in the process undoing his secure relationship to the space he occupies. Even without any explicit hostility, the objectifying gaze itself is sufficient to suffuse his sense of self and being in the world with uncertainty, to un-settle him. We can also note that Hasan’s displacement happens on two levels simultaneously: the displacement *from* the position as “Western” he seeks to inhabit, and the displacement *into* a racialized position (“camel”) that he tries to resist. The shift is facilitated by a blockage of his own gaze that forces him instead to contend with the gazes of others. In this particular scene, the gaze is attributed to East Germans, though, as we will see, it is not limited to them. But the specificity of the encounter with East Germans lies in a Turkish-German native West Berliner attempting to perform as a Westerner, yet being thwarted because he is not seen as such by others. This short, but significant scene does not render explicit racism or even discrimination, but rather suggests—through the novel’s heightened attention to the dislocating effect unleashed by a gaze on the surface of the body—a fleeting, ambiguous moment of racialization, a moment, moreover, in whose uncertainty the novel lets the reader partake via its focalization.

### Scenarios of Repetition

A single, ambivalent scene is not sufficient, of course, to establish that racialization is indeed at stake. Yet such moments recur, multiply, and escalate throughout the novel, building up their deforming impact on the protagonist. In the recurrence of such scenes—at times more fully elaborated, at other times briefly sketched—*Selam Berlin*



renders racialization's crucial dimension of repetition by narrative means. Equally importantly, repetition also features within each of these scenes as a core element.

A major instance of repetition in the novel involves the search for housing, underscoring how much racialization revolves around "the politics of who gets to be at home, who gets to inhabit spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable for some bodies and not others."<sup>46</sup> The extended narration of a classic situation in the housing search stands in for others like it, underscoring the scene's emblematic nature. The novel details how a room in the West Berlin district of Spandau that had been offered to Hasan on the phone suddenly becomes unavailable once the landlady sees him at her doorstep (Kara, 187–190). Arriving in good spirits, Hasan instead meets with immediate hostility by the landlady who upon seeing him exclaims, "No buy carpet," assuming he is a peddler and does not speak much German (Kara, 188). After initially staying optimistic, Hasan gradually realizes he cannot overcome the continued hostility expressed in the subsequent exchange. The way the novel frames this situation indicates that the rejection has nothing to do with Hasan's "transcultural identity," as some critics would have it, but rather with how his body is repeatedly seen, read, and on that basis blocked from access to basic necessities such as housing.<sup>47</sup> His unaccented German on the phone leads the landlords to imagine a "blond, blue-eyed Hans," Hasan surmises, yet when he is at their door, "Asylum seeker! Foreigner! Knifer! it flashed in their eyes" (Kara, 190). Through references to "*their* doorsteps" and "*their* eyes," the novel moves from the specific scene at hand to a repeated scenario that transcends one single encounter (Kara, 190, emphasis added). The present scene thus becomes legible as one in a series.

Repetition also marks interactions based on discursive exchange rather than anonymous gazes. Even after Hasan is finally accepted into a shared apartment in Schöneberg, his racialization continues, albeit under slightly different terms. His roommates, three young women from West German provincial towns, treat the native Berliner as an exotic object of anthropological interest, repeatedly questioning and confronting him with their own stereotypes about "Turks" (Kara, 201–202, 204–205). Yet neither Hasan's explanations, nor his direct interactions with his roommates, nor their exposure to his actual lifestyle change their basic preconceptions, leaving him trapped in a cycle of repetition. The narrator notes the bodily impact of such interpellations: "I was left speechless. I swallowed hard."<sup>48</sup> In these questions, which purportedly are about "Turkish culture," "culture" functions as another stand-in for racialized difference, in a phenomenon well-known as "culturalization."<sup>49</sup> In *Selam Berlin*, such repeated culturalization marks especially interpersonal exchanges with liberal interlocutors. Their culturalizing assumptions serve to produce a sense of displacement even *within* the very home.<sup>50</sup> The same pattern occurs in the protagonist's interactions with Wolf, a West German film director described as a 68er, who uses Hasan as a native informant to selectively confirm his own ideas for his cliché-riddled

film about Turkish drug dealers in Kreuzberg.<sup>51</sup> He expects Hasan to repeat what he already assumes about his home and does not allow for alternative accounts, as Hasan quickly realizes (Kara, 244–245). The repeated discursive ascriptions that dominate these scenes serve not so much to un-settle and eject the target—as the gaze in anonymous, public encounters does—but to fix and immobilize it.<sup>52</sup> The novel thus stages two distinct but interlocking modes through which the repetitions of racialization create “blockage” for the subject.

The specific ascription that is repeated across these very different scenes, from Spandau and Schöneberg to Kreuzberg, is that of “Turk,” while Hasan’s own identification as a “Berliner” is almost always rebuffed by others who continuously treat “Turk” and “Berliner” as two incompatible categories. In such repeated readings of the body that lock it in an immutable and unbridgeable difference and thereby deny it access to both self-determination and resources, the novel indicates that “Turk” does not merely function as a nationality, ethnicity, or even culture, but as a racialized category.<sup>53</sup>

### **Relational Racialization: “Turkishness” in the Context of “Jewishness” and “Blackness”**

Even as racial formations assert unchangeable essences, their terms are contextual, ever-shifting, and relational. Just consider the fact that “Turk” as a central category of difference from the 1970s on has been largely upended by “Muslim” in post-2000s German discourse, reworking networks of discursive association with wide-ranging consequences.<sup>54</sup> Though Islam is mentioned occasionally, *Selam Berlin* is firmly preoccupied with the racialization of “Turk” that was prevalent in the early 1990s, the setting of the 2003 novel, indicating its historical perspective. However, *Selam Berlin* approaches this racialization relationally, by probing its contours against the shapes, affects, and discourses mobilized by two other, differently racialized formations in the German context, namely Jewishness and Blackness.<sup>55</sup> This exploration reveals, respectively, impositions, affinities, and differences, but also enables a momentary breakthrough beyond racelessness.

The novel presents both Jewishness and Blackness in heterogenous ways, but in each case as constellations that the protagonist encounters rather than seeks out.<sup>56</sup> This is particularly true for the pairing of “Turk” and “Jew.” While a Jewish character, violinist Vladimir from Riga, features late in the plot as Hasan’s rival for the attentions of both his lover and of filmmaker Wolf, elsewhere Jewishness functions in more phantasmatic, historically loaded ways into which Turkishness becomes interwoven. In an old-fashioned West Berlin pub described as “one of these pubs that have survived Hitler, war, building of the Wall, fall of the Wall, and everything else in this city,” which Hasan randomly enters to watch a World Cup soccer game, he not only receives an immediate hostile welcome but becomes the object of an explicitly racialized discourse

when two pub regulars loudly speculate about his identity: “That’s a Jew,” one says, and if he isn’t, “then he is a Turk, that comes out to the same thing.”<sup>57</sup> The ensuing brief dialogue between the two customers revolves around circumcision as a site of joint (male) Jewish/Turkish bodily legibility. The novel cites here one strand of postwar West German discourse where “Turks” came to be stand-ins for “Jews” in the German imagination, transferring racialized affect.<sup>58</sup> The racialization of Turkishness, in other words, in part derives from a historical transfer. This transfer has continuing effects in the present, the novel suggests, as Hasan ultimately has to flee a physical attack in the pub, marking the space as uninhabitable for racialized subjects.

In contrast to the externally imposed equation of Turkishness/Jewishness in the pub scene, there is little equation of Turkishness/Blackness in *Selam Berlin* but rather a constellation of explorative affinity.<sup>59</sup> The novel underscores this affinity by introducing Blackness through the respective heterosexual love interests of secondary characters: Hasan’s cousin Leyla is dating Redford, an African American GI stationed in Berlin, while his best friend Kazim starts seeing Black British journalist Sukjeet from London. Both of these characters serve to introduce “race talk” as explicit discourse into the novel, making contemporary race conditionally speakable via figurations of Blackness. That this Blackness stems exclusively from elsewhere and does not include Black Germans underscores that the novel itself is not fully outside the parameters of German political racelessness, which projects both race and Black people primarily into the Anglophone realm.<sup>60</sup>

Instead of introducing an equation, the African American character’s discourse in particular serves to differentiate the racialization of Turkishness from Blackness.<sup>61</sup> In an argument that Hasan witnesses, Redford calls out his Turkish-German girlfriend: “You cannot understand this, as a white woman” (Kara, 172). While Leyla accepts this interpellation as “white” without question, Hasan comments on it in his thoughts as an unusual way of viewing the world: “Black and white—white and Black. I had never thought of these two [people] in such a manner. I mean, for me they were Leyla and Redford. And basta!” (Kara, 172). Hasan thus asserts a default colorblindness. But this speaks to the character’s rather than the novel’s participation in political racelessness, because the exchange also leads the novel via its narrator to reflect on categories with which the protagonist is more familiar, such as “Arab” as a designation for Blackness in Turkey. In Germany, he further muses, the reigning category of difference is *Ausländer* (foreigner): “In Berlin, all the dark haired, dark skinned were foreigners” (Kara, 173). By identifying the label *Ausländer* as given on the basis of bodily markers (dark hair, dark skin), the novel suggests that this category revolves around phenotype rather than the legal category of citizenship. Without spelling it out much further, this observation also hints at a basic feature of political racelessness where ostensibly neutral, non-racial categories cover up racial thinking.<sup>62</sup> Moving across these national contexts of racialization and their respective,

variable categories, the novel presents a glimpse of race as a “floating signifier.”<sup>63</sup> Turkishness, then, confronted with Blackness as something differently couched and imagined across national spheres, is identified as “white” in some instances, even as it is racialized in marked ways in Germany.<sup>64</sup> Through Hasan’s reflections, the novel signals the uneven translatability of racialized categories across contexts, while probing their operations and making their relational construction legible.

Although the protagonist-narrator does not adopt “Black” and “white” as categories for other characters, “white” reappears in the novel in an unexpected but crucial moment of the protagonist’s deformation. After Kazim, who in his relaxed manner had been ignoring racism in Berlin, is nearly fatally attacked by a group of neo-Nazis on the subway, a fate Hasan himself narrowly escapes earlier that same day, the latter becomes filled with rage. He goes out looking for revenge and deliberately provokes a group of neo-Nazi teenagers before slamming the head of one of them against concrete. Describing an eruption of violence that seems completely out of character for the sympathetic protagonist, the novel provides the reader only with blankness in lieu of introspection, with the narrator merely exclaiming just before lashing out: “Ich sah nur noch Weiß” (All I could see was White, Kara, 346). The formulation plays on the expression “ich sah nur noch rot,” used to describe an eclipse of rationality due to arousal of anger. The non-idiomatic substitution of “white” for “red” in this particular moment, meanwhile, is a rare and notable departure from one of the novel’s primary stylistic characteristics, namely its rich and joyful use of idioms that give the narration such a casually—and often humorously—colloquial tone throughout. Through this stylistic departure as well as the unusual decision to capitalize “White,” the moment becomes linguistically marked as telling a story outside conventional codes, one which revolves around seeing and naming whiteness in conjunction with violence. Highlighting whiteness in this manner, the novel provides a glimpse of the accumulative deformations of racialization as a moment not fully contained by political racelessness.

### **Affective Pedagogy and Readerly Experience**

Critics have noted the didactic bent of *Selam Berlin* and we can see it at work in the protagonist’s reflections on the shifting nature of racial categories discussed above. Yet in scenes such as the one on the subway something else is happening. Instead of merely reporting racialization, the novel leads the reader through scenes in the narrative’s present that make the process of racialization palpable via focalization. Such scenes put the emphasis on how it *feels* to undergo this process, relaying its combination of uncertainty and unsettlement in the face of blockages. The weight of a gaze, the bodily impact of an ascription, the accumulation of such moments, these are some of the aspects that the novel conveys repeatedly to its reader and that constitute what I call its affective pedagogy about racialization.

This affective pedagogy relies in part on the construction of its protagonist-narrator's knowledge about racialization as always only partial and ambiguous rather than already settled. The novel sets up this ambiguity from the start. When Hasan announces his intention to move back to Berlin, his brother warns him against it: "You will always be a *Kanacke* there, with or without *Abitur*, you will always be a *Kanacke* in Berlin!"<sup>65</sup> In response to these warnings, Hasan seems to simply take a defiant position, telling himself: "So what, then I am a *Kanacke*!" (Kara, 19). This defiance evokes Feridun Zaimoglu's 1995 book *Kanak Sprak*, which appropriates the racist slur as a negative self-assertion.<sup>66</sup> Hasan thus appears to acknowledge the racialized future awaiting him in his hometown as self-evident. Yet it is clear that he only believes this abstractly for he hopes he can circumvent such a future.

Instead of deploying *Kanak Sprak*'s provocative reappropriation of a racialized position and identity, Hasan, whose primary identification after all is as "Berlinli" and not as "Kanacke," yearns for alternative stories of upward mobility: "But I no longer wanted to hear this whining about bad prospects and foreigners and 'blah blah blah.' I was sick and tired of having to listen to stories about losers. Wasn't there anyone who had made it from zero to one hundred?" (Kara, 16). Hasan cannot counter the evidence presented to him but he tries to steel himself against the onslaught of these debilitating narratives by simply closing his ears to them, so they become mere babble ("blah blah blah"). He thus takes a position of deliberate unknowing, through which he attempts to carve out space for unmarked agency. As the novel's principal focalizer, this unknowing simultaneously functions as the vantage point from which the novel takes the reader through moments of racialization as they unfold in various scenes. The strategic nature of this choice becomes even clearer when we consider that the novel presents a more knowing perspective only to bypass it. The activist figure of Leyla who sees and names racism without hesitation encapsulates that alternative vantage point and underscores that the *novel* knows about political, historical, theoretical considerations vis-à-vis racial formations.<sup>67</sup> But it is specifically the construction of Hasan as "unknowing" that enables the novel to facilitate and highlight the move from abstract knowledge to experiential knowledge—both on the part of the protagonist and that of the reader.

In a number of scenes, the novel activates this narratively produced experiential knowledge as a call to the reader. One such scene occurs late in the novel on the film set where a fellow extra confronts Hasan with a barrage of clichés, stereotypes, and ascriptions while he is eating his lunch: "Muslim and [eating] pork sausage. Is that possible? . . . But you are a Tuuurk . . . and Muslim . . . Where do you come from? . . . But German is not your mother tongue. . . . In your homeland everything is so different . . . Do you actually understand German?"<sup>68</sup> As the novel simply keeps describing Hasan eating his sausage during this monologic rundown, the reader is put in the position of the addressee, having to endure this rhetorical onslaught. By this

point, the reader is deeply familiar with the protagonist and *knows* the absurdity of all the ascriptions thrown at him, such as the question of his command of German. The protagonist's silence then forces readers to experience, once again, what it is like to be repeatedly subjected to such moments and invites them to formulate their own response. The scene on the film set is one of a number of similar scenes and is also reminiscent of other minority stagings of one-sided racializing monologue and address. Both Aysel Özakin and May Ayim have written poems that stage this imbalance, this barrage of stereotype and misinformation.<sup>69</sup> This seemingly "silent strategy" addresses the problematic of writing racialization in the absence of vocabulary and in the face of the difficulty of being heard by putting the reader in the position of the unresponsive racialized subject.

Through this particular mode of address to the reader, the book approximates a readerly experience not just of repetition but of the "structural and temporal depth" and the "thickness of the flesh" that is a fundamental component of racialization. This is not to say that the reader is racialized, but rather that the reader is exposed to the process of racialization over and over again, thereby approximating a "virtual" sense of "thickness." In *Selam Berlin*, "thickness," as a central component of racialization, is thus not a feature of a particular character's experience but a narratively produced effect on the reader, and with it, a means of affective pedagogy.

## Conclusion

Political racelessness, as we have seen, is based on the disavowal of the workings of race in the here and now and the projection of those workings onto the past and/or faraway places. In Germany and continental Europe more broadly, it is the dominant frame for race, one that creates numerous problems for racialized subjects and forces them to find strategies to either function within or, more contentiously, work against it. The crucial mechanism of political racelessness is amnesia, a forgetting of the local emergence, particular codes, and ongoing impact of race "here." To narrate race and racism and yet remain within the popular fold, so to speak, requires a delicate balancing act between knowing and forgetting about it. Submerged in *Selam Berlin*'s plethora of story lines, citational allusions, idiomatic playfulness, and changing milieus and moods, this essay has sought to show, is also a story of racialization, albeit one that moves in a non-linear fashion between remembering and forgetting that very fact. After all, its protagonist starts out with a strong identification as a joyfully hybrid "Berlinli" who no longer wants to live in "transit" yet after his constant racialization as a "Turk," a category treated in that context as synonymous with non-belonging, finally gives up his efforts and on the night of German unification reimagines himself instead as a "nomad" on a global map (Kara, 17, 18, 382). If most critics read this ending as a happy one, it is both because of the upbeat tone the protagonist reclaims (over and over again in the novel) and because the novel no longer reminds us of this

original goal. Rather than confronting the amnesia at the heart of racelessness, then, the novel seeks to mobilize amnesia both for its protagonist's agency and for its own project of affective pedagogy. This strategy cannot ultimately overcome racelessness, since knowledge about race is always only precariously and temporarily present in the novel. But it makes some space to render the particular experience of racialization—as a “novelty” for some and as a recognizable structure for others—in surprising detail. Repetition, we have seen, is central for the production of racialization. But it is also a necessary element of its undoing. As such, we can read *Selam Berlin's* affective pedagogy as part of an ongoing, broader effort to insist on repeating stories of racialization in the face of their dismissal as one step in the long process of countering racialized structures.

### Notes

- I would like to thank Onur Suzan Nobrega, Arne Lunde, Kalani Michell, and Anke Pinkert for helpful conversations, suggestions, and feedback on earlier versions of this essay. The anonymous reviewers' suggestions further helped to sharpen the argument. As always, Michael Rothberg has been an ideal interlocutor throughout this process.
1. On the BLM moment in Germany, see Maureen Maisha Auma, “#Black Lives Matter: Social Unsettling and Intersectional Justice in Pandemic Times,” *AICGS*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.aicgs.org/2020/08/blacklivesmatter-social-unsettling-and-intersectional-justice-in-pandemic-times/>.
  2. See the initial video call by Ali Can that started the hashtag on July 24, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/PerspectiveDailyMedia/videos/1881267988844852/>.
  3. Özil (b. 1988 in Gelsenkirchen) belongs to the third generation of his family to live in Germany, received the media-deferred popular “Bambi Award” for his “successful integration” in 2010, following his breakout performance in the World Cup that year. See also Maria Stehle and Beverly M. Weber, “German Soccer, the 2010 World Cup, and Multicultural Belonging,” *German Studies Review* 36, no.1 (2013): 103–124.
  4. See Özil's full open letter from July 22, 2018, which he strategically chose to publish in English on his twitter page, reaching a massive global audience: [https://twitter.com/M10/status/1020984884431638528?s=20&t=fSLZyA5\\_f0OaLI6eJh4UwQ](https://twitter.com/M10/status/1020984884431638528?s=20&t=fSLZyA5_f0OaLI6eJh4UwQ). For a German media representation and translation of his statement see “Özil-Statements im Wortlaut,” *Spiegel Online*, July 22, 2018, <https://www.spiegel.de/sport/fussball/nach-erdogan-affeere-das-oezil-statement-im-wort-laut-a-1219615.html>.
  5. The head of the Deutsches Theater in Munich, Werner Steer, for instance, told Özil in a tweet—which the soccer player references in his statement—to “piss off to Anatolia,” indicating the wide range of social actors who participated in this racist othering.
  6. The German Foreign Minister, Social Democrat Heiko Maas dismissively referred to Özil as an “in England lebende[r] und arbeitende[r] Multimillionä[r],” who therefore wouldn't have anything to say about “Integrationsfähigkeit in Deutschland.” See “Einfach unerträglich: Schröder kritisiert Maas im Fall Özil scharf,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/schroeder-maas-oezil-1.4068652>. Former chancellor Gerhard Schröder's sharp rejoinder to Maas that is reported in this article further underscores the symbolic potency of the Özil resignation and the way it activated all layers of German society.
  7. For a detailed account of the spread of the hashtag and an analysis of the posts of 39,000 individual users in the first seven days after its initial appearance, see the article in the online magazine *perspective daily* that had also hosted Ali Can's video call that initiated the hashtag. See Juliane Metzker, “Schluss mit der Meinungsmache!,” *perspective daily*, August 7, 2018, <https://>

- perspective-daily.de/article/589/probiere. Two aspects of this analysis are particularly notable. First, while Can created it, Ohanwe and the large network of antiracist activists of which he was part were critical in spreading the hashtag. Ohanwe's adoption of the hashtag also meant that it immediately took on resonance beyond a Turkish-German frame. Second, the data analysis in this article shows that schools, and particularly teachers, were one of the most mentioned sources of racist experiences. One much-quoted tweet by Nava @navasgeht from July 26, 2018 illustrates this starkly: "nach dem [sic] Jungs in meiner Klasse mich wochenlang Affe genannt haben ich meinem Lehrer es erzählt habe, sagt er: ich würde dich eher als Gorilla sehen #MeTwo."
8. See for example "#MeTwo gegen Alltagsrassismus: 'Solche wie dich hat mein Opa früher erschossen,'" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/menschen/metwo-macht-bei-twitter-auf-rassismus-im-alltag-aufmerksam-15710604.html>; Jannis Beenen, "Twitter-Aktion: #MeTwo offenbart alltäglichen Rassismus in Deutschland," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/twitter-aktion-metwo-offenbart-alltaeglichen-rassismus-in-deutschland-1.4071558>. For reporting on the hashtag outside Germany see Esme Nicholson, "Minorities in Germany are Sounding Off Against Racism with #MeTwo Hashtag," *NPR*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/20/640141245/germans-with-migrant-backgrounds-take-to-twitter-to-share-stories>.
  9. German specificity notwithstanding, it is important to note the global nature of this sanction. Following UNESCO's statements against the concept of race in the 1950s, *explicit* references and arguments based on biological racism became unacceptable and illegitimate internationally. See Alana Lentin, "Europe and the Silence about Race," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 4 (2008): 487–503, here 495–496.
  10. Rita Chin, "Guest Worker Migration and the Unexpected Return of Race," in *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*, ed. Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 80–101, here 99. It should go without saying that all critical race scholarship starts from the premise that race is not a biological fact but a social construct with real-world effects. For a comprehensive, global account of race to which the present essay is indebted, see anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016). Wolfe defines race succinctly as a "genetically phrased idiom of hierarchy and deficit" (10).
  11. See Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann, eds., *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009). For the GDR, see Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War* (New York: Berghahn, 2015). Katrin Sieg has shown that the taboo on race in *discourse* led to acting out "continuities, permutations, and contradictions of racial feeling in West German culture" in performances of cross-ethnic impersonation. See Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2.
  12. Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxv.
  13. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxiv. Black German activists, in particular, have been challenging this amnesia and erasure in creative and transnational ways since the 1980s. See Tiffany N. Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2021).
  14. Semra Ertan (1957–1982), who came to Germany at age fifteen as the daughter of guest workers, wrote hundreds of poems, which she had begun to publish in anthologies in the early 1980s. In May 1982, she announced her impending self-immolation to the media in order to get their attention for her message but was not successful. Among the few places where her memory is retained in German culture, see Sten Nadolny, *Selim oder die Gabe der Rede* (1990), where the character Ayse is modeled on Ertan. More recently, extensive video artwork by artist Cana Bilir-Meier (who is also Ertan's niece) has rekindled interest in her and led to the publication



- of her poems in one volume. See Semra Ertan, *Mein Name ist Ausländer/Benim Adım Yabancı. Gedichte/Şiirler* (Münster: edition assemblage, 2020). For an analysis of the pervasive nature and logic of this active forgetting of racism, see Fatima El-Tayeb, *Undeutsch. Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016).
15. David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Europeanization," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29 no. 2 (2006): 331–354. El-Tayeb calls this structure "colorblindness." El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xvii.
  16. For explicitly critical interventions by minorities of color besides #metwo, see the many examples discussed in El-Tayeb, *European Others*.
  17. Yadé Kara, *Selam Berlin* (Zurich: Diogenes, 2003). In 2004, the novel was awarded both the popularly oriented Deutscher Buchpreis (German book prize) of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German book sellers association) for debut novel of the year and the Adalbert-von-Chamisso-Förderpreis for non-German authors. It was subsequently assigned in secondary schools in various parts of Germany. To date, only one excerpt has been translated into English, see Yadé Kara, "Selam Berlin," trans. Tim Mohr, *Words Without Borders: An Online Magazine for International Literature* (November 2009), <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/selam-berlin>. Kara (b. 1965 in Turkey) grew up in West Berlin from the age of six. Working in the theater and in media, she spent some of her adult life in Istanbul, Hong Kong, and London before returning to Berlin. In fact, she wrote *Selam Berlin* while living in Hong Kong. See "Ihr Liebling Kreuzberg," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 16, 2003, [https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/ihr-liebling-kreuzberg-193721.html?printPageArticle=true#pageIndex\\_4](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/ihr-liebling-kreuzberg-193721.html?printPageArticle=true#pageIndex_4).
  18. On "Berlinli" see Yasemin Yildiz, "Berlin as a Migratory Setting," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Berlin*, ed. Andrew Webber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 206–226, here 222. Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 18. The identification with a city rather than with the nation is also a common response by minority youth. See El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxvii–xxxviii.
  19. This setup is by no means extravagant. As historian Jennifer Miller shows in her study *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders 1960s to 1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), relationships between male Turkish guest workers and East German women were a significant enough phenomenon in Cold War Berlin to draw the attention of the Stasi and are documented in Stasi archives.
  20. Kirsten Prinz, "Mauerfall, Migrationsdebatten und Generationen. Türkisch-deutsche Geschichtsdarstellung und Geschichtsteilhabe in Yadé Karas Wenderoman *Selam Berlin*," in *Erinnerung-Fremdheit-Engagement. Entwicklungstendenzen in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur nach 1989*, ed. Carsten Gansel and Hermann Korte. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: 2015), 101–116.
  21. Yildiz, "Berlin," 221–224; Laura Peters, "Zwischen Berlin-Mitte und Kreuzberg. Szenarien der Identitätsverhandlung in literarischen Texten der Postmigration (Carmen-Francesca Banciu, Yade Kara und Wladimir Kaminer)," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 21, no. 3 (2011): 501–521; Müzeyyen Ege, "Berliner Mauerfall und Grenzüberschreitungen im urbanen Raum: Identitätssuche in den Romanen *Selam Berlin* von Yade Kara und *Eduards Heimkehr* von Peter Schneider," *Orbis Litterarum* 71, no. 2 (2016): 142–162.
  22. Katharina Forster, "'Eigentlich hatte ich alles von beidem. Von Ost und West, . . . von hier und da.' Transkulturalität als Lebensform und Schreibpraxis in Texten der deutschsprachigen Migrationsliteratur," in *Migration in Deutschland und Europa im Spiegel der Literatur*, ed. Hans W. Giessen and Christian Rink, (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2017); Martina Möller, "Postmigrantische Lebensformen und kosmopolitische Blicke in Texten von Yadé Kara und Mely Kiyak," in *Konzepte der Interkulturalität in der Germanistik weltweit*, ed. Renata Cornejo, Gesine Lenore Schiewer, and Manfred Weinberg (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2020), 231–250; Nadjib Sadikou, "Wider die Ausschließlichkeit. Ästhetische Entwürfe von Vielfalt in der Literatur," in *Konzepte der Interkul-*

- turalität, 91–104; Luísa Afonso Soares, “Imagining Transcultural Identities in Turkish German Literature and Cinema,” in *Discourses on Nations and Identities*, ed. Daniel Syrový (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 249–258.
23. Petra Fachinger, “A New Kind of Creative Energy: Yadé Kara’s *Selam Berlin* and Fatih Akin’s *Kurz und Schmerzlos* and *Gegen die Wand*,” *German Life and Letters* 60, no. 2 (2007): 243–260.
  24. Tom Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish-German Settlement*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 96.
  25. For a selection of such references, see Fachinger, “A New Kind of Creative Energy,” 247, 250; Peters, “Zwischen Berlin-Mitte und Kreuzberg,” 512; Ege, “Berliner Mauerfall,” 147, 151; Soares, “Imagining Transcultural Identities,” 251–252.
  26. Yildiz, “Berlin,” 221–223; Lydia Lierke and Massimo Perinelli, eds. *Erinnern stören: Der Mauerfall aus migrantischer und jüdischer Perspektive* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2020), provide scholarly and activist accounts of this period; see also Ela Gezen, Jonathan Skolnick, and Priscilla Layne, eds. *Minority Discourses in Germany Since 1990* (New York: Berghahn, 2022).
  27. Besides the crucial work of historians such as El-Tayeb, Chin, and Florvil, and anthropologists such as Damani J. Partridge, see for instance literary and cultural studies scholar Priscilla Layne, *White Rebels in Black: German Appropriation of Black Popular Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).
  28. Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991). For a succinct overview, see Essed, “Everyday Racism,” in *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies*, ed. David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 202–216.
  29. Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967). In a second strand of scholarship to which I will return later, “racialization” is employed for sociological analysis, particularly in British academic usage. There, it refers to the processes by which acts, practices, groups, or institutions (such as “welfare”) are attributed a racial quality they did not have before. See Karim Murji and John Solomos, “Introduction: Racialization in Theory and Practice,” in *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Karim Murji and John Solomos (New York: Oxford, 2005), 1–27.
  30. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 109.
  31. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 110.
  32. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 111–112.
  33. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 6–7.
  34. See also Shu-Mei Shih, “Comparative Racialization: An Introduction,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1347–1362.
  35. Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–168.
  36. Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness,” 161.
  37. Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness,” 160.
  38. Didier Fassin, “Racialization: How to Do Races with Bodies,” in *Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment* (Oxford: Blackwell 2011), 419–434.
  39. Fassin, “Racialization,” 427.
  40. Fassin, “Racialization,” 431.
  41. See the journalistic examples of this practice in Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 178–184.
  42. Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 9, 17. All translations from German are my own.
  43. Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 21. The enumeration of brand names (“Toblerone, Ricola, Wrigley’s chewing gum”) here and elsewhere is simultaneously a genre marker of pop literature, signaling the novel’s proximity to it.
  44. Luise Endlich’s *Neuland: Ganz einfache Geschichten* (1999), a transplanted West German woman’s condescending account of her East German neighbors, is an extreme example of an entire genre of writing that employs such a gaze. See Anke Pinkert, “Postcolonial Legacies: The

- Rhetoric of Race in the East/West German National Identity Debate of the Late 1990s," *MMLA* 35, no. 2 (2002): 13–32.
45. Ege's reading of the same passage also notes the protagonist's unease but attributes the situation to, in her words, his "südländische[s] Aussehen," although the novel employs that term only as an external ascription by a white German character for another Turkish-German character. See Ege, "Berliner Mauerfall," 147; Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 112. On "südländisch" and "Südländer" as a racialized German category in the guise of a geographical term, see Clara Ervedosa, "'The Perpetrator is a Southerner': 'Südländer' as Racial Profiling in German Police Reports," *Monatshefte* 112, no. 2 (2020): 217–246.
  46. Ahmed, "Phenomenology of Whiteness," 162. On housing search as a frequent site of everyday racism, see also Essed, "Everyday Racism"; and numerous #metwo accounts.
  47. For the reference to transcultural identity as explanatory with regard to the above landlady scene, see Forster, "Eigentlich hatte ich alles von beidem," 20. While I fully agree with Forster and others that the novel constructs transcultural identities, I don't see *Selam Berlin* suggesting that this transculturality causes figures to have racialized encounters. In this particular scene, for instance, the landlady's primary question is about Hasan's origins, not his practices or identifications, Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 188–190.
  48. The German original locates the bodily impact even more clearly as a blockage in the throat: "Mir blieb die Luft weg. Ich schluckte schwer," Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 201.
  49. Culturalization, also called neo-racism, refers to the shift from biological to cultural traits as a basis for imputing difference and establishing hierarchy. See Étienne Balibar, "Is there a Neo-racism?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 37–67.
  50. On the production of "eternal newcomers" as key mechanism, see El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxv.
  51. Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 239–240, 244–245. Onur Suzan Nobrega Kömürçü's study of postmigrant artists in Berlin provides accounts and testimonials from the 2010s describing casting dynamics in theater and film that are strikingly similar to Kara's fictional setup of Wolf's film in 1990. See Onur Kömürçü-Nobrega, "Postmigrant Theatre and Cultural Diversity in the Arts: Race, Precarity and Artistic Labour in Berlin" (PhD diss., University of London, 2014), 153.
  52. Fassin defines ascription as "the foundational act through which racialization is produced." Fassin, "Racialization," 422.
  53. Citizenship as a legal category figures in the novel only once: when Hasan attempts to enroll at Humboldt University in East Berlin, he finds that as a Turkish national he would have to pay exorbitant tuition since Turkey is considered a "capitalist foreign country" along with the "United States, Belgium, Switzerland" by the GDR, Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 52. This grouping upends the usual categorization of Turkey as "East" rather than "West," in one of the many places where the novel ironically cites and reverses such categories. Generally, though, the novel's primary focus is on the sphere of civil society, not state institutions.
  54. For the very different functions of the categories "Turk" and "Muslim" and the analytical importance of distinguishing their discursive employment, see Yasemin Yildiz, "Turkish Girls, Allah's Daughters, and the Contemporary German Subject: Itinerary of a Figure," *German Life and Letters* 62, no. 3 (2009): 465–481.
  55. Here, racialization refers to the process by which groups, institutions, or concepts are attributed a racial quality rather than to the psycho-social processes in the foreground so far.
  56. This is in keeping with the character's "picaresque" nature—serving as a device that moves through different social spheres—which critics have noted. See Möller, "Postmigrantische Lebensformen," 349; Peters, "Zwischen Berlin-Mitte und Kreuzberg," 508.
  57. The novel renders the speech in this dialogue in Berlin dialect, "Det is een Jude," underscoring the local dimension of this racialization, Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 230, 232. Again, this equation is a

- historical marker, since the now-dominant pairing Muslim/Jew has entirely different connotation, particularly given the rise of the “Muslim antisemitism” discourse in the last decade.
58. See Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85.
  59. On Turkish-German youth affinities to Blackness, see Damani J. Partridge, “Against Invisibilization—Towards ‘Blackness’ as a Universal Claim,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10, no. 3 (2020): 1064–1067.
  60. On this mechanism, see El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xv.
  61. The figure of Redford shares a number of features with the representation of African American men in white postwar German culture that Priscilla Layne details in *White Rebels in Black* (such as cutting-edge coolness, desirable masculinity, and proximity to rebellion). But instead of becoming subject to appropriation, Redford serves as a transnational reference point in the novel, who introduces, for example, James Baldwin’s Istanbul years to the novel’s cultural memory, Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 169. For literary perspectives on post-Wall Berlin by African American writers, see also Layne, *White Rebels in Black*, 118–150.
  62. On this process, see also El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxiv.
  63. Stuart Hall, *Race: the Floating Signifier*, Media Education Foundation Film, 1997, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PodKki9g2Pw>.
  64. The novel also briefly gestures at the fact that some Turks are indeed of African descent via a reference to the popular Black Turkish 1970s singer Esmeray, Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 173.
  65. Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 19. On the history, evolution, and meaning of the racist label “Kanacke,” see Onur Suzan Nobrega, “Das ‘K-Wort’ im Kontext des europäischen Kolonialismus und der deutschen Nachkriegsmigrationsgeschichte,” in *Gefärbtes Wissen. Kolonialismus, Rassismus und Weißsein im Wissensarchiv der deutschen Sprache*, ed. Susan Arndt and Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard (Münster: Unrast-Verlag, 2011), 638–643.
  66. Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprach: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1995).
  67. See Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 97–101 for Leyla’s own experiences and outspoken responses against Holocaust denial and anti-Black racism. This character, who has a German mother and a Turkish father, exemplifies in many regards what social scientists refer to as “reactive ethnicity.” See Çetin Çelik, “Having a German Passport will not make me German: Reactive Ethnicity and Oppositional Identity among Disadvantaged Male Turkish Second-Generation Youth in Germany,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 9 (2015): 1646–1662.
  68. Ellipses in original. Kara, *Selam Berlin*, 254. The novel renders the extra’s speech with a dialectal coloring (“Schweinewurscht”) that contrasts with the protagonist’s colloquial but standard German.
  69. For a discussion of the critical employment of address in Ayim’s poem “afro-deutsch 1” and Özakin’s poem “Wie lernt man in Deutschland eine merkwürdige Türkin kennen?” see Yasemin Yildiz, “Keine Adresse in Deutschland? Adressierung als politische Strategie,” in *AufBrüche: Migrantinnen, Schwarze und jüdische Frauen im deutschsprachigen kulturellen Diskurs*, ed. Cathy Gelbin, Kader Konuk, and Peggy Piesche (Königstein: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 1999), 224–236.