2 The ghostly queer migrant

Queering time, place, and family in contemporary German cinema

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In post-reunification German cinema, a large number of transcultural and transnational films have addressed marginality and otherness by showing relationships between Germans and migrants/foreigners. Many of these films focus on migrants who are LGBTQ+, and often for the queer migrant of colour there is a German ‘white saviour’ – a meagre attempt perhaps to make good the atrocities of the past under National Socialism. Moreover, I have identified a trend that these films often – literally or figuratively – include a character represented, in at least part of the narrative, as a ‘ghost’.² These themes are especially significant right now, when the normalisation and demonisation of both LGBTQ+ people and migrants is happening in large portions of the Western world where there is a supposed right and wrong way to be. LGB people who choose to assimilate are increasingly being sociopolitically normalised through same-sex marriage, adoption rights, etc., while trans people – especially those who do not pass as cis-gender – are being savagely attacked in both lived reality and the media. Likewise, the ‘good’ migrant (white, Western, from an affluent land) is welcomed, while those who do not fit these boxes are treated as subhuman.³

For Judith Butler, who argues that gender is learned and repeated so that it appears inherent, tracing differences in genders demonstrates that they are not natural but rather part of socialisation (see Butler 1990). Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis asserts that ‘constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both “manhood” and “womanhood”’ (Yuval-Davis 1997: 1), i.e. that there is a specific way to do masculinity or femininity depending upon geographical, temporal, and cultural location, and that doing these right is key to personal safety. Hence, ‘gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of the transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence’ (Butler 1990: 278). We continue to see this in hatred directed towards trans and non-binary people, which results in violence, linguistic and physical.

Butler’s work has demonstrated a marked shift post-9/11: from a focus on gender and sexuality to a consideration of other forms of liveable lives, precarity,

and de/humanisation, particularly in relation to migration and citizenship, while keeping the red thread of what constitutes the distinctively human life and what does not (Butler 2004a: 17). I argue that part of this is because of passing:

the misrecognition of a person as a member of a sociological group other than their own. . . . Critical and social understanding of passing started with ethnicity: examples include light-skinned Black people posing as white in the racially-segregated USA and Jews passing as 'Aryan' in Nazi Germany to escape persecution. The term has since become increasingly linked to sexuality and gender: used as shorthand for passing as straight with regard to gay men and lesbians. . . . It is also used by transgender people as a strategy either to avoid negative attention or punishment for their supposed gender transgressions or out of a belief that they should be read externally in line with what they consider to be their internal gender identity. By its very definition, when certain people 'pass', others 'fail' . . . and it is those who either cannot or choose not to pass, and therefore present a disruptive surface text, who have been most celebrated in queer theory, despite the fact that failing to pass can have serious socio-political consequences.

(Dawson 2018b: 87)

Passing can, of course, also be a matter of language: what we choose or are forced to say and/or stay silent about, as well as the voice that can betray where someone was raised or indicate perhaps that they were assigned an incorrect gender at birth. When we consider migration, gender, and sexuality, it is important to note how the gay migrant could be posed in opposition to the queer one. The former, often considered to be white, slightly older, and relatively wealthy, is normalised, while the latter betrays a greater otherness. Indeed, the queer migrant may demonstrate both a queer temporality and a break in gender performativity, perhaps having to occupy an in-between space or having to try to pass to occupy a position of greater power.

This chapter examines a range of identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella and how, whether passing or failing to pass, there is often a focus on liminality – positive and negative – and being geographically stuck and temporally trapped, or, in the case of the ghost, blurring the boundaries of temporality altogether. Jack Halberstam's *A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) works with queer temporality, a significant trend in queer theory since the mid-2000s. He argues that queer uses of time and space develop, 'at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification' (Halberstam 2005: 1), and do not maintain the linearity and repetition of a normative life schedule: that is heteropatriarchy's fixation on the binary and futurity. This queer rethinking of time was influenced at the end of the twentieth century by the AIDS epidemic, when young, untimely deaths and the fear of a death sentence via sexual acts resulted in a 'constantly diminishing future', which 'creates a

new emphasis on the here, the present, the now' (Halberstam 2005: 2). Since then, both progress in healthcare and the aforementioned normalisation has resulted in a straighter time for some LGBT people. Queer time is the antithesis of the middle-class logic of reproduction and the desirability of a long life, and Halberstam makes clear that queerness has become compelling as a form of self-description owing to its potential to open up new life narratives. Here, 'queer' is being used beyond sexuality and/or gender, to describe non-normative lifestyles. For Halberstam, those with queer lifestyles include drug addicts and club kids who live life in 'rapid bursts' even if their gender and sexuality are heteronormative (Halberstam 2005: 4). Indeed, there is a focus on identities and locations considered out of time and place. For middle-class white people in the West, i.e., those with white privilege and socioeconomic buffers that can significantly aid a liveable and comfortable life (especially now that HIV responds well to medication), queer temporality is perhaps a hedonistic and more selfish anti-mainstream approach to living. However, for the poor – and a significant proportion of people of colour are poor – who often cannot invest in the future and for whom living in the here-and-now is their only option, and for those migrants trapped in the eternal present of holding centres and a lack of legal recognition, what can be theorised as queer temporalities may be more prevalent but certainly more problematic, in that they are frequently the result of restricted choice and negative – and sometimes very dangerous – sociopolitical situations.

In this chapter, I consider in turn four German transnational films where queerness, migration, and the spectre intersect – *Gespenster/Ghosts* (2005, Germany/France, dir. Christian Petzold); *Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven* (2007, Germany, dir. Fatih Akin); *Ghosted* (2009, Germany/Taiwan, dir. Monika Treut); and *Fremde Haut/Unveiled* (2005, Germany/Austria, dir. Angelina Maccarone) – in order to examine queerness in relation to space, time, and the family. Each of the films features a key topos of LGBTQ+ representation throughout history: erasure. This is where, in art, history, literature, film, and even today's soap operas, an LGBTQ+ character is killed, often as a punishment for their supposed sexual and social transgression. These four particular films present dead or absent queer people who haunt the loved ones they leave behind: a child living in a Berlin orphanage who is possibly the daughter, alive or dead (the spectator is never allowed to be sure), of a bourgeois French couple, and who, along with her small-time criminal and homeless female lover, exists on the margins of society (*Gespenster/Ghosts*); a German woman who reappears to her mother as a ghost in Turkey, where she was killed when attempting to help her Turkish girlfriend seek asylum in Germany (*Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven*); the dead Taiwanese girlfriend of a German lesbian filmmaker, who reappears as a ghost to her partner and is also memorialised in the latter's work (*Ghosted*); and an Iranian lesbian who, after her asylum in Germany is denied, takes on the identity of an Iranian cisgender man who has taken his own life in a holding centre (*Fremde Haut/Unveiled*). The ghost is significant here with regard to queer temporality for past, present, and possibly future is collapsed into the site/

sight of the ghost which, I suggest, is a site/sight of queer temporality. Furthermore, three of these films have titles which highlight an after-life: either the spectre or heaven. While I have identified these queer migrant (non-horror) ghosts as a current trend, they inevitably carry echoes of the traditional horror figure of the vampire, a longstanding trope in queer and lesbian art across cultures, with films such as *Wir sind die Nacht/We Are the Night* (2010, Germany, dir. Dennis Gansel) and *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971, dir. Jesús Franco), a West German–Spanish horror film made in Turkey. Such vampirism is linked also to the notion of passing, which means passing as human.⁴

Gespenster/Ghosts

Gespenster and, as we will see later, *Ghosted*, call attention to the pre-Brexit perceived lack of European borders. Unlike the other three films in this chapter, however, *Gespenster* does not feature the process of migration (*Auf der anderen Seite* shows the Turkish protagonist appear to enter Germany with no problems but then be detained as a paperless migrant, just like *Fremde Haut/Unveiled* deals with claims for asylum and refugee status) but does incorporate multiple other tropes, themes, and techniques used in transnational cinema. A Franco-German co-production, using both languages, about two aesthetically similar troubled teenagers with lonely, family-less lives, it forms part of Berlin School German director Christian Petzold's 'Ghost Trilogy' comprising *Die innere Sicherheit/The State I Am In* (2000, Germany) and *Yella* (2007, Germany).

Protagonists Nina, who has learning difficulties and lives in a children's home, and Toni, a homeless petty criminal, are on the edges of society and often figuratively invisible to those around them, although the Berlin of *Gespenster* is almost devoid of people and barely recognisable in terms of buildings and monuments – that is, reminders of the past – associated with it, making it simultaneously a liberating and monitored space (CCTV, children's home, mental hospital, maternal surveillance). Like Nina, Berlin has an identity imposed on it by foreigners: Nina's French 'parents'. Much like a Berlin without history, we learn very little about Nina and Toni's lives before the present day of the film. Nina is presented as possibly being Marie, the child of a bourgeois French couple, who was kidnapped outside a German supermarket years earlier. She is, therefore, not a migrant in the traditional sense, but one possible take on the film is that she is a foreigner growing up in a land as if she were a native. When Nina's 'mother', Françoise, is released from a mental hospital after trying to pick up another young girl she mistook for Marie and meets teenage Nina/Marie of the filmic present, we discover that Nina uncannily bears the same distinctive scar on her ankle and heart-shaped mole on her shoulder that Marie had as a child.

Nina does not only have a history imposed on her by her 'mother', but also by her new (girl)friend Toni, who takes her to a television casting and weaves a series of lies about their background for the producer. Toni then seduces

Figure 2.1 *Gespenster/Ghosts* (2005): Nina (Julia Hummer) discovers a heart-shaped mole exactly like that of the kidnapped child, Marie

Source: *Ghosts/Gespenster* (2005), directed by Christian Petzold © Schramm Film Koerner & Weber, and GoodMovies (2006).

and sleeps with Nina, perhaps for the voyeuristic gaze of the camera, the male producer, and the audience, before quickly cheating on her with him. Here, we do not have a typically feminine and glamorous form of femininity as we are accustomed to on the screen, in what feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey called ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (Mulvey 1975: 11), and what is usually seen in girl-on-girl pornography aimed at the cis-heterosexual male market as well as titillating ‘lesbian chic’ in mainstream film, which is another key trend in lesbian representation on-screen.

Indeed, Nina is presented in such a bland and unimposing way that she often seems to be a ghostly shadow of someone else’s imagination. In the penultimate sequence of the film, Françoise’s husband switches from French to German for the first and only time during the film to tell Nina that she cannot be Marie: ‘Marie ist tot’/Marie is dead’, with his patriarchal voice of the film perhaps expected to provide a solid explanation, considering the mixture of mental illness, learning difficulties, criminality, and lies rather misogynistically associated with the three female protagonists. This declaration, however, does not account for Nina/Marie’s uncanny physical markings and leads Nina, the living ghost, to seek Françoise’s wallet, previously stolen by Toni, from a rubbish bin. The contents that have been dumped in the trash include a series of age-progression pictures of Marie, and suspense mounts as Nina unfolds the sheet featuring four pictures: the final image shows Nina is indeed Marie’s exact aesthetic double.

Whether Nina is and always has been Nina or is French child Marie, alive or a – metaphorical or literal – ghost, it is clear that her white skin, being born and raised in Western Europe, whether France or Germany, and ability

to communicate in German as/like a native speaker, all afford her access to privilege that many people of colour in the films throughout this chapter do not have. Here, it is not her possible status as a French child living in another country, but rather her lifestyle in a children's home, apparently without family, and her learning difficulties that contribute towards her dehumanisation, which leads her to be mistreated and exploited and, ultimately, desperate to belong with Françoise or Toni. Significant here is the queer time and place of Nina's orphanage, Françoise's mental institution, and also Toni's lack of 'home', as well as the related poverty of both Nina and Toni, which is bound to their liminality as spectral figures, often looked through, rather than at, on the outskirts of society in a Berlin presented as a rather queer, characterless, unhomely place. This is compounded by the queer time of an eternal past for Françoise, who is so haunted by her kidnapped child that she cannot enjoy the present or look forward to the future, while Nina and Toni seem stuck in a present with little past and no apparent future.

Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven

Also part of a trilogy, this time by director, screenwriter, and producer Fatih Akin, born in Hamburg to parents of Turkish ethnicity, *Auf der anderen Seite* is billed as the second of his love, death, and the devil trilogy, which began with *Gegen die Wand/Head-On* (2004, Germany/Turkey) and culminated in *The Cut* (2014, Germany/France/Italy/Russia/Poland/Canada/Turkey/Jordan). His triad of films is a response to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's BRD (Federal Republic of Germany) trilogy, which Akin nods to in many ways, including his use of Hannah Schygulla who was in a lesbian relationship in Fassbinder's *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant/The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972, West Germany), and who, in *Auf der anderen Seite*, plays Susanne, the mother of a German woman in a same-sex relationship. Susanne's daughter Lotte dates a woman from Turkey, Ayten, who in Germany calls herself Gül because she is a migrant without papers. Queerness extends beyond sexuality, as the film's title focuses on what I suggest is a rather queer place and time: death and heaven/an afterlife. This continues elsewhere as the film cuts between Germany and Turkey (employing both languages alongside English), and there is a constant in-betweenness due to the heavy focus on transit. The triadic structure is maintained via the three intertitled sections: Yeter's Tod/Yeter's Death; Lotte's Tod/Lotte's Death; and *Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven* (film title) (or 'On the Other Side' (literal translation)). There is a trend in most of the transnational lesbian films analysed here that can also be seen across transnational film more broadly: of doubling and crossing, relying extensively on transnational locations and spaces, including airports, seaports, and immigration controls, as a way of conveying what Hamid Naficy terms both the interconnectedness and liminality of life on the border (Naficy 2001), with plots revolving around narratives of immigration and exile and/or exploration and escape (see Ezra and Rowden 2006; Loshitzky 2006; Naficy 2001).

Transit is foregrounded from the outset as *Auf der anderen Seite* opens with what has been deemed the director's signature situation: a man, Najat, driving a car, near Turkey's Black Sea. The main body of the film is told in flashback form and sees it close by the sea with a circularity and corresponding non-linear/straight temporality taking us back to the beginning of narrative time and the end of narrated time. After the opening, the film cuts to Bremen, Germany, which is much more recognisable than the Berlin of *Gespenster*, as the camera follows Ali, a widower and retired *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) who we soon discover is Najat's father, through a red light district. He invites widow and fellow Turk living in Germany, Yeter, to move in with him. Employed as a sex worker in order to send money back to Ayten, her daughter in Istanbul, Yeter agrees. The second part begins with Ayten, who we learn is a radical Kurdish activist escaping a police raid in Turkey and fleeing to Hamburg, where she uses the false name Gül Korkmaz. She becomes her own *Doppelgänger*, recalling the doubling of French Marie/German Nina in *Gespenster*. She leaves her old name hovering like a ghost, which will create confusion and missed connections later in the film.

Recalling the queer temporality and dehumanisation of Petzold's film, although without the white privilege and access to the country's official language, homeless Ayten/Gül is shown sleeping at the German University where Najat works as a German literature professor. She is befriended by a student of English and Spanish, Lotte, who, in their only shared language, English (a tongue foreign to both), invites Gül to move into her home, then her bed. Arriving with little aside from the clothes on her person, Gül uses Lotte's money and possessions – similar to *Gespenster* where Toni is a vagrant with only one outfit and very few belongings. The protagonists in a lesbian relationship in this film are also devoid of the aesthetics and props that would make them visions 'to-be-looked-at', although two of the first things both Toni and Gül do is shower (linked to catharsis, and significant in relation to the abject), before donning their future girlfriends' clothes for a fresh start. By now, the viewer is aware that Ayten/Gül is Yeter's daughter, who sets out on a fruitless quest to be reunited with her – dead – mother. While it takes Gül some time to reveal her past as Ayten, Toni in *Gespenster* never discloses anything about herself aside from a turbulent relationship with an ex-boyfriend, so these characters are simultaneously of the present and presented as only having hope of a future through their same-sex relationships with others, locating them in a queer temporality.

When Gül/Ayten's asylum in Germany is denied later in the narrative, she is detained. Sarah Turnbull, in her work on migrants in detention centres, describes migrants awaiting decisions relating to asylum as being 'stuck' in an extended present without personal agency (see Turnbull 2016). They are therefore, I argue, trapped in a queer temporality. Gül/Ayten is then deported and jailed in Istanbul, so dead Yeter's lover and her daughter are imprisoned, recalling the doubling of institutions – the children's home and

Figure 2.2 *Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven* (2007): lovers Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay) and Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) pictured in the detention centre where the former is being held

Source: *The Edge of Heaven/Auf der anderen Seite* (2007), directed by Fatih Akin © Anka Film and Artificial Eye (2007).

the mental hospital – of *Gespenster*. Here, then, queer temporality is linked to the character of Ayten/Gül and her having to give up her past while living in the present with little hope for the future because of her activism, denied asylum, and imprisonment, which is unlike the collapse of past, present, and future of the queer temporality of the ghost.

Lotte follows her partner to Turkey and is accidentally killed by children who steal her bag and use Gül/Ayten's gun. The third part of the film sees the remaining characters in Turkey. White German like her daughter, Susanne does not appear to have any concerns about her right to stay there for a longer period. Najat, who had first let a room in his Turkish home to Lotte, then rents it out to Lotte's mother, Susanne, who wishes to be closer to her daughter and who we find out had undertaken the same path as Lotte when she was young. On her first evening in her daughter's former bedroom, she reads Lotte's diary to find Lotte believed her mother 'sees herself in me' ('sieht sich selbst in mir'), again doubling the mother-child relationship. The following morning, Lotte appears to her mother in the bedroom as a ghost, when shot from the mother's point of view, but when this camera angle changes to show both the mother and the space she is looking at, there is no one in the space where her mother's eyes remain transfixed, implying it is her memory combined with imagination. Mothers in two of the films are, therefore, represented as seeing their daughters when others do not: Susanne in *Ghosted* and Françoise in *Gespenster*, who is institutionalised for 'seeing' her 'dead' daughter, tying Lotte's ghostliness to memory, specifically maternal memory, rather than a literal spectral appearance.

Ghosted

Unlike the bodies of work of heterosexual men, Petzold and Akin, German lesbian feminist director Monika Treut repeatedly foregrounds queer subjects, desires, and themes throughout her oeuvre. She previously highlighted coming-out narratives, and it is the trail blazed by movements such as New German Cinema, Treut's filmic work as part of the New Queer Cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, and the queer movement and queer theory that have allowed the focus of many stories, including several tales examined here, to shift from the sexuality of characters and an (often harrowing) coming-out narrative to more fluid, queer characters used to recount more complex stories, where other aspects of their identity and lifestyle, e.g. ethnicity and migration, are presented at the fore. The narrative feature *Ghosted* could be grouped as part of a Taiwanese trilogy incorporating Treut's two documentary films (2004, 2005) focusing on Taiwanese women. While Turkish-German work is commonplace because of *Gastarbeiter* migration, *Ghosted* is the first German-Taiwanese co-produced narrative feature. Like Akin's Turkish-German film, Treut's *Ghosted* includes multiple crossings, shifts between two places (Germany and Taiwan), and uses three languages (German, English, Mandarin).

Ghosted goes even further than the previous films in terms of narrative complexity as it contains multiple, rather disorienting flashbacks. It opens with Taiwanese woman Ai-Ling receiving permission from her mother to visit her uncle, Chen Fu, in Germany, a man she secretly suspects he is her – supposedly dead – father and, in the course of the narrative, is proven correct, again creating a ghostly dynamic of parent and queer child. The film's

Figure 2.3 *Ghosted* (2009): Sophie (Inga Busch) at the video installation of *Remembrance*, with deceased Ai-Ling (Huan-Ru Ke) projected onto the wall behind her

Source: *Ghosted* (2009), directed by Monika Treut © Hyena Films, and First Run Features (2009).

main plot-line recounts the lesbian love affair between Ai-Ling, who we will discover is dead in the filmic present, and her German artist girlfriend, Sophie, who memorialises her in a video installation: *Remembrance*. Sophie is in Taipei for the opening night of the installation and, in the bathroom, a complex queer site of gender and other policing, meets and is later pursued by Taiwanese woman Mei-Li supposedly a reporter wanting to write a story on Sophie and Ai-Ling to 'drive away the ghosts of the past'. This opening forewarns of the loss of Ai-Ling in narrative time, although this has already happened in narrated time, therefore functioning much like the deathly intertitles of Akin's film.

Ghosted then employs flashback: in Germany, Ai-Ling meets Sophie at a Hamburg screening of a Taiwanese film, and their friendship becomes a lesbian relationship, due to Sophie's persistence and rather predatory advances. Ai-Ling moves in with Sophie who, feeling suffocated, goes on a supposed business trip with a third Taiwanese woman, a filmmaker named Judy, whom Sophie had previously filmed saying that, in Taiwanese culture, women come back as ghosts to avenge what people have done to them in life, and who states that she sometimes thinks she's the product of someone's imagination. Jealousy sees Ai-Ling go to a lesbian bar and leave with a solicitor, a blonde German who could be considered Sophie's double, but on their way back to Sophie and Ai-Ling's apartment, Ai-Ling listens to a voicemail from Sophie saying she is returning early from her trip. Pulling away from her drunken companion, Ai-Ling is killed by a car. The film's temporality is queer: while narrative time introduces the viewer to Ai-Ling then Mei-Li, narrated time saw Sophie meet Ai-Ling, then Judy, and, finally, Mei-Li after Ai-Ling's death. This is significant in the light of Freud's argument in his 1919 essay on the uncanny that the double becomes the 'harbinger' of death (Freud 2001: 234). Judy's appearance in Sophie and Ai-Ling's life led, in one way or another, to the latter's demise.

Returning to the filmic present, Mei-Li travels from Taipei to Hamburg and appears, unannounced, at Sophie's apartment, where they eventually make love, before Mei-Li traces Ai-Ling's last steps, causing an abject reaction when she vomits in the bathroom of the lesbian bar in which Ai-Ling spent her last night. Treut creates uncertainty throughout the film by not letting the viewer know if this is a fictional take on the real world or a fantastic one blended from her imagination and Taiwanese culture, just as we are left unsure about reality and fiction within the filmic world of Petzold's *Gespenster*. *Ghosted* eventually takes a supernatural twist when Sophie finds out that Mei-Li does not exist in a straight temporality and is instead a form of spectre haunting her.

While daughters haunt their mothers in both *Gespenster* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, Ai-Ling's double/ghost finally disappears when Sophie is invited by Ai-Ling's mother to the Taiwanese Ghost Festival, which incorporates a money-burning ritual to chase away ghosts. Ai-Ling and her ghost, Mei-Li, appear as doubles to Sophie and the viewer, before disappearing

through the flames, and *Ghosted* closes with this money-burning scene that was used to open the film. This recalls *Auf der anderen Seite*, *Gespenster*, and, as we shall see, *Fremde Haut/Unveiled*, which come full circle with opening and closing imagery, and sometimes with time, too. The ghost in *Ghosted* is the foreigner, although the Taiwanese woman does not appear to have any issues with her right to be in Germany, unlike the Turkish woman in *Auf der anderen Seite*. Ai-Ling, however, never seems fully settled anywhere. This is compounded by the fact that she is so often seen through others; whether Sophie's lens or her father's authority, she is continually objectified and infantilised, which is also problematic with regard to the wider representation of Asian women.

In *Gespenster*, a film with only white European characters, the role of protector oscillates, although Nina is often manipulated by unscrupulous Toni, while Lotte (*Auf der anderen Seite*) and Sophie's (*Ghosted*) generosity towards the foreigner is tied to their status as a particular kind of citizen: privileged young, white, middle-class, educated Europeans, echoing the notion of the 'good German'. Charlotte and Sophie demonstrate an easy mobility and the freedom to travel across borders as German natives. Sophie travels, twice, to Taipei, and Charlotte has just returned from a round-the-world trip. Charlotte's privileged position stands in contrast to that of her girlfriend, and although the protagonists in *Gespenster* are white German or French people, their respective institutionalised and homeless status can be likened to that of the foreigner kept outside national borders, or contained securely within an institution within a border or boundary, in order supposedly to provide a sense of security and a better socioeconomic lifestyle for those citizens allowed to roam freely in that country and beyond.

While *Auf der anderen Seite* and *Ghosted* revolve around travel across national borders and feature concrete borderland spaces, their protagonists also undertake psychological journeys stimulating personal growth and change through the creation and/or rejection of queer, nonnuclear, family units. *Ghosted* ends with Sophie visiting Taiwan for a second time, in order to visit Ai-Ling's family and partake in another memorial for the deceased woman. Where the first memorial, a video installation, was visual, and Ai-Ling took on a ghost-like quality via her presence-in-absence, the second evokes more of the senses via the warmth of fire and the smell of incense. Where Sophie trapped Ai-Ling in a ghost-like state on-screen, her family's ceremony aims to exorcise her ghost should she decide to linger, while giving offerings for her journey into the beyond. Indeed, looking up during this ceremony, Sophie sees the ghost doubles finally departing.

Fremde Haut/Unveiled

Also a narrative feature film by a lesbian independent filmmaker, Angelina Maccarone, *Fremde Haut/Unveiled* follows a lesbian woman who goes on to 'pass' as a man. Iranian Fariba Tabrizi travels to Germany seeking asylum

because she had been having an affair with a married woman in her homeland, which resulted in homophobia and would lead to severe punishment. Like Gül/Ayten, we see the queer foreign protagonist, a person of colour, in transit and trying to escape from authorities in their homeland, only to be met by white German authority at the other end. Fariba is driven to the reception centre at Frankfurt airport by two white men who make heterosexist assumptions of her, and one of them

adjusts his rear-view mirror to look at her, then readjusts it for a better view of her breasts. After initially meeting his look, she dons her sunglasses and focuses out of the window and, although she refuses to actively indulge his objectification, she neither visually nor verbally challenges this, knowing her future in Germany depends on being compliant. Here the look of the powerful (a white, male official) at the relatively powerless (an asylum-seeking Iranian woman) may be combined with the Mulveyan cinematic gaze in order to gain pleasure from the sight of woman, with power exploited here to both sexualise and intimidate, although she is not presented as a feminine spectacle throughout.

(Dawson 2015a: 212)

Cautious of the negative consequences of her lesbianism, she claims asylum for 'political reasons' ('politische Gründe') in Germany, and when housed in the liminal space of a German airport immigrant holding pen, which is

Figure 2.4 *Fremde Haut/Unveiled* (2005): Fariba (Jasmin Tabatabai), passing as Siamak, picking cabbage for the Sauerkraut factory with work colleague and soon-to-be partner, Anne (Anneke Kim Sarnau)

Source: *Unveiled/Fremde Haut* (2005), directed by Angelina Maccarone © Fischer Film, MM Zimmermann & Co, and Millivres Multimedia (2007).

reminiscent of the in-between spaces run by authorities in other films (the mental institution and children's home in *Gespenster* and the prison and holding centre in *Auf der anderen Seite*), she befriends a man who fled Iran because of political activity. He later commits suicide after being granted temporary asylum. It is Fariba who finds his lifeless body and, with her own asylum denied, she secretly buries him before taking on his identity: Siamak Mustafai. Like the other queer migrants in this chapter, Fariba/Siamak code-switches, here between Farsi, German, and English. Passing as Siamak, a living ghost, Fariba is transported to a small Swabian town, where s/he shares a room with a male immigrant and takes on illegal employment in a very German location: a Sauerkraut factory, where s/he begins to date Anne, with their lesbian relationship passing as heterosexual. Indeed, it is this ghostly passing, as a man, that allows Fariba to experience these things.

When Fariba/Siamak is discovered in a state of undress by Anne's ex-boyfriend and his best friend, they take issue with the relationship, and the fight leads Anne's son to call the authorities. Police arrive and catch Fariba/Siamak as s/he attempts to flee and s/he is subsequently returned to Iran. Indeed, the other time Fariba/Siamak had feared being caught also involved the actions of the two German men, whose speeding car is stopped by police, with Fariba/Siamak, seated in the back, concerned that a police check of papers will lead to expulsion from Germany. The end of the film echoes the opening, in a doubling of the plane journey – albeit in an opposite direction – and while the headscarf was removed on the first plane trip, which suggests it was worn in her homeland for cultural rather than religious reasons (the headscarf is commonplace in Germany, mostly due to the high number of Turkish people there), it is removed during the second one in order to pass as a man, complete with false passport, in Iran. The passing in *Fremde Haut/Unveiled* had been part of a more fluid gender display, apparently due to other external factors regarding the liminal space of queerness, (homo) sexuality, and asylum, while the representation of the ghost, here, is much less fluid in terms of meaning and definition than in the other films analysed.

Conclusion

This trend of ghostly migrants in German transcultural film is a relatively recent one, firmly lodged in post-reunification cinema and during a period when there has been a significant focus on memory, particularly in relation to the atrocities of National Socialism, in culture as well as daily reality and politics. The films analysed in this chapter combine the theme of memory with another key trend in this period, migration, with the queerness of gender and/or sexuality adding a twist to transnational tales of migration and foreignness. While the vampire, a trope in queer representation throughout history, is often sexualised and demonised, the ghost in these films is mostly used to recall memory and explore ties to a queer temporality rather than horror or explicit sexuality. The ghost plays with queerness, in/visibility, and legality: to be a ghost is no longer to be a citizen. Ghosts and the return of

the dead queer both time and place, including migration (especially without papers), as ghosts disrespect borders, boundaries, and binaries.

Indeed, the migrant and the ghost queer time, place, and family in the films I have discussed. These figures queer heteronormative/linear temporality through, for example, creating an eternal present or the (often temporary) collapse of past, present, and future into one site/sight. This queering of time is not only a filmic theme, but also part of the medium's form in most of the films examined: through circular narratives, flashbacks, and other devices used in these transnational tales, which at times make the viewer feel disoriented and lead us to question what is real in the filmic world. The transnational and migrant aspects also help to queer place, with a back-and-forth rather than linearity, as well as displacement and a lack of stability and belonging. The ghost and the migrant queer the concept of family, too, whether through mothers seeing their 'dead' daughters or a migrant who is a living ghost joining a single mother and her son.

Queer theory and queer lives have often been hailed as ways to avoid categorisation, instead living more freely and flexibly on a spectrum rather than part of a binary, but the films analysed also demonstrate some of the negative aspects of a queer – that is, non-normative rather than simply not heterosexual – life, such as imprisonment (holding cell, mental hospital, prison), financial poverty, and a lack of acceptance, whether in the law or in daily life. And while this may be transgressive and sometimes presented as positive in theory, the reality is often dangerous and deadly. What is most needed is a sociopolitical, rather than simply theoretical, break-down of binaries in relation to LGBTIQ+ people, migrants, people of colour, etc., of human and dehumanised, of those worthy of citizenship, good healthcare, legal rights relating to families and finances, a future, and those, because of norms, laws, and borders, supposedly not worthy.

Notes

- 1 I dedicate this chapter to Marin and Deej.
- 2 I use LGBTQ+ as an acronym here, as I do not explore other letters (intersex, asexual, etc.) that have been added in more recent times. I use LGB when discussing identities that have been normalised while transgender people are so frequently demonised. Queer is much more fluid than categories such as gay and lesbian, and could, if I had more space, allow me to theorise the positive fluidity of migration in relation to it.
- 3 This is firmly in my mind, as is my privilege as a white, relatively affluent (though with a solidly working-class background), cisgender lesbian holding a British passport.
- 4 For more on the lesbian and queer vampire, see Dawson (2010).