

1 Exiles

Exile lacks a clear definition. Precisely for this reason, anthropologists tend to use the term exile more metaphorically rather than discuss it conceptually (Salazar 2017: 7; Hackl 2017: 55). French anthropologist Didier Fassin's use of the term during a 2019 lecture in Berlin titled "Forced Exile as a Form of Life" offers a good example here. Against the backdrop of current migrations and a "shift from humanitarian reason to securitarian order",⁴ Fassin attributes an exilic condition to the following two groups:

- Syrian men who had fled the civil war there and were living in a refugee camp in Calais and
- Zimbabwean women who had migrated to South Africa in the 2000s and were currently living in shanty towns there.

Coupling the classic anthropological figure of "the nomad" with "the exile," Fassin speaks of "transnational nomads forced [in]to exile" and specifies his concept by arguing that 1) "forced exiles" are generally unwanted in the lands where they seek refuge; 2) in many cases, it is not possible to distinguish between underlying economic and political causes for migration; and 3) these two causes are in any case closely related. If Fassin had wanted to emphasize that there are broader political and economic causes that motivated such Syrian men and Zimbabwean women to leave their respective countries and drove them to live in, respectively, a French refugee camp or a South African shanty town, why, then, didn't he simply opt for the concept of forced migration, for instance?

1.1 Conceptual Approaches to Exile in Anthropology

The lecture described above was not the first one Didier Fassin gave on this topic. Rather, it was a variation on a lecture he had given before at the Adorno Lectures in Frankfurt and subsequently published in a book (Fassin 2018: 19–47). The book begins with a preamble from *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, the seminal work by German-Jewish exile and Frankfurt School theorist Theodor W. Adorno, to whose legacy the Frankfurt lecture series is dedicated, whereas the chapter containing the lecture is simply titled "Forms of Life." Therein, Fassin

⁴ Fassin, Didier: *Forced Exile as a Form of Life*. Lecture at the Department of European Ethnology, Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany, on 10 January 2019 (in cooperation with the Berlin Center for the Transnational Study of Borders *Border Crossings – Crossing Borders*).

uses the term exile only twice, and rather casually, to describe the two groups mentioned above, generally using instead the phrase “forced nomads” or referring to them as “refugees or migrants, asylum seekers or undocumented aliens” (2018: 20 & 42). While he portrays the Syrian men simply as undergraduate students who had fled the war and wanted to unite with family members or friends that have already settled in Great Britain, the only Zimbabwean portrayed in some detail was a member of an opposition party who had been physically attacked by government supporters, which, as I will show below, qualifies her for fitting under a more political understanding of exile (2018: 34 & 38–39). However, a slightly older research article dealing exclusively with the Zimbabweans, co-written by Fassin and two other scholars, is titled “Asylum as a Form of Life” and does not refer to exile at all (Fassin/Wilhelm-Solomon/Segatti 2017). Instead, the women portrayed there are described as having left Zimbabwe mainly for economic reasons (Fassin/Wilhelm-Solomon/Segatti 2017: 170–172), suggesting that the one presented in the lecture is more of an exception and Fassin’s decision to choose her as his case study was more of an attempt to bring the scope of his research into greater alignment with his new analytical concept. Put differently, Fassin’s increasing use of the term exile to refer to the same subject appears more like a rhetorical concession to his German audiences through evoking the German-Jewish exile of the Nazi period than a use of the term out of conceptual necessity, an impression reinforced by his references to other well-known European exiles such as Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin (2018: 47).

Two years before Fassin held the above-discussed lecture, the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) published a special edition of its journal in which six “Key Figures of Mobility” were discussed: the pedestrian, the flâneur, the nomad, the pilgrim, the tourist, and the exile. Noel Salazar, author of the special edition’s introduction, compares these key figures with keywords that “never acquire a closed or final meaning (not even within one domain or discipline)” (Salazar 2017: 6), a definition that to an extent accounts for the difficulty in defining exile itself. However, Salazar leaves out the question of whether exile is really the best choice as a key figure of mobility within an *anthropological* journal. When I began my research on Africans who had once been exiled in the GDR, I simply presumed that it belongs to the broader field of migration studies, convinced that the trajectories taken by these exiles might help us to better understand some of the historical causes for ongoing South-North migration and, in particular, Western reactions to it. For instance, in her brief discussion of exile, Jenny Kuhlmann—herself not an anthropologist—arguably subsumes exile under migration, writing that, when searching “for analytical concepts to examine and describe the experiences of migrants, the terms exile, diaspora, and transmigra-

tion have become central to migration research” (Kuhlmann 2018: 392).⁵ Moreover, although an abundant corpus of ethnographies that I would readily subsume under the label migration studies already exists, ethnographies dealing explicitly with exile are scarce. Thus, I would have usually considered the migrant—or, perhaps more poignantly today, the refugee—to be a rather obvious key figure of mobility and was pleasantly surprised to find my expectations disappointed.

Andreas Hackl, who authored the journal issue’s article on “the exile,” makes several good arguments for his understanding of the concept. First, he points to exile’s long genealogy in human history, writing that “exile is an ancient concept of political banishment and the enduring consequences for those affected by it” (Hackl 2017: 55). Because of territorial banishment’s inherent political character, many of its consequences—including the likely impossibility of return—are equally political in character (2017: 58). Second, as an anthropologist specializing in Palestine, Hackl points to the influence that Edward Said’s work, including his conceptualization of his own life as a form or *figuration* of exile, has had on cultural studies and anthropology. Hackl speaks here of “a widening gap between experiences of exile as a condition of displacement and some of the qualities the figure has come to symbolize, with consequences for questions of who may be considered exiled under what circumstances” (2017: 56). Finally, and connected to the latter point, Hackl discusses the subtle differences and intersections between “the exile,” the “(forced) migrant,” and “the refugee,” thus widening the semantic field to perhaps more commonly expected figures.

According to Hackl, in addition to its primary *political* connotation, exile refers to a movement between places that lies in the past and refers to the permanent state of the subject after having experienced such change of location (2017: 59). By contrast, “the (forced) migrant” is connected more to the movement itself; meanwhile, in an attempt to distinguish “the exile” from “the refugee,” Hackl uses an earlier definition formulated by his colleague Liisa Malkki (1995), for whom the figure of the refugee is linked more closely to certain status ascriptions within the realms of bureaucratic regulations and international humanitarianism (2017: 59). With reference to another colleague, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, Hackl adds an important point by arguing that “these terms often replace exile because a set of transnational and national legal-political practices and power structures have redefined exiles as [. . .] a refugee, refugee claimant, or undocumented or illegal migrant”

5 For a German article discussing the differences between diaspora and exile, see Kuhlmann 2014.

(Hackl 2017: 61). This recalls Paul Tabori's older description of asylum-seekers as "hardcore exiles" in *The Anatomy of Exile* (Tabori 1972: 29).

Connected to the question of what becomes lost in such processes of shifting status ascriptions is Hackl's observation that anthropologists often invoke exile to relate "the complex subjectivities of the displaced to the political dimension" (2017: 60–61). This seems to aptly describe what Fassin was trying to do in his lecture. Yet Malkki's 1995 review article "Refugees and Exile," from which Hackl borrowed his definition of refugees, already pointed to the danger of depoliticization and *dehistoricization* within the then-growing field of anthropological studies on refugees and displacement. She also warned of the danger of an aestheticization of exile, closely related to the concept's manifold use in literature. Historically, she proposes, a crucial moment for the conceptual or figurative evolution of "refugees" in modern Western thought lies in post-World War II Europe. But, during the subsequent period of decolonization, Western anthropologists nevertheless regarded "refugees" more and more as a Third World problem, while the problematic entanglement between the discourse on such refugees and the discourse on *development* "facilitated the continued depoliticization of refugee movements" (Malkki 1995: 497, 503 & 507). I would agree with Malkki, even though Tabori proves that, at least until the early 1970s, there were white Europeans capable of thinking of exile and Africa together. Tabori's *Anatomy of Exile* contains a section titled "The Restless Continent," dedicated exclusively to Africa. Therein, he writes explicitly of an "African exile problem" beginning in the 1960s (Tabori 1972: 265) and that it is "not at all unusual for an African country both to receive and originate exiles" (1972: 266). He quotes from a 1967 conference report from the US titled *Refugee Students from Southern Africa*, remarking that the report itself acknowledged "differing views as to the definition of a refugee or exile" (Tabori 1972: 269).⁶ According to Tabori, the report listed three main types:

- (1) freedom fighters—active members of a liberation movement who may have left home on instructions from their movement [. . .];
- (2) other 'political refugees', i.e. persons who have fled from political repression and who cannot return, for political reasons, without fear of reprisal; these refugees may never have been affiliated with a particular liberation movement or they may have left or been expelled from a liberation movement; and (3) persons who have left their home country seeking a better life.

Tabori concluded, rather pragmatically, that "most of them cannot return home and are genuine exiles under the terms of our definitions" (*ibid.*). In a brief section on the Soviet Union, Tabori was even farsighted enough to mention it as a

⁶ Jacqz, Jane W.: *Refugee Students from Southern Africa*. New York: African-American Institute, 1967.

host country for “African leaders” and to include Africa and Latin America among the regions of origin of “such men and women whom their native lands considered traitors and whom the Soviet Union accepted either for reasons of political propaganda or [. . .] because they brought useful, even precious gifts of information and knowledge” (Tabori 1972: 356). Hence, Tabori was aware that the Soviet Union could serve as a host country for African exiles, even though he was unaware of its full dimension and depicts the GDR as a country that only produced (German) exiles and refugees (1972: 260–262).

Nevertheless, Malkki is right in so far as Tabori’s understanding of exile, which has been criticized as being too broad (Goddeeris 2007: 400), constantly overlaps with the figure of the refugee. Moreover, the *African* exiles that he evokes are predominantly manifested as nationally or ethnically defined *collectives* (i.e. national liberation movements or ‘ethnic’ groups); contrary to his previous chapters, it lacks any individual accounts or voices. He also concludes his section by adding that “there is a close connection between refugee problems and problems of development” (Tabori 1972: 270). Meanwhile, Malkki argues that associating refugees with the Third World has allowed for the collectivization of displacement as a mass phenomenon linked to underdevelopment, whereas associating exiles with the First World has led to an aestheticization of displacement as an individual phenomenon linked to Western modernity. Both intellectual moves, however, strengthened a Western tendency to depoliticize and dehistoricize human mobility and displacement, as Malkki concludes in her review:⁷

People who are refugees can also find themselves quite quickly rising to a floating world either beyond or above politics, and beyond or above history—a world in which they are simply ‘victims’. [. . .] it is this floating world without the gravities of history and politics that can ultimately become a deeply dehumanizing environment for refugees, even as it shelters. (Malkki 1995: 517)

By bringing the notion of (under)development into the debate, both Malkki and Tabori invoke the *economic* realm within Western conceptualizations of exile. This is a noteworthy move for two reasons. First, in the Western imaginary, and particularly in Germany, the aestheticized figure of the exile—preferably thought of as a self-sufficient and intellectually prolific individual—is rather seldom associated with capitalism’s expansionist logic. To give an example, only in 2015 did the German Society for Exile Studies dedicate one of its yearbooks to the topic

⁷ With regard to their discipline, Malkki and Hackl both agree that anthropologists themselves tend to uncritically apply an aestheticized version of displacement on their own way of professional life—ethnographic methods like field work, or even “academic mobility” as a euphemism for temporary appointments come into mind here (Malkki 1995: 513–514; Hackl 2017: 60).

“economics and exile”. The foreword’s authors state that “if addressed at all, questions of money and economic problems have been only a marginal topic within exile studies” and that “the relationship between economics and exile has not been investigated sufficiently” (Seeber/Zwerger/Krohn 2015: 9, own translation). Implicitly, they also point to a feasible reason for this neglect: “The Jews’ strong representation within certain occupations such as lawyers, doctors, and bankers reinforced the imagination of a Jewish hegemony in public and economic life and strengthened anti-semitic prejudices” (Seeber et al. 2015: 10). Hence, the Society’s focus on the German-Jewish exile of the 1930–40s, together with the anti-semitic stereotype of the rich Jew, made engagement with economic questions a highly sensitive task and further promoted a culturalist understanding of exile. Interestingly, Hackl’s article remains silent on economic questions, as well.

Second, Bhupinder Chimni speaks of a “myth of difference” created in the early 1980s, a myth in which “the nature and character of refugee flows in the Third World were represented as being radically different from refugee flows in Europe since the end of the First World War” (1998: 351). Additionally, he names “the geographical spread of capitalism and the politics of imperialism” (Chimni 1998: 359) as two of the main causes for the twentieth century’s displacements. Until the Cold War’s end, and driven by the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution, the typical refugee arriving on Western shores had been someone fleeing the Eastern bloc: “Thereby, an image of a ‘normal’ refugee was constructed—white, male and anti-communist—which clashed sharply with individuals fleeing the Third World” (ibid.). Vanessa Pupavac’s broadening of this typical figure of the Cold War refugee to include that of the “South African political activist”—who achieved heroic status within the West’s “radical circles”—seems to challenge Chimni’s argument a bit (2006: 1). But Pupavac seems to have only had in mind those South Africans who sought refuge in the West, where she also situated herself: otherwise it would make no sense for her to write of both the Central and Eastern Europeans as well as the South Africans together, saying that “we could vicariously bask in the nobility of their struggles and have our way of life affirmed for us because they had sought refuge in our society” (2006: 1–2). Against such objects of white Western desire, African *freedom fighters* who were exiled in the Soviet bloc, even more so if they had been expelled from it—being forced to leave the East for the West—must have appeared as an outright affront.

As an empirical science, anthropology, not least because of ethnographic methods such as participant observation, necessarily tends to privilege the present over the past. Hence, to find a historically informed view on present phenomena in ethnographies is far from self-evident, and the marginalization of Marxist approaches with their inherent historicism has further complicated this task. For instance, in Germany, ethnographies on migration and border regimes have been criticized for

neglecting their historical embeddedness in broader political-economic contexts as well as the latter's structural dynamics (Georgi 2016: 186–188). What is needed, then, is stronger historical-anthropological engagement with the political-economic processes that *continue* to shape South–North migrations. Conceptually, exile offers such a perspective, as Hackl himself suggests when he describes exile not only as political in nature but also as a *prolonged* condition (2017: 59). Kuhlmann specifies this temporal aspect by arguing that exile, “though in principle also a long-term phenomenon, is understood by exiles themselves as merely a temporary condition,” since the exile's principal aim is to make return possible through interfering in her/his home country's politics (2018: 394; see also 2014: 12). Nevertheless, as I have indicated at the beginning, Hackl criticizes that anthropology “has only rarely engaged with exile conceptually” (2017: 55).

This neglect becomes especially obvious when we compare anthropologists' wide understanding or use of exile with that of political scientists. As the historian Idesbald Goddeeris unsurprisingly notes, political scientists tend to define exiles much more narrowly “as refugees or immigrants engaging themselves in opposition politics against their homeland” (2007: 396) so that some day in the future they might be able to return. He admits that such an understanding departs from the term's etymological meaning of banishment. Hackl of course lists several ethnographies whose subjects fit this definition (2017: 61), and his own specialization on Palestine may have further motivated his strong emphasis on Said. As a writer, Said stands for a very “particular figuration of exile from an emic and autobiographical position” (Hackl 2017: 55) that represents more the figure of the migrant intellectual in the West than that of an exiled politician. However, given the relevance that Hackl attaches to exile's original meaning as a form of *political* banishment, it is striking that Fassin's two groups mentioned at the beginning, with the exception of the one woman from Zimbabwe, do not fit into exile as political scientists prefer to define it. Fassin did not mention Hackl's article in his Berlin lecture, and I have already argued that Fassin's replacement of formulations such as “forced nomads” by “forced exile” is most closely related to his preoccupation with the writings of German-Jewish exiles and speaking in front of German audiences. But at the same time, Fassin's ascription of a quasi-exilic condition to these two groups appears to me like a direct response to Hackl's suggestions, as Hackl's article is an anthropologist's plea to pay more attention to exile as a condition which “binds the subjective and socio-political dimensions of displacement conceptually” (2017: 65). This idea can help us to keep in mind the political and historical patterns of certain forms of transnational human mobility while, at the same time, focusing on the displaced individual's reaction to it. Correspondingly, even if the way Fassin invokes exile demonstrates the tendency of anthropologists to rely on the term more in a metaphorical sense, one could inter-

pret his usage as another anthropologist's attempt to take Hackl's plea seriously. Still, merely attributing a quasi-exilic condition to various groups of migrants and refugees is not the same as specifying the conditions and lives of people who have also left their countries but who, in contrast to Fassin's case studies, become members of exile movements continually and actively engaged with the politics of their homelands. By emphasizing the political and historical insights that studies on such specific types of exile can generate, I do not want to suggest that studying other types of exile or migrations cannot offer similar and worthwhile insights. All I want to say, in accordance with Hackl's main arguments, is the following: studying exiles who actively oppose their home country's politics offers a quite unique potential for understanding the subjective as well as the socio-political and, thus, also the *economic* side of larger patterns of geo-politics, given that, as I will seek to demonstrate throughout the present study, the exiled individual's biography constantly reminds us of these *global entanglements*.

Further clarifying my own perspective, let me add one more of Hackl's observations. He argues that *diaspora* became an "all-purpose" word in the 1980s which replaced exile under the influence of theories of postmodernism and globalization. According to Hackl, diaspora studies, together with the so-called mobility turn—even in its more critical postcolonial expressions—figured "movement as an empowering normality opposite to place attachment" (2017: 59) and obscured the discussion of exile. Hackl's following statement summarizes this process best:

In retrospect, the rise of diaspora studies expelled particularly the 'tragic' dimensions of exile: the political exclusion and the limitations of hybridity amid unbridgeable rifts and enduring immobilisation. This dimension also includes the 'lost context' of a history of war and colonialism that 'tore away people from their homes' before they came into the metropolises of the former coloniser [. . .]. Exile re-introduces this context of violent political displacement at a time when the celebrations of unrooted cosmopolitanisms are challenged by the 'continuing primacy of the state in determining the nature of mobility'. (Hackl 2017: 60)

A quite far-ranging critique: silencing "the tragic dimensions of exile" while, instead, focusing predominantly on its aesthetic or metaphorical possibilities, further delinking human mobility in Western thought from some of its most fundamental historical patterns – "a history of war and colonialism." What Hackl does not mention is that the diasporas which gained so much scholarly attention in Western academia were almost exclusively located within or closely tied to the West. For instance, African critiques raised against Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, a seminal work which, published in 1993, undoubtedly forms part of the mobility turn and had an enormous impact also on anthropology, target exactly this one-dimensional engagement and Gilroy's neglect of Africa itself (e.g. Masilela 1996; Zeleza 2005b: 212). Accordingly, James Clifford self-critically reappraised his influential essay on diaspora discourses,

wherein he counterposed Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* to notions of the Jewish diaspora, as expressing "a certain North American bias" (1994: 302). But he also argued that there is no reason why Gilroy's "privileging of the Black Atlantic, for the purposes of writing a counterhistory in some depth, should necessarily silence other diasporic counterhistories" (Clifford 1994: 320). Obviously influenced by Said, Clifford distinguished discourses on diaspora from discourses on exile by the latter's "frequently individualistic focus" (1994: 308). Simultaneously, he asked what experiences the former "reject, replace, or marginalize," ending his essay with a call to recover "non-Western, or not-only-Western" histories (Clifford 1994: 302 & 328).

Indeed, until recently, Western scholarship has neglected the extensive interactions that took place during the Cold War between countries of the Third World and the Eastern bloc states (formerly known as the Second World), which have produced their very own diasporas and exiles. Instead, the focus lay one-sidedly on the West and the corresponding diasporas in the Americas, the Caribbean and Western Europe, accompanied by an overemphasis on the cultural effects of the former subject people's movements to and between these spaces—be it enforced or voluntarily. This has not only silenced the life stories of exiles like the ones presented in this study but arguably sidelined the Third World's failed attempts to build up postcolonial nation states (or larger territorial units) strong enough to counter Western hegemony.

Moreover, Hackl describes political displacement as a shift that "can result from forced human mobility, but also from the forced movement of boundaries and political projects across and around people" (2017: 65), which reminds us of the effect that the Second World's demise could have on Third World exiles who, because of these projects, lived in the former at the end of the 1980s. This brings me to my final point. Forced movement or creation of boundaries is something very familiar in African contexts. In his introduction to EASA's special edition, Salazar makes clear that *all* of the selected key figures' conceptual developments have "a distinctly European genealogy" (2017: 7). Exile, at least in its current configuration, is a Eurocentric concept closely tied to the model of the European nation state, the development of which is closely tied to Europe's colonial expansion during its imperial history.

According to the historian Marcel van der Linden, the modern understanding of exile is tied to specific characteristics attributed to the European state of the nineteenth century—such as the idea that a state should care for and protect its citizens. If it fails to do so, its citizens can seek another state's protection. This thinking, he continues, not only gave birth to the modern figure of the refugee but also informs the modern understanding of exile; research on the latter should, therefore, be entangled with the history of state- and nation-building (van der Linden 2012: 8). Europe's history of state- and nation-building, however, cannot be sep-

arated from its expansionist drive, while Africa's history of state- and nation-building cannot be separated from its struggle against Europe's expansionism (e.g. Boele van Hensbroek 1993: 119). The latter went hand in hand with the development of industrial capitalism and the rise of the "West" as a conglomeration of the world's economically strongest countries, driven by the political and military leadership of Europe's most prolific colonial outcome: the US. Africa, a continent that is home to the world's economically poorest states, stands in utmost contrast to this. How, then, is exile discussed within African Studies?

1.2 Recent Approaches to Exile in African Studies

Considering the countless studies on the African diaspora, it is astonishing that a volume from the US, said to be "the first of its kind to reconsider exile in its totality and to argue for its centrality to theorizations of state power in colonial and postcolonial Africa" (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 4), appeared only in 2018.⁸ The volume is, however, notable for departing from anglophone studies on the African diaspora—which normally focus on the US, the Caribbean, or Great Britain—by reversing the geographical perspectives dominant therein and putting greater emphasis on continental Africa instead. The contributions cover a broad range of themes: Sierra Leonean settlements of diaspora Blacks, the use of political banishment to rule in colonial Africa, expressions of exile in poetry and lyrics, European settlers who were deported from colonial Africa by the British, the role that Osama bin Laden's exile in Sudan played for al-Shabaab's attacks in Kenya, or recent Mauritanian diaspora communities in the US, to name only some. It also includes two chapters that, considering the geographical origin and temporal space of the exile biographies I am concerned with, address a type of exile that touches upon my own research field: one contribution by Susan Pennybacker on the ANC's exile in London and another by Joanna Tague on "Mozambican Liberation Exiles" (2018: 139), as she calls them, in Dar es Salaam. Taking all of the volume's contributions as a whole, exilic conditions are attributed to a wide variety of individuals or groups whose backgrounds and reasons for displacement strongly differ. Cases such as diaspora-born Blacks from the Americas who allied with the British only to be used by them for a new settler experiment in West Africa or white settlers in East Africa who were forced by their fellows to leave the continent because of their intolerable behavior

⁸ The volume is an outcome of the 4th Conable Conference "*A Vision of Revolution*": *Exile and Deportation in Global Perspective*, which took place in 2015 at New York's Rochester Institute of Technology. The conference's geographical spectrum was not restricted to topics related to Africa.

reveal very distinct historical linkages to “Africa.” Thus, a metaphorical use of exile can also be said to permeate this volume.

However, as one might expect from a volume temporally centered around colonial and postcolonial Africa, Nathan R. Carpenter and Benjamin N. Lawrance, the volume’s editors, bind African exile in their introduction conceptually to European colonialism and to “the instability of state authority during Africa’s long engagement with European power” (2018: 4). Instead of theorizing exile, they highlight it “as part of a continuum of African displacements beginning with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and continuing through imperialism, colonialism, independence, and up to and including contemporary events [. . .] ushering in waves of new migrations” (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 4). They argue that, “with the important exception of pan-African movements in exile, African exile is sidelined from the global encounter with colonial and imperial power” (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 6). Instead, exile has largely been undertheorized and used metaphorically as “suggestion, rhetorical device, and synonym for various forms of displacement or migration” (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 5). Oddly, however, this critique partly contradicts their own broad definition of exile made only three paragraphs earlier, where they propose that exile 1) “is the forced removal or coerced absence from one’s homeland”; 2) “has taken many forms [in Africa] including banishment, self-imposed expatriation, and forced resettlement, among others”; and 3) “encompasses not only political exclusion but also resettlement and migration born of environmental disaster, war, economic hardship, or fear of social persecution” (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 5).

Such a conceptualization makes enforced displacements a key characteristic of colonial and postcolonial Africa, with exile only being a variant within such displacements. Conceptualizing exile as a variant of enforced displacements is of course not particular to Africa; I would rather see the particularity of African exile as understood by Carpenter and Lawrance in the unique role that European (or Western) expansionism plays as the main generator of these displacements. This role, in turn, makes twentieth-century African exile in state-socialist countries an awkward research field in German academia, as I will discuss in more detail below.

Most of the other case studies presented in the volume are in one way or another tied to the West. That an African exile in Eastern-bloc countries existed is only indicated in the chapters from Pennybacker and Tague and even therein only in passing, since the former focuses on South Africans in London and the latter on Mozambicans attending a US-funded school in Tanzania. I would partly explain this neglect as being due to Western scholars having only recently begun to pay closer attention to Africa’s entanglements with the Eastern bloc. This delay, in turn, can be connected to the editors’ argument “that the diversity of exile experiences across the continent can be recovered and interpreted as ‘archive’” (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 4). Considering that the volume offers variations of African

exile in a very broad sense, I want to outline at least briefly a few more of Carpenter and Lawrance's conceptualizations and how Emily Burrill comments on the volume in her afterword, before I come back to Tague and Pennybacker.

The significance for theorization of state power that Carpenter and Lawrance attribute to African exile indicates their interest in exile's *political* dimensions; they consider exile as "fundamental to any account of state power or critical re-reading of colonial and postcolonial oppression" (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 4). Another noteworthy specification made by the editors is that exile "was not confined to African elites but rather encompassed all sectors of society" (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 4). This distinguishes their understanding of exile from, for instance, that predominating in the German Society for Exile Studies.⁹ Associating exile preferably with intellectual elites also touches on the question of the archive; for instance, Clara E. Lida has argued about the Spanish Republicans' exile in Mexico that "the exile which was best remembered is the literary exile, which was not the biggest in numbers but the one which bore testimony to its existence" (Ahrens 2014, own translation). This invokes Carpenter and Lawrance's notion of the archive and, translated into a world region in which oral tradition continues to play an important role, problematizes the inherent Eurocentrism of exile's connection with literacy as the primary means of creating collective memory.¹⁰ In line with this argument, Burrill recurs in her afterword to Sophia McClennen's much-cited study on exile in Latin American literature and, underlining an argument that the latter made therein, claims that we have to reconcile "notions of exile as an existential state of displacement with crucial implications for memory and identity" with the more descriptive approach to exile that prevails in "a scholarship that assesses the conditions and implications for those in exile from authoritarian regimes" (Burrill 2018: 310–311).

Carpenter and Lawrance identify two tropes within discourses on exile that would also exist in Africa. They point to exile as not only being a form of erasure or social death—in that exile "erases histories, lives, and experiences, to varying degrees of completeness" (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 6)—but also as being a unique condition for introspection and reflectiveness, which again recalls Said's use of the

9 As the German Society for Exile Studies 2009 yearbook's editors write, the German "study of exile reveals quantitatively and qualitatively its character as research on elites, working with other methods and theoretical approaches and having other tasks than contemporary research on migration" (Krohn/Winckler 2009: VIII, own translation).

10 The case of the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico is also notable in that the Mexican government allowed only such Spanish refugees to enter the country if they had learned a profession and knew how to read and write. Given the high rate of illiteracy in the Spain of the 1930s, exiles from lower social classes were automatically excluded, as Enrique Lister notes (2005: 290–291).

term. Even though they ultimately insist on exile's tragic or negative dimension, they do not dismiss the latter trope entirely. Instead, they point to exile's empowering effects by arguing that "not all narratives of exile are histories of erasure," in that exile might also be creative or generative, dramatic and productive at the same time and "in most cases creativity happened *in spite of* exile's dislocation, disorientation, and violence" (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 7). It is exile's asserted productiveness that allows for a discreet critique of capitalism when they further write that "people in exile formed or recreated national identities, they catalyzed transnational anticolonial, anti-apartheid, and anticapitalist movements" (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 8). That African exile also articulated itself in anticapitalist movements was not exclusive to Southern Africa during decolonization; but it holds especially true for a region in which Portuguese colonialism, white settler regimes and apartheid persisted following the 1960s.

1.2.1 Case Studies from Southern Africa: Mozambique and South Africa

How do Joanna Tague and Susan Pennybacker invoke this region and period within the volume? Covering the 1960s and 1970s, Tague also raises the question of how to distinguish between exiles and refugees with regard to the Mozambicans in Dar es Salaam she is concerned with: "thousands of refugees who followed their leaders to this cosmopolitan city" (Tague 2018: 137), as she writes in the beginning, who, right in the next sentence, turn into a "diffuse exile community" whose leaders had problems keeping track of (Tague 2018: 138). What turns these Mozambicans into exiles, or what suddenly frees them from their former ascription as refugees within Tague's text, is their integration into a political organization linked to their home country—here, the national liberation movement Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo). This is a noteworthy move. Paul Zeleza, whose thoughts on exile I will discuss in the following section, argues that Said created a "hierarchy of the displaced" in his autobiography by equating displaced intellectuals, capable of drawing creative output out of their displacement, with the exile and putting them on top of the hierarchy, while refugees remained at the bottom (Zeleza 2005: 9–10). In Tague's move, refugees climb up this ladder through joining (or creating) a movement linked to the home country, and international assistance for refugees is substituted with a quasi-national assistance for party members. The latter is organized by a network of privileged but similarly displaced compatriots—in Tague's case including the Frelimo leader Eduardo Mondlane's US-American wife—in other words, by the construction-in-progress of a political movement in exile. This network offers a protective or caring structure in the host country, mobilizes its members for a political and military struggle related to the home country, and has

leading figures who serve as intermediaries to organize support. By relying on this infrastructure and keeping it active, refugees turn into a collective of exiles.

However, African exile during decolonization—including the anti-apartheid struggle—drew upon certain structural features that earlier or later periods necessarily lacked, namely the primacy of national liberation, effective political movements, and the need to organize international support, such as opportunities for vocational or military training or studying abroad. Attributing exile to a displaced person mainly because he/she has joined a broad political movement hence bears the danger of re-establishing a Eurocentric framework, as it takes certain logics of territorial units that would emerge out of European colonialism as African nation states for granted. Tague is, of course, aware of such contradictions and sees two reasons for the “ambiguity in distinguishing” (2018: 139) between the refugee and the exile. First, she refers to the United Nations’ 1951 Refugee Convention, which attributed a status of refugees only to Europeans who were displaced because of events that occurred before 1951. This convention was reformed only in 1967. Her second argument is, however, seemingly tautological with regard to her use of the term exile, explaining that “we also know very little about how African refugees and liberation leaders throughout the 1960s defined and navigated their own exile,” but “lack of substantive UNHCR support often meant that African liberation movements in exile assumed responsibility for refugees from their home territories” (Tague 2018: 139). By taking over such responsibility, one might conclude, these movements turned refugees into political exiles.

An important part of this responsibility was to offer its members opportunities that would distinguish them from mere refugees, such as a training or study abroad. The significance that these opportunities played for exiled members of liberation movements or Africans in general, as well as the significance that the Soviet system played in generating them, have been highlighted by various scholars (e.g. Mazrui 1999; Katsakioris 2016). Tague, in turn, theorizes the impacts that the prospect of obtaining a scholarship to study in the US had on Mozambican students’ *status as exiles*. Given that their careers were always temporary stages, Tague writes that “exile was, as Edward Said observed, a ‘permanent state’; as the multiple layers of exile—the various forms that exile took—followed students geographically” (2018: 142). She continues:

This notion of permanency, however, revolved around their educational advancement; students hoped to attain a scholarship abroad and did not fear being physically in exile as much as they feared a stalled education. In this way, the purpose of being in exile was intimately linked with ideas of permanency: one had to have a purpose (and to be serving the liberation movement through that purpose) to avoid being in permanent exile. (Tague 2018: 142)

In the beginning of her text, Tague writes that, although “‘exile’ encapsulates a range of experiences, from coercion to free will [. . .] we often default to imagining exile as punitive” (2018: 138). Her case study challenges this imagination. Within the context of decolonization and the Cold War, she argues, exile was also an opportunity closely intertwined with social advancement. Tague focuses only on the West, which is quite surprising since Frelimo maintained close relations with Eastern bloc countries during the independence struggle and, afterwards, even turned Mozambique into a nominally socialist state.¹¹ Thus, she mentions Eastern bloc countries as possible spaces for such opportunities of social advancement only in passing. Nevertheless, the way she invokes these countries indicates that they offered opportunities of high quality. Tague writes that, in the mid-1960s, Mozambicans not only used their status as graduates from the Tanzanian school to enroll in universities in western capitalist countries like the US, England, Switzerland, Belgium or Portugal, or in southern countries like Algeria and India, but also in socialist eastern European/Asian countries such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, or the USSR. Moreover, she presents a Mozambican exile who studied and even received a doctorate in East Germany before beginning a career in high profile positions for the Mozambican government (Tague 108: 145 & 149).¹² Hence, within the broader discussion of African exile during colonial and postcolonial history that the volume seeks to address overall, Tague’s contribution invokes the Eastern bloc exclusively in the context of higher learning and in an unreservedly *positive* way. This is remarkable if we recall how predominantly *negative* the West, which emerged victorious from the Cold War and has usually been portrayed as being morally superior to its former eastern counterpart, is presented in the volume as the main generator of enforced African displacements. From a German point of view, it is even more remarkable or paradoxical, since the GDR continues to be represented almost entirely negatively within dominant streams of Germany’s post-reunification discourse—its treatment of Blacks and People of Color being no exception.

Does Pennybacker’s contribution invoke the Eastern bloc in ways similar to Tague’s? Tague writes that, for the Mozambicans, Dar es Salaam was “the preeminent hub for liberation exiles and other activists from across the continent” (2017: 138). Something similar can be said about London with regard to the exiles that Pennybacker addresses: South Africans who found themselves exiled in the west-

¹¹ Not unlike Tague, Andrew Ivaska also highlights the importance of Frelimo’s first president Eduardo Mondlane’s relationship with the US (2018: 28).

¹² The only other explicit reference Tague makes to an Eastern bloc country is her mentioning of a Czech teacher at the school in Dar es Salaam; she also mentions a German teacher but without further specifying if he was from the FRG or the GDR (2018: 145).

ern part of the Cold War world. Just like Tague, she invokes the corresponding exiles in Eastern bloc countries only in passing. However, due to the specifics of the South African context, her contribution reveals significant differences in terms of the importance which communism played for African decolonization and the anti-apartheid struggle. First, Pennybacker uses interviews with ANC members, conducted in the early 1990s by Hilda Bernstein and Wolfie Kodesh, who were South African exiles of Jewish origin as well as members of the South African Communist Party (SACP).¹³ Instead of simply mentioning the latter, Pennybacker highlights the role that communism played in her subjects' biographies right from the start by further stressing interviewer Bernstein's "Soviet diplomat's Bolshevik family's" background, international communism's influence on anticolonial struggles, and the Soviet Union's support for the anti-apartheid-struggle in particular (2018: 185–187). Hence, considering the outcome of the "committed few thousand South Africans who continued actively to oppose apartheid from abroad," she writes of a double existence "as a peaceful, antiracist, broadly based, global 'human rights' movement in one guise, and as a paramilitary, ideologically orthodox, communist-engaged, Black-dominated and secret underground movement in another" (Pennybacker 2018: 187). Note that she links communism not only to militancy or dogma but also to Black dominance, thus implicitly linking communism to emancipatory struggles of groups racially subjugated and economically exploited by the West. Second, communism and the Eastern bloc run through many of the exile narratives collected by Bernstein and Kodesh and selected by Pennybacker. These narratives also include that of a white South African who spent seven months of training in the Soviet Union, leading Pennybacker to construct the following spatial sketch, which also mentions the GDR in passing and suggests that Marxism was not merely a discursive tool to mingle a critique of capitalism with anticolonialism but also that the Second World's material support was substantial:

His journeys bespoke the Cold War context of the militarized armed struggle in Africa, [. . .] the lesser power that Britain now was, and the magnanimity of the Soviet state in its South African project. The USSR was a competing base of support to that offered by Britain, involving different kinds of political means testing. [. . .] Havana was also on the map for some young South Africans in long-term exile and training, as was the German Democratic Republic and other points in the former Eastern Europe. (Pennybacker 2018: 187)

¹³ The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), founded in 1921, was declared illegal by the apartheid regime in 1950 and refounded itself as the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1953. For the prominent role of South African Jews in the anti-apartheid struggle, see Plass 2020.

In her earlier descriptions of Britain as a host society, Pennybacker also highlights its inherent contradictions when it comes to questions of its postcolonial heritage and South–North migration. She argues that “the liberal democracy that claimed inalienable rights to safe haven for so many, was at the same time the weak surviving pivot of an exploitative empire that fostered unresolved relationships at home” (Pennybacker 2018: 187). The most pronounced critique of capitalism and, in reverse, positive invocation of international communism within this volume on African exile appears in the final exile narrative that Pennybacker chose for her contribution, which belongs to an interview Kodesh conducted in 1993 with Denis Goldberg.¹⁴ Goldberg was a long-time member of the SACP and, as the only white person who was sentenced in the Rivonia trial, one of the most prominent South African exiles of Jewish background. He talks about how much the Western discourse on racism and apartheid astonished him when he came to Britain in the mid-1980s after more than twenty years of imprisonment:

we know quite simply that racism is apartheid, apartheid is part of capitalism, is part of imperialism and this was accepted throughout the ANC and the liberation movement ever since I've known [of it]—and not just amongst communists as such. [. . .] But when you get to Europe [. . .] all these things got blurred in the kind of ‘Oh we are democratic in Britain. We have a great human rights record.’ [. . . T]here's a kind of ideological falsity about Europe and its politics. And yet the mass of people seem[s] to accept it. And so it was exciting actually to see this. (Goldberg, as quoted in Pennybacker 2018: 196)

Pennybacker further quotes some of Goldberg's critique against the Soviet Union's authoritarianism as well as his comments on the fall of the Soviet Union. Goldberg found it necessary to defend it during the Cold War, but its demise somehow contradictorily led to a “freer Southern African region” (Goldberg, as quoted in Pennybacker 2018: 196).

That Pennybacker, of all things, decided to end her contribution's empirical part with Goldberg's narrative is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, Goldberg

¹⁴ Pennybacker abbreviates most of the exiles' names with their initials. However, given Goldberg's status as a public figure and the need to contextualize his statement, I find it necessary to explicitly name him. His passing in 2020 also eliminates any possible need to maintain his anonymity. Moreover, anyone familiar with the ANC's history could easily identify him because of the additional information Pennybacker gives: “a male, Jewish South African, who was a defendant in one of the key trials of South African history. Spared the death sentence, DG spent twenty-two years in prison for treason while his wife, who had been held in more limited detention, left the country with their children to live in London; he joined them there after a negotiated release” (2018: 196). In 2002, after the death of his first wife, Goldberg married the East German Edelgard Nkobi (born Schulreich), who had left the GDR in 1975 together with her first husband, ANC member Zenzo Nkobi (Quart 2014).

was not a Black or ‘coloured’ but a white Jewish South African and, thus, hardly representative for South Africa, whose vast majority was and still is Black. A Communist Party member during the anti-apartheid struggle, he held on to his Marxist convictions even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. His inclusion may be considered even more surprising because Goldberg is more likely to be associated with his two-decades-long imprisonment in South Africa than with his later exile in London, even though African writers like Kofi Anyidoho (1997) have pointed out the many analogies that exist between prison and exile. Goldberg’s exile narrative explicitly links racism and apartheid to capitalism and imperialism, pointing towards a specific type of human rights discourse as a functional element within the West’s ideological repertoire to justify its political economy and touching on one of the hinges of its global dominance: the historical relationship between the development of its political economy and a specific kind of racism and material inequality that are entangled with (Western) Europe’s colonial expansion. It took a contribution on the exile provoked by the longest struggle against white oppression on the African continent to explicitly address this issue. Is there a similar tendency when African intellectuals of different national backgrounds reflect upon exile?

1.3 Approaches to Exile among African Intellectuals

1.3.1 Paul Zeleza’s Reflections on Exile in the Writings of Edward Said and African Discourses

The anthropologist Andreas Hackl took Edward Said’s exile as a point of departure to counter, as he wrote, “the chronic neglect of exile’s analytical value” (2017: 65) within anglophone Social and Cultural Anthropology. Although additionally relying on some literature from other disciplines, Hackl mainly focused on ethnographic approaches to exile. Much of the epistemological value attributed to such an approach arguably rests on the fact that many (white) Western academics consider Said to be an outspoken critic of the West. What happens, however, if an African intellectual takes Said as a point of departure to reflect on exile? Paul Zeleza, a historian and writer, undertook this approach several years before Hackl. Born in Zimbabwe of Malawian parents, who later moved with him back to Malawi, Zeleza grew up under the Malawian dictatorship of Hastings K. Banda before eventually leaving the country and continuing his academic career in Canada and Kenya. Consequently, tropes associated with African intellectuals in exile run through his own biography.

In an article from 2005, Zeleza focused on exile in African *literatures* that motivated Carpenter and Lawrance to make a brief reference to him, arguing that

“literary examinations of exile also suggest displacement as giving life, freedom, and opportunity” (Carpenter/Lawrance 2018: 29), though in the process only highlighting his positive examples. Nevertheless, a number of Zeleza’s observations do qualify for helping us attain a better understanding of African political exile as well as for rethinking Hackl’s observations. For example, Zeleza reads some of Said’s texts to reflect on how Africa and anti-Black racism in the US are invoked therein (Said spent several years of his early life in Egypt before moving to the US). Here, Zeleza’s article not only helps us to get an overview of African exile’s literary dimensions but also to see more clearly a certain Western bias in Said’s work that is often overlooked by Western scholars. Note, for instance, the following remarks Zeleza makes on Said’s autobiography *Out of Place*, published in 1999:

Said’s alienation from Cairo and by extension Egypt and Africa is unmistakable from the silences in the narrative. We are given the expatriate Cairo, the Cairo of Arab exiles [. . .], but the Cairo of the indigenous Egyptians is largely invisible. Egypt intrudes in this island of comfortable exile, violently and almost annoyingly, through the revolution of 1952 and Nasser’s doomed socialist experiment. (Zeleza 2005: 6)

The positive effect which Nasser’s coming to power initially had for Africa’s decolonization—culminating in the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956—can hardly be overestimated. While this revolution, at least in Zeleza’s reading of Said, apparently made of Cairo a rather uncomfortable place for the type of exile Said had experienced there, Cairo became more generally a hot spot for African freedom fighters, and the city turned into a hub from which Africans from all around the continent departed to study at European universities (Burton 2019: 30–40). Of course, the Egypt revolution took place shortly after Said’s move to the US, from which he would cheer Nasser on (Shatz 2021). What Zeleza means, or at least how I understand him, is that Said has lived in (and uncritically remembers) a quite different hub: a “colonial, bourgeois Cairo” (Zeleza 2005: 5) in which Said enjoyed a privileged lifestyle within a small Western-oriented Arab expat community, protected and isolated from the ordinary Egyptians as well as from the looming political upheavals on the wider continent. A certain reluctance to address anti-Black racism, Zeleza continues, also counts for those parts of Said’s memoir in which he recalls his student life in the US. However, more interesting with regard to my main subject here—African exile in the GDR—is how Zeleza explains this ignorance.

Referring to a work of the late Pius Adesanmi (2004), Zeleza argues that “exiles who ignore the politics of their hostlands and are singularly fixated on the desolation of their homelands run the risk of producing and peddling exceptionalist discourses of oppression” (2005: 8). In other words, specific discourses bounded to

certain territories may facilitate the ability of exiles to tolerate or ignore the injustices of their host countries, as long as they target other members of the society than themselves. Following this logic, Said, the Palestinian child of an economically privileged Christian-Arab family, who would dedicate his political and intellectual energy to the Palestinian cause, was neither exposed to the everyday life of common Egyptians and Africans while living in Cairo nor subjected to *anti-Black* racism while living in the US. According to Zeleza, such conditions allowed Said to write a memoir that leaves in silence certain obviously negative aspects of his host countries that did not affect him personally but which most other critical observers would find obligatory to address.

To avoid misunderstandings: Zeleza leaves no doubts of how much he admires Said's lifelong engagement as a public intellectual committed to the Palestinian cause and to deconstruct certain Western epistemologies. He clearly acknowledges his intellectual and academic achievements. Yet, to the same extent to which he praises him, Zeleza points to several aspects within Said's theorization of exile that he considers problematic. To begin with, the wish to return—commonly seen as one of exile's indispensable characteristics—evanesces in favor of a celebration of the exilic condition itself (Zeleza 2005: 9). Zeleza argues that Said fetishizes a privileged form of exile in which “the worldliness of intellectual exiles assumes revolutionary potential” and “the historical imperatives of anti-imperialist struggle now find expression and vitality in exilic and migratory energies and movements” (2005: 10).¹⁵ Such a celebration of “the intellectual and artist in exile” goes hand in hand with depreciation of the “nearly forgotten unfortunates” when it comes to South–North migrations, as Zeleza polemically writes. Said, he explains, tends to see only “cosmopolitan intellectuals” as exiles, while “the rest are pretenders or undeserving of the true pathos and majesty of the exilic condition and experience” (2005: 10). This leads Zeleza to a more general critique of Western scholarship:

From here to the invocation of exile as an emancipatory experience is but a short step, especially in some of the celebratory, mischievous, and depoliticized narratives of postmodernism and postcolonialism that extol ambiguous, ambivalent, hybrid, contingent, cosmopolitan, borderless and unanchored identities. (Zeleza 2005: 10)

What needs to be mentioned here, however, is that Zeleza, in his critical reading of Said, leaves out *The Question of Palestine* (Said 1979), a book which articulates the experience of exile and forced displacement in a more collective and profoundly political sense. Ann Laura Stoler (2016: 37–67) points to the fact that this book, published only one year after *Orientalism*, has received considerably less

¹⁵ Zeleza refers here to an earlier critique he wrote of Said's 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*.

attention than Said's other works, and Zeleza's as well as Hackl's article both confirm her argument, for they make no reference to this book at all. Who knows whether this neglect in the broader reception of Said's works has not also facilitated a culturalist reading of Said's configuration of exile?

In any case, even though Zeleza's approach to Said is more critical than Hackl's, both problematize specific streams within Western humanities coming out of the 1980s that have tended to celebrate human mobility and displacement (e.g. migration) *at the expense* of critically engaging with its deeper political and historical ramifications. But the reflections of Zeleza and Hackl on exile actually exhibit more similarities as well. Trying to grasp exile conceptually, Zeleza states that it "is exceedingly common in modern Africa, indeed in the world at large, yet it remains difficult to define as a concept and a condition" (2005: 10)—exactly as Hackl would argue more than a decade later. Indeed, many of Zeleza's arguments, such as that "the exile is usually seen as a victim of banishment while the expatriate and émigré enjoy some choice and emigrant and refugee are legal statuses" (2005: 11), sound so similar to Hackl's that the latter seems to have missed an opportunity to back up his own views by not having referred to Zeleza's article in his own. Considering exile's Eurocentric genealogy, Zeleza insists on the conceptual dependence of exile on distinct nation states and the latter's "coercive power over citizens and aliens" (2005: 11). Curiously, Hackl, an anthropologist, recurs to Said as a literary scholar and writer for exile's aestheticization and contrasts it with more pragmatic and politicized uses in selected ethnographic studies on refugees and displacement. Meanwhile, Zeleza, a historian and writer, recurs to the social science discourse on migration as a counter to Said's concept of exile, reminding us "that dislocation, expatriation from home is a prosaic condition experienced by millions of people rather than an exceptional reality only for those blessed with artistic souls" (2005: 12). Whereas Hackl speaks of exile as a metaphor, Zeleza speaks of exile as "a metonymy for various forms of dislocation from a physical and psychic homeland" (2005: 11). For Zeleza as for Hackl, exile can refer to real physical displacement as well as "be[ing] metaphorical, referring to artistic representations of alienation from familiar traditions" (Zeleza 2005: 11). Even though there are African authors who celebrate privileged forms of displacement as quasi-exilic, mentally stimulating and creatively enriching, Africans, Zeleza argues, have already experienced a metaphorical type of exile through colonialism and the consequent process of alienation from their cultures and languages (2005: 13). During the subsequent period of decolonization and the Cold War, exile became "an especially quarrelsome and opinionated lot" when ideological struggles between "liberals, nationalists and Marxists" were played out (Zeleza 2005: 15); physically, exile further gains in importance in the "struggles against the devastations of neocolonialism" (2015: 16–17) following decolonization. This leads us almost up to the present. Taking another

scholar's critical reading of the "fragmented fiction" of Dambudzo Marechera, a celebrated Zimbabwean author, as one of his final examples, Zeleza speaks of a "vision of exilic despair" characterized as follows:

It represents an ontological condition of humanity, the experiences of African deprivation and estrangement under colonialism, their alienation as émigrés and emigrants in racist Europe, and as disenchanted citizens in totalitarian postcolonial states, all of which produce devastating personal and psychological dislocations, making meaningful political action by the exile and returnee all but impossible. (Zeleza 2005: 17)

This sounds like a desperate situation, one which fits perfectly with the Western imagination and negative stereotypes of Africa. Zeleza lists more African authors whose exiled characters "are often lonely, traumatized and uncompromising individuals who return to an equally bleak, brutalized world of corruption where the promises of independence have been aborted" (*ibid.*). He writes of "alienated and impotent intellectuals" who are "sapped and paralyzed by a Manichean understanding of the world," dismissing "all national liberation struggles as mystifications contrived by an omnipotent, conspiratorial imperialism" and inhabiting "a nihilistic world of unyielding structural dualities and little agency, of a passive 'Africanity' and a destructive 'Westernity'" (*ibid.*).

Here we need to keep in mind that contrary to Western authors who can write for their own lucrative national markets and in their own national languages, many African authors have to write explicitly for Western markets and in the former colonizer's language to make a living. They must, hence, satisfy some of their Western readers' expectations and feelings of guilt to sell their products (see also Zeleza 2005: 13). Zeleza's bibliography fortunately contains a wide range of authors, some of whom have created characters that draw a more positive picture of living abroad. Further, he also looks at literature where the exiles portrayed do not return or at literature focused on the exilic experience itself. Such fictions, he writes, offer "a kind of contrapuntal affirmation of rootless cosmopolitan affiliation, one marked with anxieties and contradictions held in fluid, suspended tension" (Zeleza 2005: 18)—an affiliation for exiles who have found a new home in western European countries, such as France, but one that raises constant fears of being racially insulted or attacked as well as living a life in isolation, alienated from the host as well as the home country. Taken to its extreme, the latter two can turn into "interchangeable spaces, indeed states of mind, real and imagined, present and absent" (*ibid.*). They transform exile into a "cosmopolitanism in which collective postcolonial subjectivities are endlessly negated, in which the borders of space, time, history, language, religion, culture and identity are perpetually transgressed" and "concepts of origin and belonging" continually constructed and deconstructed (Zeleza 2005: 18).

Zeleza's exile narratives, no matter whether they stem from real experiences or from a writer's imagination, are full of contradictions, always meandering, and dialectical in nature, leaving the impression that his continent of origin is a fertile ground for all kinds of exiles, especially the tragic ones. Two more points are noticeable here. First, Zeleza's analysis creates the impression that, from an African perspective, exile comes close to a timeless mass phenomenon; meanwhile, in its literary expressions a view that focuses on exile as an individual phenomenon is dominant. Second, most of the examples Zeleza gives lead to the West, and those who lead to other spaces he does not use for opening up another perspective. With the South African Alex La Guma, Zeleza lists at least one exiled writer whose biography could have led him into this field (2005: 11). La Guma was a high-ranked 'coloured' member of the South African ANC as well as of the South African Communist Party. At first exiled in England, he later moved on to socialist Cuba together with his wife, where he died in 1985. As I will discuss later, he published a hardly known travel account about a journey he made through the Soviet Union that contains some autobiographical references regarding his exile. Interestingly, his fictional works never addressed this exile but, rather, were concerned instead with the living conditions of fictitious characters in apartheid South Africa and feasible forms of resistance. Were African writers whose exile led them to the Eastern bloc and international communism less prone to aestheticize their experience of exile than their counterparts in the West did?

A puzzling question remains. To what extent does the discourse on literary African exile as depicted by Zeleza, however critical he might be of Western epistemologies, still follow a specific Western logic which emphasizes exile as generating tragic but, nevertheless, aestheticizable experiences of scattered individuals within an exclusively Western setting when it silences exiles connected to the Second World? The latter's exclusion is even more paradoxical when we consider that it was arguably an important part of the most radical forms of African resistance against the West in the twentieth century.

1.3.2 Francis Njubi Nesbitt's Classification of Migrant African Intellectuals and their Politics of Exile

An implicit Western focus is not unique to Paul Zeleza. It similarly characterizes, for instance, a brief article written by Francis Njubi Nesbitt on African intellectual migrants to which Zeleza also refers (2005: 15). Titled "African Intellectuals in the Belly of the Beast: Migration, Identity, and the Politics of Exile," it features exile prominently in its title while "Belly of the Beast" already indicates an exclusive engagement with the Western colonizer's world. However, given that the

Africans whose biographies I present here were exiled in the GDR but, given the German reunification, ended up in the Federal Republic of Germany and, thus, in a Western capitalist society, it is worth looking closer at this text.

Nesbitt—himself a Kenyan currently living in the US—argued in the early 2000s that African intellectuals are confronted with their “Africanity” for the first time when they enter the US or Western Europe, due to the racism to which Africans are constantly subjected there. He even went so far as to state that W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of a “double consciousness,” developed exclusively on the African-American experience in the US, counts even more for African migrant intellectuals than for African Americans and African Europeans, given the former’s looser connection to the Western host societies:

The exiles are much closer to the African ‘soul’ Du Bois referred to and are less prepared for the pervasive racism and second-class status that they have to overcome in the West. This duality is intensified by the sense of alienation and guilt engendered by the widespread demonization of exiles as selfish and ungrateful wretches who escape to greener pastures as soon as they get their degrees, instead of using their education to uplift the poverty-stricken societies that educated them at great expense. (Nesbitt 2002: 70)

Nesbitt divides such migrant intellectuals into three groups which, as he adds in his conclusion, “are not mutually exclusive” (2002: 74): the comprador intelligentsia, the postcolonial critic, and the progressive exile. Note that, in other parts of his text, Nesbitt attributes exile to migrant intellectuals outside of Africa in general, whereas here he attributes it only to the last of his three groups explicitly. Unsurprisingly, as Nesbitt’s terms and order already suggest, the comprador intelligentsia is the most negatively connoted and the type that most obviously sells out to Western capitalism and neocolonialism:

Compradors can be recognized by their uncritical adoption of the free market ideology of globalization as the solution to Africa’s development crisis. They can be seen touring the continent on generously funded ‘research’ junkets and attending international conferences where they defend the global structures and heap blame on African countries for corruption, ‘tribalism’, and ineptitude. (Nesbitt 2002: 71–72)

In contrast to the former, postcolonial critics are less easy to grasp but more interesting when it comes to their relationship with Western knowledge production:

Much like the compradors, postcolonial critics take advantage of their color, nationality, and location in the West to become expert interpreters of the African experience for Western audiences. They also are conduits of Eurocentric thought for African consumption through the adaptation of the latest trend in European American perspectives to ‘explain’ the African experience. This adaptation of European American thought to the African experience has ranged from liberalism to various types of Marxism and to modernization, developmentalism, and dependency/world systems theories. Since the 1990s the most popular

Eurocentric perspective has been the postmodernist critique of essentialism and metanarratives through deconstruction and discourse analysis, which the postcolonial critics have adopted as their own. Thus, the postcolonial critic is only the latest phase in the long history of Third World scholars borrowing European American theories to explain African, Latin American, and Asian experiences. (Nesbitt 2002: 71)

Nesbitt invokes a problematic essentialism by suggesting the possibility of a ‘pure’ African, Latin American, or Asian experience that is free (or can be freed) from Western interference. Moreover, for the sake of his argument, and probably caused by his sketch-like article’s briefness, he depicts Western Marxist approaches—including dependency or world systems theory—as though they lack any theoretical benefit for African and other non-Western intellectuals. He also neglects that dependency theory was developed in Latin America. Further, by placing these approaches in a direct genealogy with postmodernist and postcolonial approaches, he silences the many dissonances that exist between them, such as, for instance, critiques against the two latter approaches raised by Marxists. Nevertheless, Nesbitt makes a point by suggesting that even the most critical Western theories are inescapably tied to Western hegemony and, in spite of their critical value, satisfy Western academia’s demands while leaving the underlying political-economic power structures which they criticize practically unchallenged.

However, if Nesbitt rejects Western knowledge production as being of no practical use to efficiently counter Western hegemony or to explain the African experience, what, then, does the political commitment and agency of his third type of African migrant intellectuals in the West—the “progressive exiles” —look like? What does it mean that he only speaks of them in exilic terms? Nesbitt refers to Du Bois, the Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and the global (meaning only “western”?) anti-apartheid movement to exemplify what African migrant intellectuals can do to qualify for this group. They have to “resolve the crisis of double consciousness” by building up a “dignified identity through Pan-Africanism and a commitment to the liberation of all people of African descent whether in the diaspora or on the continent” (Nesbitt 2002: 73). In doing so, Nesbitt continues, “progressive African exiles could use their location ‘in the belly of the beast’ to transform the international system for the benefit of all” (2002: 74). The underlying assumption is clear: the *racializing and exploitative* patterns of globalized capitalism can be overcome or attenuated, and progressive African exiles belong to those who can push these reforms from within the capitalist core states, to borrow a Wallersteinian term. Nesbitt seems to relate exile exclusively to the promotion of progressive and emancipatory change and attributes it to such African migrant intellectuals who maintain a positive relationship with their continent (or country) of origin while similarly establishing a positive relationship with the diaspora. They use their privileged location in the West not for their own benefit

but for “the benefit of all,” as happened, for instance, with the anti-apartheid movement and the abolishment of apartheid in South Africa.

What, however, does such a tale neglect? First, it neglects that, at the end of his long life as a political activist and intellectual, Du Bois had lost his faith in Western capitalism’s capability to reform in terms of racism and the economic exploitation of the global South. Instead, he joined the Communist Party, turned his back to “the belly of the beast”—the United States, his country of birth—and, together with his wife, migrated (or went into self-imposed exile) to Ghana. Second, Nesbitt mentions that “during the 1970s Africans and African Americans re-established ties that had been severed by the anticommunist hysteria of the 1950s” (2002: 74). Nevertheless, his article does not reveal any awareness of the significance which international communism continued to play for African decolonization and the anti-apartheid struggle, a significance that lasted until the Soviet Union’s very own demise. Third, Stuart Hall had good reasons in 1980 to describe apartheid South Africa as follows:

It is perhaps *the* social formation in which the salience of racial features cannot for a moment be denied. Clearly, also the racial structures of South African society cannot be attributed to cultural or ethnic differences alone: they are deeply implicated with the forms of political and economic domination which structure the whole social formation. Moreover, there can be little argument that this is a social formation in which the capitalist mode of production is the dominant economic mode. Indeed, South Africa is the ‘exceptional’ (?) case of an industrial capitalist social formation, where race is an articulating principle of the social, political and ideological structures, and where the capitalist mode is sustained by drawing, simultaneously, on what have been defined as both ‘free’ and ‘forced’ labour. (Hall 1980: 308–309)

If the French neo-Marxist discourse of his time did not totally misguide Hall, and he was right with this observation, contrary to what Nesbitt’s brief reference to the anti-apartheid struggle suggests, South Africa’s transition from a *capitalist* apartheid state towards a *capitalist* democracy cannot be told as a simple success story. Rather, it was a compromise on the interrelatedness between racial and *economic* questions. To see it otherwise would neglect that the underlying political-economic system that had driven both South Africa’s economic miracle as well as the racial and economic subjugation of the majority of the population under apartheid has basically remained the same since the end of apartheid. Moreover, it would neglect that South Africa’s transition was a highly ambiguous process that did not go unchallenged. Instead, it was (and still is) haunted by questions of economic inequality along racial lines—not unlike the questions that motivated Du Bois in 1961 to join the Communist Party and leave the US for Ghana.

1.3.3 Es'kia Mphahlele's Genealogy of a Specific African Discourse on Exile

Before I engage deeper with these points, I want to evaluate one more example of a Black African intellectual's approach to exile. Although similarly tied to the discursive sphere of the West like Zeleza and Nesbitt's accounts, it reveals more about the African geopolitics of exile during decolonization, due to the author's origin and the time span of his biography. It not only offers a more comprehensive approach towards conceptualizing African exile in the twentieth century but also points to some important specifics of the African region from which the exiles I present in this book once departed. Es'kia Mphahlele (1919–2008) was a teacher and writer who left South Africa voluntarily together with his wife and children in 1957, after having protested against the Bantu Education Act (a segregation law) and the regime banning him from teaching. This twenty-year journey led him to Nigeria, France, Kenya, the US, Zambia and again the US, where he lived until his eventual return to South Africa—still under apartheid rule—in 1977. His exile thus entangled him with the Western part of the Cold War world, as his work for the anti-communist Congress for Cultural Freedom shows.¹⁶ That his essay-like article “Africa in exile,” published in the US journal *Daedalus*’ 1982 edition *Black Africa: A Generation after Independence*, cannot be separated from his own self-imposed exile becomes obvious through his many biographical references. For instance, his stay in Nigeria from 1957 until 1961 allowed him to attend the All-African People's Conference in Ghana and experience at first hand the enthusiasm created by the first wave of African decolonization. It did not, however, prevent him from also experiencing the disillusion that rapidly followed:

Almost overnight after independence, I witnessed the tragic unfolding of the imperial theme [. . .]. News filled the air of treachery, assassination, palace rebellions, preventive detention, corrupt government, neo-colonial plots to subvert independence, public executions involving rebels, of persons being liquidated by murder as members of the parliamentary opposition, and so on. [. . .] Men I found cabinet ministers in newly independent states were exiles three years later. (Mphahlele 1982: 30)

His article poignantly recalls the political upheavals that shaped Western anthropologists' perceptions in which refugees became particularly associated with the Third World, as Malkki later observed. Mphahlele also shows how awkward it is to distinguish between exiles as individuals within larger groups of refugees. Just as Malkki, Zeleza or Hackl would argue later in their own articles, Mphahlele nevertheless links the exile closer to embodying a mental state and the refugee closer

¹⁶ On the Congress for Cultural Freedom, see e.g. Grohmann-Nogarède 2020. For a brief biographical account that focuses on Mphahlele's exile, see his entry in Bernstein (1994: 52–56).

to a legal regime (1982: 31–32). Accordingly, he conceptualizes exile rather broadly and contradictorily, stressing the perspective of a displaced subject—someone leaving a home country against his or her will:

You are a refugee today. As soon as you find asylum in a country disposed to grant it, you are an exile. Indeed, mentally you already consider yourself an exile as soon as you cross the border of your country in flight. To the extent that you are conscious of what you are fleeing from and of where you are heading to seek a place of refuge, you are an exile. (Mphahlele 1982: 32)

Mphahlele must have carefully read Tabori's *Anatomy of Exile*.¹⁷ Contrary to Goddeeris, he found it necessary to add even more variants to Tabori's already generous definition of exile (Tabori 1972: 37–38; Mphahlele 1982: 32–34). With his eighth variant, he refers to former dictators pushed into exile after having been overthrown, thus reversing the common associations of exile as a condition only progressively minded people fall victim to (as in Nesbitt's coupling of "progressive" with "exile"). Mphahlele's fourth variant probably recalls experiences that he had in Zambia in the late 1960s, when the country hosted various liberation movements, among them the South African ANC (e.g. MacMillan 2013). He writes of an uneasy relationship that exiled freedom fighters maintained with their exiled compatriots. The latter held positions such as teachers, doctors or lawyers and were hired by the host country's government in ways that impeded their full integration into it while, at the same time, the freedom fighters did stop regarding them as one of their own. This often provoked the intellectuals to resign themselves to their academic pursuits in professional spaces created by their host governments, where they came to feel socially and politically irrelevant, isolated from the freedom fighters, who often had disdain for them (Mphahlele 1982: 33).

Counterposing political to intellectual exile suggests frictions between African exiles organized within political structures (and, as in the case of the ANC, largely supported by the Soviet bloc) and those consisting of generally non-affiliated intellectuals like Mphahlele, who had studied and/or worked in Western countries. Is it possible that such frictions translated into Western scholarship on African exile neglecting those exiled in communist countries? Of course, not all freedom fighters were of socialist orientation, but Mphahlele's description somehow mirrors the imbalances within German exile studies, favoring the 1930–40s intellectual exile in the West over the politically organized exile of Communist Party members in the

17 Just as his white South African compatriot Hilda Bernstein, who would later read Tabori during her work on a collection of South African exile narratives. See Bernstein, Hilda: *Going Home*. SACC Newsletter, October 1991. A3299, Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers, 1931–2006, Historical Papers Research Archive, Johannesburg 2015.

East. Moreover, the idea of being resigned to academic pursuits mirrors a certain criticism Mphahlele raised against Western academia that he developed during his years as a migrant intellectual in the US. It partly qualifies him as one of Nesbitt's progressive exiles and recalls Nesbitt's deprecation of the postcolonial critic: Mphahlele had to learn in the US "that an academic can, if he likes, lose himself in intellectual pursuits, move only in the university community, and be insulated from the rest of the larger community out there, safe, cozy, contented" (1982: 48). He rejected such a lifestyle and, as he further writes, maintained his self-respect through "the thin thread of long-distance commitment" (ibid.) to his home country.

What is remarkable in this respect is his ambiguous stance towards the diaspora—here African-Americans in the US—which in turn distances him from Nesbitt's idea of progressive exiles. "To be actively and meaningfully involved in a people's concerns and political struggle as a genuine participant, you should feel its history," Mphahlele argues, a sentiment he felt unable to because he "could only identify intellectually and emotionally with the black American's condition" (1982: 48). Such a statement puts into question the notion of pan-African commitment and, instead, points towards the specific conditions that a Black South African who left his country because of apartheid had to deal with. Interesting in this context is that Mphahlele binds exile not only to the wish to return but also to a *conscious* unwillingness of the politically dislocated subject to fully assimilate (or integrate) into the host society, especially one where similar conditions of racism and inequality as in their home country obviously exist (1982: 46–47).

Hence, Mphahlele is less concerned with the diaspora than with Africa's mis-carried independences, as he labels it, together with the then still-ongoing apartheid as the major causes for exile such as his. In this sense, his article reminds us of what kinds of historically informed perspective became marginalized during the rise of diaspora studies and the mobility turn in the 1980s and 1990s. For instance, Malawi—nowadays an almost forgotten country in the West's perception of Africa—is frequently mentioned in his text, showing how important the struggle against the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was, given that the latter's further existence would likely have led to expanding the logic of apartheid over the whole of Southern Africa (Mphahlele 1982: 29).

Considering gender, the African exile Mphahlele describes is predominantly masculine and of age, making the heterosexual need for female companionship "an added problem that extends beyond the basic burden of exile and its political dimensions," since it "implies the acceptance [. . .] of an extragroup commitment"—one that necessarily complicates any idea of future return (Mphahlele 1982: 36). I stress this point here because my case studies are predominantly about males whose biographies mirror Mphahlele's description and almost invariably confirm the importance of romantic relationships that may convert exiles into per-

manent immigrants and secure them a residence permit. Highlighting this also helps us to be aware of the gendered dimensions of exile that Clifford has noted: “When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate” (Clifford 1994: 313).

With these concerns in mind, what I find most interesting is how Mphahlele traces the genealogy of a specific *African discourse* on exile. As one would expect from such an attempt, it includes the Atlantic trade in enslaved Africans as an earlier form of enforced mass displacement. Here, Mphahlele speaks of a discursive repercussion of the African diaspora in the Caribbean that traveled back to continental West Africa, where it created the notion of an alienated African personality or a spiritual exile. He exemplifies this by pointing to the influence that early Haitian intellectuals had on the francophone Négritude movement, Edward Blyden’s conceptualization of an African personality, and Kwame Nkrumah’s further development of it (Mphahlele 1982: 37). Put differently, the colonial encounter with the West resulted in a spiritual exile for many Africans, due to their violent alienation from traditional values and epistemologies. However, Mphahlele points to important regional differences or limits when considering this discourse’s continental range: within the broader region of Southern Africa, given its higher percentage of white settlers and the fact that displacement of African people there was not of the same level of extremity as it was for West Africans enslaved and transported to the Americas, Africans “began to express themselves on their condition—landlessness and the total absence of political rights” but “generally would not conceive [of] the idea of alienation” (Mphahlele 1982: 40):

The sense of urgency generated by a brutal present-white rule preempted any sense of exile. To wrest power from whites, one needed formal education, political experience, and wisdom, and a relatively secure economic base—all of which are Western tools. (Mphahlele 1982: 40)

At this point, however, Mphahlele seems to underrate the Second World’s impact especially on Southern Africa. With the Soviet Union holding the West at bay, securing the emergence of China as well as of Cuba or Yugoslavia, tools formerly associated exclusively with the West—science and technology as well as economic and military power—were transformed by communism and directed against the West. Yet, at the beginning of his essay, Mphahlele does briefly note that, following Sharpeville in 1960,¹⁸ more South Africans fled the country and studied not

¹⁸ The Sharpeville massacre refers to the shooting of 69 people by the police during a protest march in South Africa.

only in the capitalist West but also in communist Russia or East Germany (1982: 30), meaning that he knew that such South–Northeast entanglements existed. Corresponding with this on the textual level, what Mphahlele describes as the regional specifics that made the West African discourse of spiritual exile less meaningful in Southern Africa were the rural exodus of young men from all around the region and the urban ghettoization provoked by industrial labor. Particularly within South African literature, Mphahlele argues that these conditions translated into a quasi-socialist discourse that replaced the more culturalist notion of spiritual exile with alienation through processes of rural–urban migration and pauperization:

The migrant labor system [. . .] drove able-bodied men into exile, where they became wanderers forever, having little or nothing to go back to after the valley had been raped. Urban ghettos swelled with workers, who were building the white man's cities and manning his industries, and became festering slums. To escape the agony of exile, these urban dwellers dug in to establish a kind of permanence in areas where they were denied a sense of place. Over the generations, the sheer struggle for survival blurred the sense of exile, the sense of being emigrants. Senghor's image of the prodigal was unheard of in South Africa.¹⁹ The literature here reflected a pastoral sense of dispossession on the one hand, and on the other, a proletarian sense of urgency and restlessness that had everything to do with subjugation sustained by the white man's political machine. (Mphahlele 1982: 41)

One might object now that this (literary) discourse is exclusive to South Africa and, therefore, meaningless to other countries within the region. Such an objection ignores, however, the historical role that South Africa played for countries that do not share a common border with it, such as Angola, Zambia, or Malawi, but do share entangled histories with it. South Africa not only siphoned off migrant workers from all around Southern and Central Africa but also the country's unique economic and military strength hampered the decolonization and development processes of the whole subcontinent. However, the point I want to make here in accord with Mphahlele's perspective is that Southern Africa's historical specifics transformed an older diasporic and West African discourse on spiritual exile into one of *bodily* exile. Fueled by the concrete effects of white settler colonialism, it echoed a European discourse on socialism which not even a moderate African intellectual like Mphahlele could ignore, although he avoids the term capitalism. Instead, he writes of “colonial exploitation, the racism of Europe, the money economy”; of “the continued dependence of Africans on their former colo-

¹⁹ Mphahlele refers here to Léopold Sédar Senghor's poem “The Return of the Prodigal Son.” Senghor, first president of Senegal and a key figure in the Francophone Négritude movement, reflects therein on his return to Senegal after a long stay in France.

nizers and the rest of the white world”; of “world powers that can impose their own terms for economic and technical aid on a governing elite in charge of a nation’s treasury”; or, finally, of “the failure of both Africa and the West to arrive at a synthesis” (Mphahlele 1982: 43).

In view of the fact that these conditions were a result of Africa’s colonial encounter with the West, it is hardly a surprise that many Africans—although it seems that Mphahlele was not one of them—perceived the Soviet Union’s emergence and subsequent consolidation as something positive. It is equally not surprising that their subsequent encounter with the Cold War’s East produced its very own variant of African exile, a variant that neither Zeleza nor Mphahlele really address but that can be understood as African exile’s most clear manifestation as a *critique of capitalism*. Nor is it surprising that, more generally, Western scholarship has neglected this exile—or has only begun to engage with it predominantly within the context of Africa’s most “European” or industrialized nation state, South Africa, as I discuss in the following sections.

1.4 Interruptions of the Economic: The Reissue of Alex La Guma’s *A Soviet Journey*

A ‘coloured’ member of the ANC as well as of the Communist Party, the South African writer Alex La Guma (1925–1985) spent most of his exile in London, before moving to socialist Cuba. Hence, quotations from his writings and speeches would have fit perfectly with Pennybacker’s article on South African exiles in London. Mphahlele (1982: 42) and Zeleza (2005: 11) both mention him, but neither addresses the spatial geographies of his exile and the strong socialist commitment it reveals. In 2017, the historian Christopher Lee took up the challenge to reconcile La Guma’s exile and communist beliefs with Western-centered epistemologies on the African diaspora and reissued one of La Guma’s lesser-known works, the propagandistic travel account *A Soviet Journey*. Originally published in 1978 within Moscow’s Progress Publishers’ book series *Impressions of the USSR*, Lee succeeded in getting the book reissued in the US within the prestigious Rowman & Littlefield’s *Critical Africana Studies* book series. The publisher’s website defines *Critical Africana Studies* as “a rubric term utilized to conceptually capture the teaching and research of a wide-range of intellectuals (both ‘academic’ and ‘organic’ intellectuals).”²⁰ In his comprehensive introduction to *A Soviet Journey*, Lee conceptualizes La Guma precisely as such: “La Guma was an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense of having

20 https://rowman.com/Action/SERIES/_/AFS/Critical-Africana-Studies# (accessed 2 October 2023).

emerged from a working class milieu—unlike other activists, such as Fanon or Guevara who were middle class in background” (Lee 2017: 42). According to Lee, *A Soviet Journey* stands out for several reasons: first, considering memoirs of the Soviet Union, “there is no other memoir of comparable length or depth by an African writer, particularly of La Guma’s stature” (Lee 2017: 4).²¹ Second, based primarily on an organized journey that La Guma undertook in 1975, *A Soviet Journey* further relies on several other trips to the Soviet Union that he had undertaken at earlier dates; it thus comes most closely to acting as La Guma’s unwritten autobiography (Lee 2017: 3), especially because, unlike his fictional works on South Africa under apartheid, it is tied on a deeper level to his life in exile.

Lee’s introduction is one of the most elaborate attempts within Western academic discourse to come to terms with an African exile that at least partially unfolded in the socialist world, as well as with an African worldview that took an exclusively *affirmative* stance towards the Soviet Union. Lee does not explicitly point to the mobility turn and diaspora studies or postmodernism and postcolonialism as having facilitated certain forms of dehistoricization which, I think, also played a role in sidelining figures like La Guma. However, by arguing that *A Soviet Journey* “provides an ‘epistemic displacement’ apart from both the conventions of Western Marxism and the black radical tradition as typically understood” (Lee 2017: 5), Lee equally points to an implicit Western bias in such works as Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* or Cedric J. Robinson’s *Black Marxism* (2000) and Reiland Rabaka’s *Africana Critical Theory* (2009), the latter two books being hardly known in Germany.²² How, then, does Lee address La Guma’s exile and communist beliefs within the context of the underlying *political-economic* discourse of (Soviet) communism as an *African* tool against Western colonialism and apartheid? The implications here for my own research should be obvious, as Lee’s framing of La Guma’s exile and political commitment may be helpful in understanding African exile in the GDR as well. This is all the more true since the younger of Alex and his wife Blanche La Guma’s two sons moved from British exile to the GDR in 1979, studied there, married an East German and still lives in (East) Germany, while the older son studied in the Soviet Union and later returned to South Africa.²³ Another important link between Alex La Guma and East Germany is that several of his fictional works first appeared through *Seven Seas Publishers*, the English-language series of the GDR’s book publishing house *Volk und Welt*; the series was

21 On the Soviet Union’s ambiguous stance towards the more far-ranging presence of people of African descent in Abkhazia, see Fikes/Lemon 2002.

22 Cedric J. Robinson’s *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* was first published in 1983.

23 For a biography of Alex la Guma’s wife, Blanche La Guma, see La Guma/Klammer 2011.

edited by Gertrude Heym, the wife of the Jewish writer and remigrant (or former exile) Stefan Heym. Nevertheless, as addressed in the following paragraph, there are certainly some limitations to too closely analogizing La Guma's exile with those of the African exiles I discuss in the present study.

La Guma qualifies in a particular way to bring Africa's entanglement with the Second World to the attention of those in the anglophone Western humanities. Labeled by the apartheid regime as 'coloured', La Guma was partly of British descent, which enabled La Guma and his family to relatively easily join ANC exiles in London, from which he departed for his various excursions into the Eastern bloc and to his final exile in Cuba. This is not to say that the family did not go through many hardships, but due to La Guma and his father's prominence within international communism and the ANC's networks—Alex La Guma's father was the 'coloured' South African communist Jimmy La Guma (1894–1961)²⁴—the La Guma family enjoyed certain privileges, compared to more ordinary members of the ANC. For instance, Bartolomew La Guma, the younger son who was exiled in the GDR, told me that he and his brother received their scholarships to study in the Eastern bloc with relative ease.²⁵ Such privileges at least partly put into question an uncritical conceptualization of La Guma as an organic intellectual. Moreover, even though Cuba was (or still is) a state-socialist country, the island's geographical embedment in the Caribbean, together with La Guma's former exile in Great Britain, makes of it a setting still close to the concerns of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*. Meanwhile, biographer Roger Field argues that La Guma's familiarity with Western culture made him a cultural broker who could perfectly address eastern as well as western audiences. Field exemplifies this perspective by drawing on La Guma's speech *Culture and Liberation*, arguing that La Guma strategically used Amílcar Cabral's²⁶ thoughts therein:

²⁴ In 1927, Jimmy La Guma attended the International Congress against Imperialism and Colonialism in Brussels and traveled through the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union, where he influenced the Comintern's Native Republic Thesis. Alex la Guma wrote a biography of his father in which he also thematized the latter's visit to the Weimar Republic, organized by German communists: "[Jimmy] La Guma addressed several meetings in Germany surprising his audiences by speaking to them in their own language which he had learned in South West Africa. In later years, it was always his regret that he was not able to revisit Germany, particularly after the Socialist victory in the Eastern section" (1997: 34). On La Guma's participation in the congress in Brussels, see Weiss 2014: 83; on the Native Republic Thesis, which basically defined South Africa as a colonially oppressed "Native's Republic," with the peasantry as the strongest revolutionary force, see Adi 2013: 72–76. For a brief German account of the La Guma family's ties with Germany, see Pampuch 2018a: 339–340.

²⁵ Conversation between Bartolomew La Guma and the author, Berlin, 14 September 2015.

²⁶ Amílcar Cabral was an independence leader from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

La Guma, through Cabral, (following Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*) acknowledged that capitalism had increased exploitation and misery, contracted the world geographically, but expanded it intellectually. [. . .] Cabral offered perspectives and formulations that kept the reductionism and dogma of Soviet Marxism [. . .] at a distance. In the version he presented to a Dutch audience, La Guma does not offer his support for the Soviet Union. Though the audience was progressive and aware of capitalism's and imperialism's contradictory legacy, he avoids the risks associated with the *Communist Manifesto* or *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Cabral's version of the same arguments brings them closer to a politically vaguer, more romantic and theoretically complex expression of insurgent nationalism [. . .] a language far more attuned to the discourse of solidarity work in advanced capitalist societies than Marxism-Leninism [. . .] could offer. (Field 2010: 202–203)

In *A Soviet Journey*, La Guma does not appear to care much about offending Western sensitivities. Instead, he unequivocally praises the Soviet Union and writes in the best Marxist-Leninist rhetoric that the “capitalist system, disguised under the gaudy neonlit mask of ‘the free world’, ‘the great society’, ‘Western civilisation’, increasingly reveals its inability to free man from national oppression, racism, to remove antagonism, hatred and distrust between nations from the life of its society” (La Guma 1978: 230). Lee contextualizes such a clearly propagandistic work basically through historicization. Three of his arguments are of particular relevance here. First, Lee counters the popular image of Mandela's release from prison in 1990 with the assassination of Mandela's comrade Chris Hani in 1993. Having returned to South Africa from a decade-long exile, Hani, like Mandela a Black South African, was heading the SACP when a Polish emigrant assassinated him with the help of a white South African politician. Lee does not discuss whether Hani's assassination by an anti-communist Polish emigrant could be linked back to state-socialist Europe by revealing a hidden side of opposition movements like *Solidarność*: the merging of anti-communism with racism that preceded the racist outbursts set in motion once the collapse of the Soviet bloc became clear in 1989 (Betts et al. 2019: 179; Christiaens/Goddeeris 2019: 305–306).²⁷ For Lee, Hani's assassination symbolizes the very limits of South Africa's transi-

²⁷ That opposition movements in state-socialist countries included right-wing extremist streams is a line of argument which has been taken up only recently within the German debate on its socialist past. However, unlike the authors quoted above, Enrico Heitzer (2018) does not link right-wing tendencies in the GDR's opposition movements to the socialist state's solidarity politics, thereby revealing once more a certain methodological nationalism still characteristic for the German debate. By analyzing a science hoax involving the Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies in Dresden and Human-Animal Studies, Heitzer wrote a brilliant reflection on the strange paths that anti-communist thinking can take in German post-reunification scholarship (2018b).

tion process—we cannot understand the country’s relatively peaceful transition without taking into account the pressure put upon the ANC by the white South African elites and the mediating Western powers to renounce any intentions to restructure the South African economy along socialist lines (Lee 2017: 1–2). Lee further claims that, beside acting as another sign of the Cold War’s end, “the passing of Chris Hani can also be read as the death of a specific political imagination—a radical internationalism, African born and based, which informed the anti-apartheid struggle” (2017: 2). In this sense, he proposes to speak of the type of exile La Guma experienced as a “fugitive cosmopolitanism [. . .] defined by enforced political exile” (Lee 2017: 4). It was a radical internationalism tied to the Second World that was in no way exclusive to South Africa, as Lee’s account somehow paradoxically suggests, but—if we look only at this broader region—rather characteristic for the whole of Southern Africa.

Second, Lee asks why La Guma was silent about the authoritarian sides of the Soviet Union or, with regard to Central Asia, its quasi-colonial (or imperial) character. Where Zeleza would probably point to Adesanmi’s concept of exceptional discourses of oppression, Lee answers this question rather evasively by arguing that “La Guma was a committed communist, an appreciative guest, and, ultimately, not writing for a twenty-first century audience” (2017: 39). More convincing, perhaps, is his subsequent argument, in which he suggests a change of perspective, saying that La Guma “was, first and foremost, addressing the problem of the future world as defined by the South African liberation struggle and the politics of the Cold War” (Lee 2017: 39–40). According to this logic, overall it is the West’s inherent racism, and apartheid South Africa as one of its most enduring outcomes, that motivated a rather uncritical or affirmative African stance towards the Soviet Union.

Third, and connected to the previous point, Lee historicizes *A Soviet journey* by comparing it with earlier accounts of travel to the Soviet Union written by Black intellectuals. African-American writer Langston Hughes’ memoir *I Wonder as I Wander*, from 1956, is particularly striking here. Therein, Hughes describes how he met the Hungarian Jew Arthur Koestler in Soviet Central Asia in the early 1930s and how differently they looked at this part of the Soviet Union. Koestler later turned into one of the most pronounced apostates of the Communist Party and severe critics of the Soviet Union. Hughes, in turn, explains his much more favorable view of the Soviet Union in general and its politics in Central Asia in particular through his Blackness and the anti-racist politics that, in his eyes, the Soviets successfully applied there: “Koestler had never lived as a Negro

anywhere [. . .] Even with eternal grime and continued famines, racial freedom was sweeter than the lack of it” (Hughes 1993: 211).²⁸

Such accounts challenge the dominant reading of another white European’s travel account that also resonates within German exile studies: Andre Gide’s *Retour de l’U.R.S.S.* Published in 1936, this memoir painted a disillusioning picture of the Stalinist Soviet Union. During a recent conference on travel accounts regarding the Soviet Union written by exiles as well as non-exiles, historian Michael David-Fox explained Gide’s criticism of the Soviet Union as being based upon his prior anticolonial travel experiences, meaning that Gide’s earlier excursions through colonial Africa sharpened his critical perception of the Soviet Union (Greinert 2017: 16).²⁹ Even though it might be true that Gide likened European colonial rule in Africa to communist rule in the Soviet Union and that he came to the same critical conclusions by comparing them, accounts like those of Hughes or La Guma demonstrate that Black intellectuals could perceive the Soviet empire in a much more favorable and indulgent way, even during the worst moments of its Stalinist period. This was so because, contrary to whites like Koestler or Gide, they knew the West’s treatment of Blacks and PoC first hand.³⁰ Hence, previous experience of Western colonialism and racism obviously had an impact on how fellow travelers perceived the Soviet Union; but it could make a difference whether these travelers were Black or white, and if—as it was the case with La Guma—these travelers were members of African exile movements or not. This brings me to the African exile in the GDR.

1.5 African Exile in the German Democratic Republic: The Case of South Africa

As I have already indicated, Western academia has only recently started to more deeply examine Africa’s multiple entanglements with the Second World,³¹ crucial components of which emerged during the liberation struggles in the continent’s southern regions. Considering its overall dimensions, the first point to make here

²⁸ In 1954, Koestler published his own memoir – *The Invisible Writing* – in which he describes how he met with Hughes (1969: 137ff.). For an analysis of Hughes’ encounter with Koestler, see Moore 1996. For an analysis of orientalist views in the writings of Koestler, Hannah Arendt and George Orwell, see also Pietz 1988.

²⁹ Gide’s homosexuality is often mentioned as an additional reason for his criticism against the Soviet Union, given the latter’s homophobic tendencies.

³⁰ This is not to say that there are no critical accounts by Blacks or PoC at all; but there are also many more positive accounts (Lee 2017: 12–17).

³¹ I discuss selected examples of this literature within the context of my case studies. For an influential anglophone work in historical science, see Westad 2008: 207–249.

concerns the general exilic conditions of the liberation struggles in the south and the overwhelming importance of *African* host countries. Countries that achieved their independence relatively early and adopted pan-African politics, such as Tanzania (1960) or Zambia (1964), became refuges and hubs for exiled liberation movements from other parts of the region which were still struggling against white oppression, such as South Africa or today's Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola. While the South African exile has by far received the greatest amount of scholarly attention, host countries from the Eastern bloc still remain marginalized therein, as Pennybacker's contribution again demonstrates. There is still a lack of detailed studies on, for example, the extent of African exile in the Second World. Moreover, contrary to its Western counterparts like Great Britain, France or the US, Eastern bloc countries tend to be depicted rather as *transitory spaces* in which members of exiled liberation movements spent only a limited period of their exile. That Africans could live in exile in Eastern bloc countries for decades or even finally end up staying there instead of returning to their home countries is even sidelined in such an inspiring text as Marcia Schenck's research note on the "Black East" (2018).

Until recently, there were only two German monographs on exile in the GDR: one about Greek (Panoussi 2017) and another about Chilean exiles (Koch 2016).³² Its African manifestation, in contrast, with the exception of the Namibian children—a particular group which I do not address here—had raised only very little interest.³³ This is quite remarkable, since a German reference work that compares the African politics of the two Germanies already pointed in the late 1990s towards the political and ideological significance that the GDR attached particularly to Southern Africa and its support of liberation movements there (Engel/Schleicher 1998: 108–138 & 406–410). It is even more striking if the anti-apartheid struggle's prominent place within the West's imaginary, on the one hand, and the FRG's close ties with the apartheid regime on the other, are taken into account, and when we additionally think about all the public and scholarly debates about a specifically East German racism since the 1990s. To better understand this, it may be useful to more closely examine some of the already-existing German scholarship and literature on this particular subject.

³² For the exile of the Turkish Communist Party in the GDR, see Tügel 2014 and Karci 2020.

³³ The GDR's practice of hosting several hundred Namibian children and educating them within specific facilities has resulted in several monographs and edited volumes (e.g. Krause 2009; Schuch 2013; Kenna 1999).

1.5.1 The German-diasporic Approach: May Ayim and Yoliswa Ngidi

A testimony to early intellectual awareness after German reunification that there must have existed a South African exile community in the GDR is the life story of Yoliswa Ngidi. Ngidi had fled South Africa in 1977 and come to the GDR as a member of the ANC in 1986 via Swaziland (today Eswatini), Mozambique and Tanzania. She died in 1993, at the age of 33, in Berlin while suffering from HIV. The same year, May Ayim, a pioneering voice within Black feminist literature in Germany, wrote down and translated Ngidi's life story for an edited volume on intersectional approaches to racism, antisemitism and class-oppression (Nombuso 1993).³⁴ Published under Ngidi's pseudonym, Sithebe Nombuso, its title *East or West Germany, that's not a big difference for me* (own translation) picks up one of Ngidi's statements within the text. Her account narrates how she came to the GDR for vocational training as a radiographer and, thus, confirms Tague and Pennybacker's suggestions regarding African exile in Eastern bloc countries as a means for educational and social advancement. Nevertheless, it also speaks of initial difficulties for Ngidi and her comrades in coming to terms with strict rules in the residential houses. The same goes for befriending members of the state-organized *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ) or mingling with their white East German peers in general. Ngidi describes the latter as lacking political consciousness, exhibiting difficulties in expressing themselves freely on political issues, due to an atmosphere of insecurity and distrust. It was up to Africans like Ngidi to sensitize them for their use of racist language (such as the n-word). Ngidi further notes "a certain contradiction" between official solidarity campaigns in the GDR, such as collecting considerable amounts of money to support an ANC camp in Tanzania, and "the simultaneous lack of knowledge and empathy for the situation of Blacks in the GDR" (Nombuso 1993: 227, own translation). She further problematizes interactions with churches, noting that their members mistrusted ANC members as necessarily being communists and non-religious. But her narrative also contains explicitly positive memories of the GDR: "The conflicts lessened after time," she writes about the African students and her German peers, "later we even had a lot of fun together" (ibid., own translation).

³⁴ May Ayim's famous collection of poetry *Blues in Schwarz-Weiß* (Blues in Black and White) includes a poem titled "*im exil und hiv positiv*" (in exile and hiv positive) that was written in memory of Ngidi (2005: 95–97 & 134). Ayim, who is said to have suffered multiple sclerosis herself, reflects here on Ngidi's untimely death in a way that entangles exile with illness and can, thus, be seen as another metaphorical expression of the "journey" or "exile myth" of illness, as proposed by Hawkins (1999: 79–81). The poem reveals nothing about Ngidi's exile in the GDR, however, which is only mentioned in a brief biographical remark at the end of the collection.

Ngidi's account reveals that a combination of the individual's current situation, the interactive situation, and the questioner's interests always influence how a life story is told. In her case, the difficult living conditions she faced following the GDR's demise superimpose her life story, which stands as an early testimony of the violent racism and the logics of exclusion many Blacks and PoC had to confront in the aftermath of German reunification. For instance, Ngidi talks about a racist attack against a Black comrade in East Berlin and the new German administration's attempt to get rid of as many foreigners from the former GDR as possible. For Africans like Ngidi, one could conclude from her account that German reunification must have meant the rupturing of a life in exile that had developed relatively positively hitherto, followed by sudden insecurity and worsening of living conditions, while the political situation in the country of origin and a foreseeable return were still unclear. Confronted instead with the harassment of the new German administration, Ngidi recounts how she abandoned her training as a radiographer and moved from Dresden to Berlin, where she found support and new vocational training via self-organized migrant groups. She further explains that "Germany, fortunately, is not only a terrible country" (Nombuso 1993: 231, own translation) and that she had also had many positive experiences in Berlin.

Ngidi's account appeared in the year of her death in a non-mainstream, activist-based publication from (West) Germany's leftist-feminist and Black/PoC circles that she must have come into contact with after her move to Berlin. The section of the volume with Ngidi's story further includes an essay by Ayim as well as two poems—one by a Black German who was born in the GDR, another one by the African-American intellectual Audre Lorde. The significance which the latter's stay in the West Berlin of the 1980s had for the development of a politically conscious Black German movement can hardly be overestimated.³⁵ Notable here is that one of the earliest manifestations of African exiles in the GDR which I could find had articulated itself, in the reunified Germany, within a *Black German discourse* created mostly by German-born Blacks, such as Ayim who, in turn, were inspired by the African-American Lorde and in search of a broader history. In the words of Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, this discourse's development could be described as "a public space that renders a constantly mutating multivocal Black presentness (*Gegenwärtigkeit*) representable" (2016: 57) and that (re)connects "the multitude of dispossessed Black German spatiotemporal experiences with other Black time-spaces"

35 For the impact which Audre Lorde had on the black German community, see the documentary *Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992*, director: Dagmar Schulz, Germany 2012.

(2016: 57).³⁶ Within such a polyphonic space, Ngidi's story brought Southern Africa's entanglements with the Second World into an otherwise Western-centered, diasporic discourse and became interwoven with the biographies of German-born children having at least one Black parent. Here, *Blackness* and *Germany* are the central features that further superimpose themselves upon the historical particularity which distinguishes Ngidi's story from the majority of other Blacks in reunified Germany. In the process, the entanglements between the GDR and one of Southern Africa's most well-known liberation movements, as well as exile's *political* meaning, lose their significance, as both become just another means through which the Black German experience emerges. Ngidi's relationship with her home country—a crucial aspect within conceptualizations of exile—as well as the GDR's commitment to Southern Africa's decolonization both pale in comparison with her situatedness within a broader diasporic community whose center lies in the West.

1.5.2 The Affirmative-political Approach: Eric Singh, the Publication of *Sechaba*, and Rereading Wallerstein and Balibar's *Race, Nation, Class* in Reunified Germany

In 1994, another article authored by an exiled ANC member appeared, this time in a similarly non-mainstream but decidedly *East German* publication. Edited by Ulrich van der Heyden and Ilona and Hans-Georg Schleicher, three white East Germans who had all been engaged with the GDR's Africa politics—the first one as a scholar, the latter two as a diplomat couple—its subject was the entanglements between the GDR and Africa. The volume includes an article authored by Eric Singh, titled “Sechaba: An ANC journal printed in the GDR” (own translation). The volume's list of contributors presents Singh as follows:

A textile worker and trade unionist born in 1932 in Durban, South Africa; member of the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress; banishment, imprisonment and flight from South Africa; from 1968–1979 involved in the publishing of *Sechaba* in East Berlin, working within the ANC's section for information and propaganda; currently free-lance journalist in Berlin. (Schleicher/Schleicher/van der Heyden 1994: 295, own translation)

Singh, of whose marriage with an East German woman since 1981 the volume did not inform, never remigrated to South Africa. Instead, he died in Berlin in 2014.³⁷ What interests me here is that the volume presented him as an Indian South African

³⁶ First published in German (al-Samarai 2005).

³⁷ For a brief biographical account that I wrote about Singh after interviewing him in 2011, see Pampuch 2013b.

activist who, after having been banished and imprisoned, fled the country, came to the GDR via ANC networks, and continued to live in Germany when the book was published. As in the case of Ngidi's life story, the author's information for Singh links South Africans who lived in the GDR to (political) exile. In contrast to Ngidi, however, Singh represents an older generation of exiles who had spent a good part of their life in the GDR. Furthermore, if we compare Ngidi's full account with his article, Singh, a professional journalist, seems to write from a very different subject position; far from any expression of existential struggle or fear, such as in Ngidi's account, his concluding section even expresses a kind of self-complacency.

Singh emphasizes the importance *Sechaba* played for the ANC to counteract, as he writes, the apartheid regime's media propaganda within Western countries (1994: 132–133). He counters criticism raised against the GDR after 1990 but similarly highlights West Berlin's anti-apartheid movement's support for *Sechaba* (Singh 1994: 135). First published in 1967, *Sechaba* was discontinued in October 1990, the same month when the GDR officially joined the FRG, with its last volume appearing in London in December of the same year. Singh quotes from the final editorial, which expressed gratefulness for the GDR's support; this volume of *Sechaba* further had a picture of the opening of the ANC's mission in East Berlin in 1978 on its front cover. Beside giving a summary of *Sechaba*'s history, beginning with the suppression of progressive publications within South Africa and the offer the GDR's solidarity committee made to the ANC at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana 1966 to help print *Sechaba*, Singh explicitly thematizes South Africa's Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 as one of the apartheid regime's practices to suppress any form of serious opposition (1994: 130–132).³⁸ Hence, not unlike Pennybacker's contribution, his article puts the ANC's exile and struggle in an affirmative relationship to the Second World—only it did so more than two decades earlier, under the authorship of a former exile, and in German.

Singh concludes his article by quoting from a letter which the renowned white sociologist Heribert Adam had written in 1991 to a South African magazine, on the occasion of *Sechaba*'s final volume.³⁹ In his letter, Adam had expressed his incomprehension about *Sechaba*'s final editorial, arguing that it falsely lamented the demise of the GDR, an “embarrassing socialist system” (Adam, as quoted in Singh 1994: 138). In Adam's eyes, the latter had fortunately been overthrown by

³⁸ The Tricontinental was a Cuban conference which led to the foundation of the Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa & Latin America (OSPAAAL) as well as to the influential leftist journal *Tricontinental*.

³⁹ The German-Canadian Heribert Adam was a former PhD student of Adorno at the Frankfurt School (Institute for Social Research); he published several books on South Africa and is professor emeritus at a Canadian university.

its formerly oppressed people. To claim that East German workers voluntarily printed *Sechaba*, as the journal's editorial did, would distort the truth, since the printing press was controlled by the Stasi and the workers were not free in their decision. Singh comments on these accusations as follows:

It cannot be my task here to judge about the GDR's mistakes and shortcomings. Admittedly, there must have been many of them. [. . .] But it does not change the fact that millions of people worldwide—among them the South African people—are grateful that the GDR and their many helpful people existed. (Singh 1994: 138)

Singh further stresses his point by mentioning one of the East German graphic designers who worked in the printing press by his full name, adding that without such worker's engagement *Sechaba's* printing could often not have been finished in time.⁴⁰ Moreover, he rightfully marks Adam's view as exemplary of what the vast majority of white Western intellectuals thought (and arguably still tend to think) about Eastern bloc countries in this respect, views that are characterized more by an implicit anti-communism and disinformation than by a real knowledge of how state-socialist societies actually functioned. Singh was a PoC who had lived for two decades in the GDR and had experienced German reunification at first hand. He knew the FRG's gestures of superiority that accompanied the GDR's demise just as he knew the FRG's close historical ties with the apartheid regime. Hence, in the context of the 1990s and the violent racism that was of particular intensity in East Germany, his insider view, however biased it actually was, was a true challenge to German academia. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that it ever found a considerable reception among West German scholars who worked on the GDR at that time or among scholars who have worked on racism and migration since.

A case in point for this gap is the German publication *Race, Nation, Class: Re-reading a Dialogue for Our Times* (Bojadžijev/Klingan 2018), which discusses the impact of Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar's influential work *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (1991). The latter includes a chapter by Wallerstein that takes a debate from a *Sechaba* volume from 1984 between ANC members on the

⁴⁰ Singh's tribute to an ordinary East German worker to highlight the GDR's solidarity work's sincerity anticipated the Finish artist Laura Horelli's exhibition *Namibia Today* in 2017 in Berlin; its subject was the Namibian liberation movement SWAPO's journal of the same name, which was printed in the GDR as well. Among the invited guests of the exhibition's inauguration in one of (East) Berlin's subway stations was not only the Namibian ambassador but also Thomas Lendrich, a former worker of the Gera printing press in Thuringia, once responsible for the journal's printing. He was obviously positively affected by the late recognition that his work received in reunified Germany. <https://archiv.ngbk.de/projekte/kunst-im-untergrund-201617-mitte-der-pampa/> and <http://laurahorelli.com/namibia-today/> (accessed 2 October 2023).

South African category ‘coloureds’ as a starting point to reflect on racialized national identities (1991: 71–85; first published as Wallerstein 1987). Wallerstein was most likely unaware of the exilic setting of this debate, as he neither mentions where *Sechaba* was printed nor that one of the discussants, Arnold Selby—a white South African to whom I return below—was living in exile in the GDR (another discussant was Alex La Guma). Tellingly with regard to Germany’s post-reunification discourse, however, more than three decades after this debate took place, the German authors of *Race, Nation, Class: Rereading a Dialogue for Our Times* seem to be equally unaware of this fact. Hence, in an otherwise excellent chapter on the German reception of Wallerstein and Balibar’s work, the West German migration researcher Mark Terkessidis (2018) misses the chance to evoke the GDR also as an emancipatory space that enabled a debate among exiled South Africans which Wallerstein later drew inspiration from. Whereas Singh’s article provides us with a completely different perspective on how to contextualize Wallerstein and Balibar’s work within the context of a reunified Germany, Terkessidis can evoke the GDR only negatively as a postsocialist German space in which labor migrants and refugees fell victim to racist attacks during the reunification period (2018: 211).

Although the actual topic of Singh’s article was *Sechaba*’s history and its printing in the GDR, he drew early attention to the GDR’s broader commitment to the ANC’s struggle and, thus, to a state-socialist country’s positioning in what arguably was the most notorious struggle against white settler colonialism and racial capitalism in the twentieth century.⁴¹ And he did so from a South African exile’s perspective. Although including some criticism against the GDR, as his above-quoted argument reveals, Singh, through his focus on the GDR’s concrete material support, painted a much more positive picture of the GDR than Ngidi. Notwithstanding these differences, both Ngidi and Singh’s texts were early opportunities for German researchers to take note of this subject and investigate it more comprehensively. Given that both texts were authored by exiles, they were also chances to notice the *continuing presence* of such Africans within reunified Germany. Why not research their experiences and consult more of them to enrich scholarly investigations with personal testimonies? For years to come, German academia would miss this chance, a fact that is even more difficult to comprehend if the growing interest in Postcolonial Studies, beginning in the 2000s, is

⁴¹ For the South African genealogy of the term “racial capitalism,” coined by white authors Martin Legassick and David Hemson, see Hudson 2018; for its elaboration by the African-American Cedric J. Robinson (2000), see Kelley 2017 (both articles have also been published in print in the *Boston Review*: a political and literary forum, Forum I, Winter 2017: *Race Capitalism Justice*, edited by Deborah Chasman & Joshua Cohen).

taken into account.⁴² To better understand this neglect, I first provide another example from popular literature before discussing a pioneering article from German historiography that does include the South African exile in the GDR.

1.5.3 The Critical-literary Approach: Jana Simon and the Story of Felix S.

For anyone familiar with the right-wing extremism of the *Nachwendezeit*, entangling South African exiles in an affirmative way with East Berlin's infamous hooligan scene of the *Wendezeit*⁴³ must sound rather odd. Yet, Jana Simon (2011), a white East German author and journalist, took up this task in 2002 by publishing a haunting account of her childhood sweetheart Felix S.⁴⁴ Born in 1970 in East Berlin as the son of a white East German father and a 'coloured' South African mother, he belonged to the relatively small group of GDR citizens who were Black or PoC. His mother had been brought to East Germany as a child by his grandmother—an exiled South African—in 1961. Together with her second husband, an exiled white SACP member (and not her daughter's father), the grandmother and her husband took charge of Felix from the late 1980s on. Simon's narrative develops around its central figure: Felix became a successful kick-boxer, bouncer, and prominent figure within East Berlin's hooligan scene until he was charged with drug trafficking and taken into custody, committing suicide in prison in 2000. In a strangely contradictory combination, his life tragically brings together East German society's integrating *and* exclusionary logics with regard to its Black and PoC citizens.⁴⁵

Simon, however, was aware of the significance and innovative nature of her book's wider subject—the South African exile in the GDR. Touching on the difficult story of Felix' mother only in passing, she dedicated almost sixty pages of her book to the life of Felix' grandparents and conducted long interviews with the couple during the research for her book. These discussions revealed the story of a 'biracial'

42 Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* appeared in 2000 in German translation.

43 *Wendezeit* (The turn) is a German neologism to describe the period in which the German reunification took place. Correspondingly, *Nachwendezeit* means the post-reunification period.

44 Throughout the whole book, Simon uses only the initial of the family name. The book's 2011 edition, however, contains information that the forenames of Felix and his grandparents are real (Simon 2011: 253).

45 Felix' commitment to martial arts and readiness for physical confrontations recalls Nicola Lauré al-Samarai's observation of an autobiography written by André Baganz (1993), another Black male who was born in the GDR. According to Lauré al-Samarai, "only physical assertiveness and being physically prepared to fight remained as a strategy in his isolation to defend his threatened everyday world" (2004: 204, own translation).

South African couple—a ‘coloured’ named Jeannette and a white named Arnold—who fled South Africa in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre and came to the GDR via the SACP’s networks but on separate paths: Arnold via Ghana and Jeannette—together with her daughter from an earlier partnership—via London. Simon claims that the three were the first South African refugees in the GDR (2011: 159) and uses their life story to illustrate the complexity of Felix’ familial background and, further, explain his later problems. For Simon, exile occurred to Jeannette and Arnold like a natural force, quickly and irreversibly (2011: 155). Although Simon’s focus lies more on the couple’s earlier life in South Africa and their flight and migration to the GDR in 1961, with Ghana and London as temporary destinations, she also dedicates several pages to their life in the GDR.

The couple spent their first three years at the trade union college Fritz Heckert near Berlin, after which Jeannette was not allowed to study, as neither the GDR nor the ANC supported her wish to do so.⁴⁶ She explains this outcome by citing the official version regarding her quasi-“bourgeois” family background as well as pointing towards the ANC’s favoritism when it came to awarding scholarships from host countries to its members. Later, she lost a job as a translator for foreign visitors because she was unwilling to maintain her contact with the latter on a merely professional level, as GDR authorities demanded her to do. Arnold, in turn, was employed by the English section of the GDR’s international broadcast station, *Radio Berlin International* (RBI), and worked there until his retirement.⁴⁷ He also became a prominent long-distance runner, as well.

Hence, Simon highlights the grandparents’ difficult integration into their East German host society. Although she does not thematize it explicitly, her account suggests that race mattered: Arnold’s integration seems to have been easier than the integration of his ‘coloured’ wife. By transcending their individual biographies, however, Simon points to the significance which their exile in the GDR played for the ANC. The reader learns that high ranking members such as Oliver Tambo, Joe Slovo, or Thabo Mbeki visited the grandparents in their apartment in Berlin-Schöneeweide, an Eastern district which would turn into a no-go area for Blacks and PoC in the 1990s. Further, the grandparents also served as contact persons for the increasing number of younger Umkontho we Sizwe members who

⁴⁶ On African trade unionists at the GDR’s *Fritz-Heckert Gewerkschaftshochschule*, see Harisch 2018 & Angermann 2018; the latter work mentions Felix’ grandfather, Arnold Selby, on p. 35.

⁴⁷ Among RBI’s staff must have been several migrants from all around the world. For a Chilean exile who worked there, see Trigo 2010; for a white former US soldier who defected to the Eastern bloc in the 1950s and worked at RBI for a while, see Grossman 2003. On the reception of RBI in India, see Bajpai 2021.

entered the GDR in small groups after the Soweto uprising in 1976.⁴⁸ At one point, Simon writes that more than a hundred South African exiles lived in the GDR (2011: 210).

Just like Ngidi's account and Singh's article, Simon's book reveals that some of these exiles continued to live in Germany after 1990—in the grandparent's case, at least until the early 2000s. The picture that Simon paints of the GDR's solidarity politics towards South Africa differs from Tague's or Pennybacker's invocations of the African exile in the Eastern bloc as well as from Singh's article or even Ngidi's more ambiguous account. Where the latter is overshadowed by the difficulties that Ngidi faced after German reunification, Simon's account of the grandparent's life is eclipsed by Felix' suicide—there is no real chance for a positive outlook or assessment. Moreover, being a work of popular literature, Simon's book partly reads like an attempt at atonement for a lost friend whose suicide she had been unable to foresee. It thus can be seen as Simon's attempt to understand, retrospectively, the deeper causes of Felix' alienation. Against such a personal backdrop, it is hardly surprising that Simon's views on GDR politics is critical. The problems Felix had as a PoC in the GDR, such as the society's inherent racism, strengthen Simon's underlying skepticism with regard to the sincerity of the administration's official solidarity politics. Simon's own subject position, however, becomes relevant beyond her private relationship with Felix: it helps to understand a certain perspective which a number of East Germans of Felix and Simon's generation have adopted on the GDR.

The book's 2011 blurb describes Felix as a 'coloured' (*Farbiger*) but lacks any information regarding his mother's South African origin. Instead, it announces "the extreme life of a *Wendekind*." The latter is a term used to describe a generation of East Germans who experienced the reunification as teenagers, a description which not only fits Felix but also Simon as the one who narrates and appears in the former's life story. She describes the East Berlin of the late 1980s—the years of Felix as well as of her own coming of age—as a melancholic place. Simon's GDR of that time is a place of no future, in which the disillusioned grandchildren of revolutionaries had turned into goths filled with *weltschmerz*, death wishes, and sarcasm (2011: 35). How to approach such a country's past in an uncritical or positive way? In Simon's words, the grandfather's life story is that of a white South African worker's child who achieved social advancement thanks to his membership in the South African Communist Party and who allied with the

48 The Soweto uprising was a series of mass demonstrations, starting with protests by Black students against the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools. The protests were violently suppressed and left several hundred protesters killed by security forces.

Blacks to destroy the supremacy of his own racial group. It seems to her “like a parable from a GDR school lesson in civics” that she, as a schoolgirl, “would have read only absent-mindedly and boredly, like a mere piece of propaganda” (Simon 2011: 125–126 & 128, own translation); on another page, she writes that not even Felix really listened to his grandparents’ story or that he maybe never really wanted to hear about it (Simon 2011: 54). The country which forced the grandparents into exile—apartheid South Africa—is a land of spies, “like all regimes that see themselves surrounded by internal and external enemies” (Simon 2011: 57, own translation)—the latter undoubtedly a reference to the grandparents and Felix’ mother’s host country, the GDR.⁴⁹ Simon wrote this in 2002. A grandchild of Christa Wolf, one of the GDR’s most politically outspoken authors, Simon evidently became fully aware of her country’s solidarity politics—here, the commitment for the anti-apartheid struggle—only during her research for the book. But, even then, she had problems to accept it as a *positive feature* of the lost country she had once lived in. This reveals, to my mind, as much about a socialist society’s inner logics and intergenerational conflicts as it reveals about a capitalist society’s difficulty in coming to terms with its partially socialist past. This brings me to a pioneering article from Germany’s post-1990 historiography.

1.5.4 The Historical-critical Approach: Patrice G. Poutrus, the South African Communist Party in Exile, and the Tense Relationship between Contemporary Witness and Historian

Titled “*Honorable comrades: Political emigrants as strangers in the everyday life of GDR society*” (own translation), the article was authored by historian Patrice G. Poutrus (2005). Poutrus is the GDR-born child of an East German mother and an Egyptian-Sudanese father and grew up in the GDR, a biographical feature to which I will soon return.⁵⁰ His article appeared as a chapter in a German volume which is still

⁴⁹ Such comparison is still an approved practice in German academia, as well: for instance, a relatively recent PhD dissertation (Kunst 2014) compares reunified Germany’s coming to terms with its state-socialist past with the case of South Africa’s coming to terms with its apartheid past. It does so, however, without any reference to (or apparent knowledge of) the GDR’s anti-apartheid commitment and relationship with the ANC.

⁵⁰ In 2006, a Black German of Ethiopian background was almost beaten to death during a nighttime brawl he had with two white Germans in the East German city of Potsdam. The attack led to a public debate on racism and “no-go areas” for Blacks and PoC because it occurred shortly before the soccer World Championship took place in Germany. At that time, Poutrus worked in Potsdam, at the Center for Contemporary History. Abini Zöllner, then a journalist and herself of East German-Jewish and Nigerian background, interviewed Poutrus on the attack. The interview

a reference work on migration in the GDR.⁵¹ Poutrus' contribution covers various groups of exiles (or political emigrants as he prefers to name them) in the GDR: Spanish, Greeks, Iranians, Algerians, South Africans, and Chileans. Contrary to Ngidi and Simon's biographical approaches, but also in stark contrast to Singh's approach as a contemporary witness, it is a classic historiography based exclusively on archival sources. Poutrus makes a strong argument by stating that these relatively small groups of migrants are particularly well suited to exemplify migration and intercultural contact in the GDR because, contrary to many other migrants, they were not segregated through residential homes but shared the everyday life of the GDR's population (2005: 221). He further suggests that the reluctance to investigate them in German academia might be motivated by the fact that this group is commonly taken as evidence for the importance that solidarity played for the GDR and the communist movement by "those who nowadays defend an affirmative remembering of the 'first Workers and Peasants State on German soil'" (ibid., own translation).⁵² The slightly sarcastic tone—not unusual in German academic writing on the GDR—points to the author's own positioning within the discursive struggle regarding how to interpret the state-socialist past in reunified Germany: an "affirmative remembering" is obviously not on his agenda. Fortunately, Poutrus' study is more substantial than this initial sarcasm might suggest. For instance, I fully agree with his assumption that the more positive light that studies of political emigrants could shed on the GDR might be a reason why German historical science, with the Chileans as the sole exception when Poutrus wrote his study, had so far neglected this group. Poutrus' bibliography lists neither Ngidi's nor Singh's articles. It is likely that Poutrus overlooked the volume with Ngidi's account because of its marginal character.⁵³ It is harder to understand, however, why he similarly overlooked Singh's account, which appeared in an edited volume of a well-known German sci-

was accompanied by a picture of Poutrus and informed about his parents' background. See Abini Zöllner: *Das Prinzip Ostdeutschland*, *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 April 2006, p. 33.

51 Poutrus already mentioned the existence of Algerian, Namibian and South African exiles communities in the GDR in an earlier article on political emigrants (2003). Therein, however, Poutrus does not touch on the South African case in such detail as he does in the above-quoted article. Instead, he only writes about the brawl between African students and Germans discussed below. For another insightful article focused only on the Algerian case, which I am not discussing here as my focus is on the southern part of the African continent, see Poutrus 2007.

52 As Poutrus makes clear in a bibliographical reference, his implicit criticism targets a publication from two elder scholars from the GDR (Elsner & Elsner 1994).

53 By including *Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Oguntoye/Opitz/Schultz 1992) in his bibliography, Poutrus refers to a classic of Black-feminist German literature (2005: 258); he was thus aware of activist-driven literature and did not hesitate to quote it, unlike what more conservative scholars might have done.

entific publisher. Regardless of the reasons, how does Poutrus interpret the South African exile in the GDR on the base of his archival research?

In accordance with his sources, Poutrus focuses on the institutional side instead of on the exiles themselves. He differentiates the GDR's accommodation of Greek and Spanish exiles from the Algerian and South African cases: while an "internationalist and revolutionary solidarity policy" for "communist brother parties" characterize the former type, Poutrus sees the latter motivated by the GDR's self-interest to achieve international recognition as a sovereign nation state by forging relationships with newly independent states (2005: 223, own translation). He repeats the latter argument in his section on Algerian exiles, where he argues that "in the late 1950s, the SED's leadership understood decolonization as a chance to overcome the GDR's political isolation" (Poutrus 2005: 248, own translation), claiming that the GDR's support for the Algerian liberation movement (and its corresponding marginalization of the Algerian Communist Party) served this purpose.⁵⁴ Further, Poutrus argues that the shift in the GDR's solidarity policy towards the support of anticolonial liberation movements instead of national communist parties (where the latter existed) can be seen as a concession based upon its understanding of international developments: independent postcolonial nation states became a preliminary and, thus, unavoidable stage towards the communist world revolution the GDR hoped for (Poutrus 2005: 253). Once again, he underlines that the SED's primary interest was not decolonization as such but its desired international recognition as a sovereign nation state. Hence, Poutrus overemphasizes the struggle against the West German *Hallstein-Doktrin*, established to isolate the GDR internationally, at the expense of investigating any other interests—such as a feasible belief in the moral damnability of and need to overcome Western colonialism and racialism, for instance—that the GDR's leadership might have had in decolonization. His emphasis on the GDR's national interests is undoubtedly a result of his methodological approach, with its focus on GDR archives. This becomes particularly problematic when he looks at the South African example.

Given his comparative approach, the section on South Africa within Poutrus' contribution consists of less than six pages and is, thus, considerably shorter than Ngidi's or Singh's articles. A critique of capitalism, such as in Pennybacker's study on the ANC's exile in London, appears in a rather vague and ambiguous form. For instance, Poutrus writes of the "Western major enterprises' pre-eminent influence on the South African economy" (Poutrus 2005: 254, own translation) without further specifying it. Instead, he uses this observation to situate the GDR close to this sphere by focusing on the economic relations that the GDR maintained with apartheid

54 SED is the acronym of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, the GDR's ruling party.

South Africa until the mid-1960s. As he shows by quoting from archival records, the SACP demanded that its East German counterpart put an end to the GDR's economic ties with the South African regime and made it a precondition for any closer relations between the two communist parties. In this context, Poutrus also highlights South Africa's exceptionality and meaning for the GDR as a highly industrialized African state with a considerable Communist Party. Thus, while emphasizing the self-conscious behavior of the SACP towards its East German counterparts, at the same time his article creates the impression that the GDR's commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle was only half-hearted, since it needed the SACP's explicit intervention to end the existing economic relations between the GDR and South Africa. However, he rightfully sees therein one of the GDR's core conflicts but, again, without further clarifying its full implications for South-North relationships involving the Second World:

Ideologically, the GDR saw itself as a part or even at the center of a worldwide independence movement. Meanwhile, economically, the GDR's state-directed economy was far from being independent from the imperial West, including South Africa. (ibid., own translation)

Based upon the files he had found, Poutrus then lists in a short paragraph the support the GDR offered to the SACP: material support for the SACP's own propaganda, between ten and fifteen places for vocational training and studies in the GDR as well as two opportunities for recreative stays in the GDR and, of course, providing the SACP with the GDR's own propaganda. The remaining part of his article consists of a longer account, drawn from archival records as well, describing a brawl between male African students—among them a South African—and male East Germans over an East German women, which leads him to a sustained reflection on racist stereotypes about African sexuality that, as the records reveal, persisted in the GDR.

Poutrus' article certainly does share some of Ngidi's experiences, such as the latter's description of the GDR as a society characterized by mistrust. However, reading Poutrus' article together with Ngidi's, Singh's, and Simon's texts creates quite different pictures of the GDR with regard to its commitment to the South African struggle and its corresponding accommodation of exiles. One would hardly conclude from Poutrus' article that Black Africans in the GDR could have "a lot of fun" with their white East German fellows, in the way Ngidi remembered. The same counts for the idea that an African's move to the GDR could read like a social and educational advancement interrupted only by the FRG's impact and an increasingly violent articulation of racism during reunification. Or, as Singh argued perhaps a little too euphorically, that "millions of people" including South Africans were grateful that the GDR existed, or that some of the ANC's most eminent figures frequently stayed in the East Berlin apartment of a couple of ex-

iles who lived in the GDR for almost three decades, as Simon's account reveals. Again, this is not to say that Poutrus' article is fundamentally wrong or lacks important insights. Observations like the following are particularly convincing with regard to my Malawian case study, for instance:

The individual lack of rights of asylum-seeking foreigners in the GDR, and their dependence on the SED leadership's foreign policy interests, stood in sharp contrast with the significance that these persons could have for the SED's propagandistic means. (Poutrus 2005: 259, own translation)

Nonetheless, Poutrus clearly emphasizes only *conflictual or negative* points at the expense of any positive aspects that the GDR's support for the SACP could be said to have from a Black or communist South African perspective. In a certain sense, his text confirms a critique raised by the white East German editors of a volume on Mozambican migrant workers in the GDR, among them the already-mentioned Ulrich van der Heyden. Germany's post-reunification scholarship, they argued in 2014, would focus predominantly on the "destructive" sides of the GDR's migration and solidarity politics, rely mainly on selected archival sources which illustrate these sides, and neglect oral history accounts (van der Heyden/Semmler/Straßburg 2014: 10).⁵⁵ An author's personality and biography undoubtedly play a role in how he/she interprets historical and political events or selects evidence and examples to support or counter a thesis. While Singh's focus on the GDR's role in printing *Sechaba* highlights the positive sides of the GDR's support for the anti-apartheid struggle, Poutrus' focus on the GDR's late breakup of its economic relations with South Africa and on brawls between Africans and East Germans highlights its negative sides. But, contrary to Singh or Ngidi, whose articles remained at the margin of German knowledge production, or to Simon's biographical account which belongs to the genre of popular literature, Poutrus writes with the reputation of a professional historian—a public figure provided with the aura of objectivity—and can potentially reach a more influential audience.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ For my review of this book, see Pampuch 2015.

⁵⁶ In his monograph on Chilean exiles in the GDR, Sebastian Koch (2014) provides a brief overview of different groups of political emigrants who were exiled in the GDR. With regard to South Africa, he relies solely on Poutrus' article (Koch 2014: 97–99), criticizing that "Poutrus has only little to write about the South African emigrants (coming to the GDR, their function within the ANC and occupation in the GDR, return to South Africa)" and that he is "moralistic and judgmental" (Koch 2014: 99 & 12, own translation). However, this does not lead him to question Poutrus' corresponding findings, which is striking since Koch's analysis of the Chilean case often contradicts Poutrus' own assumptions in this respect. While the latter suggested that the decentralized housing of Chileans served to isolate or immobilize them, Koch argues that in the cities Chileans

Most German historians keep their personal lives strictly apart from their scientific writing. Only in 2018, against the backdrop of increasing right-wing populism and an increasing number of “opponents of the German variant of Soviet-style dictatorships, for whom the evolution and the development of the SED state is part of the German people’s tale of woe” (Heitzer/Jander/ Kahane/Poutrus 2018: 11–12, own translation), Poutrus broke with this practice. He wrote a contribution titled “Another past that does not pass: My difficult path from being a contemporary witness to a contemporary historian” (Poutrus 2018, own translation).⁵⁷ Since I am a white West German interested in biographical narratives from Blacks and PoC with an East German background, I wondered if Poutrus would thematize therein his corresponding experiences in the GDR, given that his father is from North Africa.⁵⁸ In the article, however, he does not make any mention of his father’s background. Instead, he describes his development “from a loyal defender of the ‘first Workers’ and Peasants’ State on German soil’ into a contemporary historian who now engages with topics such as migration, xenophobia, and racism in the GDR” (Poutrus 2018: 276, own translation). Poutrus was 29 years old when the GDR disappeared. Until then, he had been a member of the SED, served for three years as a staff sergeant in the GDR’s military, and become a full-time functionary of the FDJ. He further writes of the deep disappointment that his former party’s incapacity to incorporate democratic reforms and the ultimate GDR’s dissolution sparked in him. These two aspects, together with the realization that he did not belong to the victors of history as he had always learned it in the GDR, has led him to classify his life in the GDR as a bitter lesson (Poutrus 2018: 278).

In other words, Poutrus articulates here a crushing self-evaluation of a formative part of his life *only* because it unfolded in the GDR, the political system of which he had supported. Paradoxically, this also reminds us of Simon’s depiction of the late GDR as a disillusioning place with no future, just as Poutrus’ critical and arguably selective view on the South African exile echoes a certain perplexity within Simon’s approach to the GDR’s corresponding politics. The main difference is that Poutrus’ case points towards a deeper conflict between the contemporary witness during his GDR live and the contemporary historian now, two figures that Poutrus both represents, as he writes in the beginning of the article (2018:

were concentrated in an apartment building or in the same street; furthermore, the GDR in no way sought to hinder their political self-organization (Koch 2014: 370).

57 The second part of Poutrus’ article deals with how the Soviet military administration treated the communist German exiles after their remigration to East Germany following World War II.

58 My implicit assumption that Poutrus would emphasize biographical aspects related to his father’s background because the latter is African may follow the logic of a specific white imagination.

276). This may explain his reluctance towards the former within his professional work as well as his incomprehension of affirmative accounts of the GDR. In a review he wrote about Quinn Slobodian's generally well acclaimed volume *Comrades of Color: East Germany and the Cold War World*, Poutrus admitted that he "could not avoid the impression that some of the authors see the decline of the SED state with a certain regret" (2017, own translation). The striking gap between Germany's post-reunification scholarship and non-German views on the GDR has probably never been articulated in a more pronounced manner than in this passing mention. As I intend to show with my two final examples here, it needed a younger generation of German scholars and migrants to look with different eyes at the South African exile in the GDR.

1.5.5 The Affirmative-biographical Approach: Anja Schade on the African National Congress in Exile

At the time when Poutrus' contribution appeared, Anja Schade had just finished her studies at the formerly West German Free University of Berlin's Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science. During her studies, she had attended a seminar given by Ulrich van der Heyden, who had taught at her institute as a private lecturer. As Schade, a white German and of almost the same age as myself but of East German origin, later told me, it was through one of van der Heyden's seminars on the GDR and Africa that she became aware of the former's support for the ANC.⁵⁹ She decided to write her 2004 diploma thesis on the topic and has just recently published her doctoral dissertation on the ANC's exile in the country of her birth (Schade 2022);⁶⁰ her PhD project has led to several articles so far as well as her curating a permanent exhibition on the GDR's support for the ANC, inaugurated in 2019 in the South African Liliesleaf museum.⁶¹ That she learned about the topic through van der Heyden points to the logics of Germany's post-reunification academia; even today, these logics make such a knowledge transfer into a quasi-counterhegemonic

⁵⁹ Personal talk with Anja Schade on 11 March 2015 in Berlin.

⁶⁰ I could not include Schade's dissertation in the following discussion of her work due to its late publication date.

⁶¹ The Liliesleaf Farm was a secret meeting place for anti-apartheid activists and is now a heritage site. For a brief article from the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS), which funded the exhibition see Leidecker, Jörn-Jan: East German Solidarity with South African Liberation, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, News 23 April 2019, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/40327/remembering-east-german-solidarity-with-the-south-african-liberation-struggle/> (accessed 2 October 2023). The RLS is a political foundation with close ties to *Die Linke*, the SED's successor party.

act, because elder scholars from the GDR are largely absent from the humanities departments of German universities. Their West German peers, in contrast, generally know little of the GDR or, in the event that they work on the latter, normally focus on its dictatorial aspects or on politically less captious ones such as everyday culture. This deeper conflict also echoes through the title of Schade's diploma thesis: *'Solidarity helps us win!': The GDR as seen through the eyes of the ANC—A change of perspective as a contribution towards the inner-German debate regarding how to reappraise Germany's past* (Schade 2004, own translation).⁶² This reveals Schade's awareness of the post-reunification discourse's tendency to highlight the GDR's negative features and silence or relativize any positive features which the state-socialist country might have had as well. Thus, her own biographical background cannot be ignored: as a young East German confronted not only with a hegemonic discourse which downplays positive features of her and her family's country of origin but also, as recent scholarship shows, with discriminatory practices against East Germans, Schade sought with her work to interfere in the discourse's dominant stream.⁶³ Aware of the risk that such a scientific approach necessarily bears, she wrote in her introduction that

it is not the aim of this work to improve the GDR's negative image through revealing the country's solidarity practices with liberation movements and young nation states. On the one hand, everyone—particularly if she/he has been socialized in the GDR—who, in the eyes of the beholder, paints a too positive picture of the GDR is put under general suspicion of falsifying history. This is hardly surprising, given the long-standing confrontation between two systems on a political as well as on a scientific level and taking into consideration the real power structures in Germany. On the other hand, it is impossible to write only about the state's disinterestedness with regard to these politics: such altruism never existed, even though the SED's propaganda tried to make its people believe that it did (Schade 2004: 3, own translation).

Instead, Schade's declared aim was to "broaden the debate of how to reappraise East Germany's past via an external perspective which has thus far been neglected and which, moreover, is an important political force in today's South Africa" (ibid., own translation). Accordingly, her thesis contains longer chapters

⁶² The thesis is accessible at the Free University's Otto Suhr Institute's library. Schade's second supervisor was the West German scholar Franz Ansprenger. To my knowledge, Toni Weis was the first to quote Schade's diploma thesis (2011: 366).

⁶³ Recent scholarship has pointed out that the underrepresentation of East Germans in higher positions – also at universities – cannot be explained anymore with the need for personnel familiar with West German structures, as had been argued during the transformation period (Kollmorgen 2011: 319–325; see also Pampuch 2018b: 242–244).

on the GDR's Africa policies, on the relationship between the ANC and the GDR, and on the latter as a host country for ANC exiles.

In her introduction, she points to the gap in the scientific literature that existed on GDR–ANC relations at the time when she wrote her thesis. Hence, the main body of German literature she relies on there consists of studies written by two of the three East German authors already mentioned: Ilona Schleicher and Hans-Georg Schleicher (Schade 2004: 5). In this respect, she rightfully argues that German scientific literature written before 1990 can be consulted only with reservations, given that “in both German states, scientific publications often served as a mean of propaganda” (Schade 2004: 4, own translation), thereby pointing to a weak spot within the self-conception of Western academia. Just like Poutrus, Schade emphasizes the Hallstein-Doctrine's effects on the GDR's Africa policies and the SED's partial instrumentalization of its solidarity politics to challenge West Germany. Moreover, she dedicates several pages of her work to the economic relations between the GDR and South Africa as well (Schade 2004: 18–27). One difference here is that Schade relies on a scholarly article by Ilona Schleicher which Poutrus—who relied instead almost exclusively on archival sources—must have overlooked (Schleicher 1993). This is striking in so far as Schleicher had already shown in 1993 that, contrary to official statements, economic relations between the GDR and South Africa continued at least until 1980, even though they were not really economically significant for each other by that time, as Schade writes. Poutrus' article, in contrast, leaves the impression that the GDR completely broke with these relations after the SACP's intervention. Schade, however, argues that the ANC/SACP most likely did not become aware of their continuation (2004: 26). She further writes that the first relations between the ANC and the GDR were established in 1961 in Cairo (Schade 2004: 43),⁶⁴ demonstrating again the relevance that Nasser's Egypt played as a space for such encounters. In a section on *Sechaba*, Schade relies strongly (though not exclusively) on Singh's article; in other parts of her thesis, she quotes from email correspondence she had with him, as well, and even ends her work with a quote from Singh. Unsurprisingly, Singh's statements all highlight the positive sides of the GDR's support or argue that the former clearly outweighed the negative aspects of the GDR (Schade 2004: 89) and, thus, mirror the general tenor of his article.

In her chapter on exile, Schade writes of an estimated number of between 150 to 200 South Africans who entered the GDR *every year* (2004: 64), most of them of course only temporarily for education, vocational training, medical care,

⁶⁴ Relations between the SACP, which later allied with the ANC, and the GDR had been established earlier.

or military training. To gain further information about how South Africans experienced their exile, she led two interviews herself—one via personal conversations with a South African woman who wanted to remain anonymous, described as a member of the ANC exiled in the GDR beginning in the 1970s and still living in Germany today (Schade 2004: 67), and a second one via telephone with Indres Naidoo, who served as the ANC's official representative in the GDR from 1988 until 1991, before eventually returning to South Africa. Researching and coming into contact with them was difficult for Schade, as neither of these exiles were known to a wider public nor did the South African embassy in Germany or the ANC's headquarters in South Africa show enthusiasm to support her research. Consequently, she additionally relied on several life-story interviews which Hilda Bernstein (1994) had conducted with South Africans who had also spent some years of their exile in the GDR and which were later published in *The Rift*. It is in the context of how to make contact with feasible interview partners where Schade makes her own socialization in the GDR explicit, reflecting that “the reappraisal of Cold War events is never neutral but determined in the present by the respective bloc-socialization of the beholder” (2004: 66, own translation). Schade suspected that, if her interviewees were to know about her background, it might have an impact on what they would tell her and what not. That this was a reasonable assumption seemed to confirm another exile's reaction to her request: fearing that she could use the interview in a selective manner to one-sidedly criticize the GDR, she/he rejected being interviewed.

Such difficulties in finding interviewees notwithstanding, Schade's small and non-representative sample does reveal differing views on the GDR. Higher ANC representatives, for example, tended towards a quasi-diplomatic narrative that silences conflicts or problems. Schade concluded that the experiences ANC members had in the GDR might depend on their status within the movement. It may also have made a difference for (South) Africans in the GDR if they came into contact with white Germans at official gatherings as members of a renowned political movement or if whites merely perceived them as ordinary Blacks or PoC in everyday life. Schade dedicates a whole section of her thesis to racism in the GDR. Despite these critical dimensions of her thesis, the broader picture Schade creates reveals the considerable public awareness which the ANC's struggle must have enjoyed in the GDR given—as the exiles' testimonies reveal—the many public appearances which ANC representatives had in schools and factories. In this regard, churches also played an important role. Schade thus concludes that the ANC was a very prominent organization in the GDR: even children aged three to five were able to learn through age-appropriate media about the struggles of the Nicaraguans, Vietnamese, or South Africans and the need to support them, thanks to the centralized state's capacity to create propagandistic means at all levels. ANC

members also particularly highlighted the importance of the GDR's material support. Schade argues here that the GDR offered types of support which only a state could provide: particularly military training but also medical care, financing the ANC's quasi-diplomatic mission in East Berlin, and the printing of propaganda material (Schade 2004: 85). On the other hand, similarly to Poutrus, she argues that the GDR's lack of natural resources made the country dependent on foreign currency and resources from non-socialist countries, a matter of fact which stood in contradiction with its solidarity politics. She nevertheless writes that the ANC's judgement of the Federal Republic's support for the apartheid state is supposed to be unflattering but that, in the comparison, "categories such as 'social integration' or 'racism'" (Schade 2004: 86, own translation) have to be critically examined with regard to the GDR, as well.

In her conclusion, Schade creates a strong image by paralleling the GDR's dissolution and accession to the FRG with South Africa's lifting of the ANC's banishment in 1990, with the latter decision making a return for exiles theoretically possible (2004: 83). At first glance, things were coming to a good end. Her following description of the *immediate effects* which these developments had for South African exiles, however, tarnishes any teleological retrospection. Instead, it parallels Vladimir Shubin's description of what Perestroika meant for the ANC in the Soviet Union: an end of support on the state level and an increase of violent racism on the society level, in the Soviet case further accompanied by an increase of racist media coverage and a rapprochement between the new Russian and the (old) South African government still in power (Shubin 2008: 315 ff.).⁶⁵ Schade further stresses this image of a state-socialist European society turning into a more hostile environment for Blacks and PoCs during its absorption into the Western capitalist sphere by highlighting a poisoning attack against Naidoo and his wife in their East Berlin apartment in 1988. While the perpetrators could never be found, it occurred just at the time when (presumably white) South African businesspeople, in search of new opportunities, happened to be visiting the Leipzig trade fair undercover (Schade 2004: 25 & 84). The point I want to make is that a German thesis written as early as 2004 already evokes the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc as a "Revolution of Whiteness," as the historian James Mark would put it during a conference presentation fifteen years later.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Vladimir Shubin, a social scientist specialized in Africa, headed the African section of the Soviet Union's Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in Moscow as well as the African Section of the CPSU's International Department.

⁶⁶ James Mark titled his presentation *A Revolution of Whiteness? 1989 and the Politics of Race*. See the program for the conference *Historicizing 'Whiteness' in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Bucharest,

But there was a price to pay for such insights, as Schade ended up working on her doctoral dissertation even though all the German funding institutions where she applied for a scholarship rejected her applications. This rejection is remarkable: Schade's diploma thesis had already been highly innovative in taking up a subject—the ANC's exile in the GDR—on which no research at all existed and whose wider topic—the anti-apartheid struggle and a state-socialist country's commitment to it—undoubtedly is of broader interest. Moreover, Schade's level of argumentation in her thesis and how she approached her subject clearly demonstrates an ability for undertaking scientific work. That several German funding institutions nevertheless found her PhD project not worthy of being funded cannot be explained easily. I would also dismiss the argument that applicants always outnumber available scholarships, as Schade's experiences mirror my own. I rather see therein the structural logics of Germany's academic system at work, which make certain types of research on Germany's state-socialist past more difficult to realize than others.

Fortunately, Schade continued with her PhD project on her own. In 2016, she presented initial results of her work at the conference *International Solidarity in East and West Germany: Global Engagement in the Cold War* (own translation) at Potsdam's Center for Contemporary History.⁶⁷ Against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war and “the Germans' great solidarity with refugees, which surprised the world” (own translation), as the conference announcement reads, the conference's aim was to historicize the solidarity which Germans showed in 2015 by discussing earlier manifestations of international solidarity by both German states. Schade's presentation was unique in so far as it was the only one which focused on recipients of the GDR's solidarity work, as the panel's moderator Detlef Siegfried acknowledged. She later wrote a chapter for the conference volume, titling it “Solidarity and everyday life in the GDR as seen from the perspective of exiled members of the African National Congress” (own translation).⁶⁸

25–26 June 2019. <https://socialismgoesglobal.exeter.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Program-Whiteness-conference-Bucharest-Final-2.doc> (accessed 2 October 2023).

67 <https://zzf-potsdam.de/de/veranstaltungen/globales-engagement-im-kalten-krieg-internationale-solidaritat-ost-westdeutschland> (accessed 2 October 2023).

68 The volume's thorough introduction, however insightful, reveals a (white) West German scholar's difficulties to adequately contextualize and assess the GDR's solidarity politics in general and Schade's contribution on the ANC's exile in particular. Its author, Frank Bösch, pays considerably more attention to the old FRG's leftist and Christian solidarity groups (including its conservative streams), even though the former represented only a small minority of the FRG's population, whereas in the GDR international solidarity was the official state doctrine. Meanwhile, (anti-)capitalism is mentioned only once and only in the context of the US (Bösch 2018: 29).

With exile now at the heart of her argument, Schade's contribution resembles Pennybacker's on the ANC's exile in London in a crucial way that her diploma thesis still lacked: a pronounced *critique of capitalism*. Furthermore, Schade also responded to the conference's framework and linked her study to current forms of migration to Western countries. Although in a more cautious tone than Pennybacker, this move transfers the latter's argument regarding Great Britain's ambiguity—in terms of having been a Western host country for refugees and, at the same time, an imperial power—into the twenty-first century by drawing on the case of the new FRG after reunification. Contrary to Pennybacker, however, who exclusively relied on the interviews conducted by Bernstein and Kodesh, but also contrary to her own diploma thesis, this time Schade complements Bernstein's interviews and autobiographies of former ANC exiles with a much greater number of interviews conducted by herself—interviews with eleven South African exiles of two generations. She differentiates between those South Africans who were politically active and exiled (or first imprisoned) already in the early 1960s and those who left South Africa in the late 1970s and the 1980s, in the wider context of the Soweto uprising (Schade 2018: 195). Schade summarizes her findings from these interviews as follows:

Despite appropriate criticism [towards the GDR], both generations emphasized the advantages which socialism has in comparison with the capitalist system. Socialism as a feasible social formation for post-apartheid South Africa was the alternative to the abhorred apartheid regime. [. . .] This inversion of the local [i.e. German] perception, in which the majority sees the capitalist system as the more desirable one, also raises questions with regard to the Western system's failures from the perspective of immigrants. In the face of the present day's conjunctures, such as flight, migration, and asylum, and if the claim is to make 'Western' values and standards attractive for other societies, it seems all the more important to reflect upon the Western system itself. (Schade 2018: 208, own translation)

As if this critique of capitalism were not enough, Schade added that "in the eyes of many ANC members, Western states had discredited themselves with their foreign and economic policies" (ibid., own translation). "The development of these policies," she continued, "together with their asylum and admission policies, are therefore fields whose effects on the propagation of one's own system's advantages can hardly be overestimated" (ibid.). Considering the experiences of these exiles in East and West—a comparative aspect articulated within the interviews but being beyond her main research interest—Schade noted that "interestingly—and without an explicit request—the capitalist system often served as a negative point of reference" (2018: 208, own translation). In light of such a critique of capitalism, Schade's description of what three exiles of the second generation thought about the GDR's dissident scene is interesting. One of them, a stipend recipient of a missionary church, concluded that the church might become a hub for dissidents and critics of the system

in which anti-communist and subversive *resentments* would flourish. Another one remembered that some of the GDR's conscientious objectors criticized the ANC for propagating the armed struggle against the apartheid regime. A third one, however, initially participated in the anti-regime protests in Leipzig in 1989 (Schade 2018: 199–200). All three examples implicitly point towards certain tensions and a rather ambiguous relation between (South) African exiles and the late GDR's growing dissident scene.

Worth noting is that Schade's recent contribution reveals two differences to her diploma thesis. First, she does not thematize her own subject position as a (white) East German anymore. Second, and with only one exception in a footnote (Schade 2018: 204–205), she substitutes the term racism with the terms xenophobia and hostility towards foreigners. Both moves would seem to have consequences: mobilizing her own East Germanness in her diploma thesis enabled Schade to criticize the post-reunification discourse on a more profound level. In her 2018 contribution, this important critique is reduced to moderate arguments such as “studies of the socialist states and the GDR's solidarity are still marginal” or that “the recipients of solidarity⁶⁹ remain at the margins” (Schade 2018: 186 & 187, own translation). The tendency to substitute racism with xenophobia or hostility towards foreigners, in turn, is problematic because the latter terms cannot capture the phenomenon of being attacked and/or discriminated against primarily because of one's physical appearance. Mark Terkessidis writes about this point that, in the old FRG, “racism had been reserved for the Nazi Period” (2018: 212), a fact which made it almost impossible to name the outbreaks of racist violence in the new FRG following German reunification. His similarly West German colleague, Manuela Bojadžijev, reflects on the terms xenophobia and hostility to foreigners as follows:

Central actors in Germany made great efforts to introduce the concept of racism into the German discussion, opposing the dominant but generic concept of *Fremdenfeindlichkeit* (xenophobia, or literally ‘hostility to foreigners’) in the early 1990s. Essentially, this was in opposition to a largely psychological notion of xenophobia as a generalized fear of ‘foreigners’, i.e. as an anthropological constant. Alongside the assumption of the existence of the ‘foreign’ on principle, which seemed to presuppose an ‘actually identifiable’ quality of the ‘foreign’ and proved unable to identify differentiations within said ‘foreign’ [...], xenophobia conceived of the non-recognition of difference as a subjective individual misunderstanding, interpreted as ‘prejudice’ and referring it back to the individual as their own ‘problem’ (of being prejudiced). (Bojadžijev 2018: 269–270)

⁶⁹ In other parts of her contribution, Schade uses the German word couple “*Solidaritätsempfänger_innen*” (solidarity recipient), which unfortunately recalls the (West-)German term “*Sozial-/Transferleistungsempfänger*” (social welfare recipient), thus turning exiled African freedom fighters discursively into needy and passive recipients of East German solidarity.

To exemplify how the term xenophobia fosters an inability to “identify differentiations,” it suffices to look again into Schade’s own text. In the explicit context of “experiences of hostility towards foreigners” (Schade 2018: 204, own translation) she creates an oxymoron by writing that “children of (white) German-(Black) South African couples were beaten and insulted because of their skin color” (ibid.). It is obvious that these children—born in the GDR and citizens of the socialist German state—were attacked because their physical appearance or ‘racial features’ allowed the attackers to differentiate them from their white peers. Moreover, Schade not only relies on the experiences of South African exiles who were labeled by the apartheid regime as Black, ‘coloured’, or Indian; she also refers to the experiences of Arnold Selby, the white South African SACP member, husband of the ‘coloured’ South African Jeannette, and (step-)grandfather of Felix S. as described in Simon’s book, which Schade does not seem to have considered as a source. Therein, Simon narrates that Arnold Selby once came to blows with some white East Germans because the latter had insulted his Black friends (2010: 209). These attackers obviously made a difference between white or Black “foreigners.”

Considering German academic writing on the GDR, using xenophobia or hostility towards strangers instead of racism within studies emphasizing the positive sides of the GDR’s migration or solidarity politics, or using it solely with regard to the country’s commitment to anti-racism while downplaying any serious racism among its white population, is also problematic in that it hinders the wider reception or acceptance of such studies within critical German scholarship on racism, migration, and postcolonialism. Studies in this field often neglect capitalism’s racializing effects and would probably benefit most from the epistemological insights gained from studies on the *positive* sides of the GDR’s solidarity politics. However, using “hostility towards foreigners” as Schade did in her contribution from 2018 at least allows the thematization of racist experiences, as a comparison with her most recent publication shows.

In 2019, Schade co-authored an English book chapter with Ulrich van der Heyden on the GDR’s solidarity with the ANC, containing a section on the ANC’s exile in the GDR which summarizes the findings from her earlier writings. In stark contrast to the latter, the co-authored text renounces any discussion of racism or xenophobia. Instead, it brings the post-reunification discourse back into the debate. The two authors argue that “some politicians and historians from the FRG, after 1990, spoke of a ‘prescribed Solidarity’ enforced by the state party, which was apparently not supported by the population” (van der Heyden/Schade 2019: 83)—a generalizing statement that they convincingly reject. They similarly argue that “post-factual, ideologically informed views often determine the present-day picture of the solidarity efforts of the GDR population” (van der Heyden/Schade 2019: 84). Although I fully agree with this critique, it nevertheless becomes problematic when they fur-

ther write that the “idea of solidarity was, however, not as pronounced and indelibly ingrained in every GDR citizen as the official GDR propaganda liked to proclaim” but that “relevant surveys immediately after German unification showed that foreigners were ‘warmly welcomed’, especially in the 1960s and 1970s” (van der Heyden/Schade 2019: 84). Similarly, when the labor migration from Mozambique and Vietnam is uncritically subsumed under this line of argument (van der Heyden/Schade 2019: 88), and even though I would not reject from the outset the idea that this type of labor migration and the GDR’s support for national liberation movements could both be put under the same umbrella of the GDR’s solidarity politics, this threatens to blur the different statuses (and experiences?) of migrant workers and exiles. Hence, the text unnecessarily risks instrumentalizing the GDR’s solidarity with the ANC for an undifferentiated defense of the GDR’s white majority population against reunified Germany’s tendency to distort the GDR’s history. Hopefully this will not hinder the text’s reception too much because, once again, it does show that the GDR’s support for the ANC and other anticolonial movements is, first of all, a *positive feature* of Germany’s divided past and one which the Federal Republic’s political establishment still has problems dealing with, as indicated by a German newspaper article recounting discomfort at Germany’s South African embassy caused by the Liliesleaf exhibition, which Schade helped to create.⁷⁰

According to the article, Nicholas Wolpe, founder and CEO of the Liliesleaf Trust, was astonished about the feeling of hostility which representatives of the German embassy in South Africa showed towards the exhibition project.⁷¹ If this feeling of hostility is true, a brief reflection which Martin Schäfer, the German ambassador to South Africa (and of West German origin), has written about the exhibition could be read as a late attempt to correct it. Schäfer writes therein that he had the honor to co-open the exhibition and admits that, “in supporting the anti-apartheid struggle, East Germans certainly found themselves on the right side of history.”⁷² He further speaks of the paradox that the GDR “wholeheartedly

⁷⁰ Selz, Christian: *In der DDR war täglich Weihnachten*, Neues Deutschland, 2 October 2019, p. 7. See also idem, *Recht auf Anerkennung*, junge Welt, 14 September 2019, p. b4. *Neues Deutschland* as well as *junge Welt* are two small and left-wing German newspapers originally from the GDR. The Liliesleaf team organized a discussion on the occasion of the exhibition’s inauguration in which Martin Schäfer, three former South African exiles, and the East German director of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation participated. For documentation and analysis of this discussion, see Pampuch 2024 (forthcoming).

⁷¹ Nicholas Wolpe is the son of South African anti-apartheid activist and sociologist Harold Wolpe, who was exiled in Great Britain.

⁷² Schäfer, Martin: Are we drawing the right reasons from the past? German Missions in South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini, 24 April 2019, https://southafrica.diplo.de/sa-en/04_News/-/2239504 (accessed 2 October 2023).

supported anti-colonial liberation movements abroad” but “denied its citizens democratic and human rights at home”; meanwhile, the FRG “guaranteed the democratic rights and political freedoms of its citizens” at home but, “in its stance on South Africa, Cold War allegiances long prevailed over the just cause of the freedom struggle” (Schäfer 2019). Why exactly these allegiances had to collide with South Africa’s struggle for freedom, and what the West’s political economy had to do with it, he does not further elaborate—just as he remains silent about whether he sees any chance for such an exhibition appearing in Germany.

1.5.6 The South African Diasporic Approach: Thabo Thindi and *Exile Faces*

Although Schade’s work has, to my knowledge, been the most comprehensive scholarly approach towards the South African exile in the GDR to date, it also points towards certain difficulties which a white German junior researcher might face in choosing it as the topic for a degree thesis. First, there is the problem of finding funding from German institutions. Second, there is the problem of finding Africans willing to speak about their exile experiences. Third, there are the many pitfalls of post-reunification discourse in Germany. My final example is different: it shows how *migrant agency* can sidestep most of these problems and create an exhibition within Germany itself which, although rather as a subplot, similarly highlights the GDR’s solidarity by simply letting the exiles speak for themselves. It testifies to the outstanding ability of migrants to reveal and multiply hidden knowledge of entangled histories between home and host countries—knowledge which previously has tended to be silenced or distorted by the prevailing ideology of the host society.

Thabo Thindi, a 1980-born Black South African artist, migrated to reunified Germany in the 2000s to reunite in Berlin with his Black German girlfriend—the two had met during the latter’s stay in South Africa. Soon after his arrival in Germany, work on a cooperative film project confronted him with a part of South Africa’s history hitherto unknown to him: the entanglements between his home country’s liberation struggle and Germany’s former socialist part. It is a story which he had never learned about in South Africa, just like most of his German peers had never learned about it in the old FRG and reunified Germany. I met and talked to him first in March 2014, at Eric Singh’s memorial ceremony in the South African embassy in Berlin. Thindi had conducted a biographical video interview with Singh, the screening of which formed part of the ceremony’s program. The next time I heard of his work was only a few months later, in August of the same year. A biographical video documentary titled *Exile Faces*, which named Thindi as its author and of which Singh’s interview had only been a part,

was exhibited during a several days long event marking the occasion of twenty years of democracy in South Africa, hosted by (West) Berlin's famous cultural institution *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (House of World Cultures, HKW).⁷³



Fig. 1: Video installation *Exile Faces*, HKW 2014 (permission granted from HKW).

Eight huge TV screens with headphones were placed in the HKW's foyer (fig. 1). On each of them, a South African talked about how he/she had left South Africa during apartheid and ended up living in divided and reunited Germany.⁷⁴ Most of them appeared to me to be Black Africans, with Jeannette Selby ('coloured') and Eric Singh (Indian) being the only exceptions. All were men, except Selby and one other woman. Only two of them had come to reunified Germany via the old FRG or other Western countries—one via the Netherlands and the other via Austria.⁷⁵

⁷³ For the event's website, see https://archiv.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/suedafrika/suedafrika_1.php; for the announcement of *Exile Faces* within the event, see https://archiv.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/suedafrika/exile_faces/veranstaltung_105779.php (accessed 2 October 2023).

⁷⁴ If I remember it right, all narratives were in English.

⁷⁵ One of them, a woman who had not been involved in anti-apartheid politics, fell in love with a white West German whom she had met in South Africa; they first migrated to Austria and then

The remaining six were all former ANC members and exiles from the GDR: Selby, Singh, and four younger exiles who fit into Schade's concept of the second generation. I had already come across Selby and Singh through my own research but had only read about one of the latter four exiles through a small publication from an East German NGO.⁷⁶ The other three were completely unknown to me. All of them had remained in Germany after 1990 and still lived there. During all the years of my research, I had never seen anything similar: the narratives of Africans who invoked the GDR's anticolonial politics in an affirmative way had finally found their way into a renowned (West) German institution. It was not as if life in the GDR was at the heart of the narratives; instead, it was the experience of having been forced to live outside of South Africa, the exiles' home country. I will return in upcoming chapters to some key figures from *Exile Faces* who are relevant to my overall analysis. What interests me here is Thindi's approach as such: how did Thindi, who, as he told me, had never dealt with political issues in his artistic work before, come to taking on such a project?⁷⁷

After his coming to Germany, Thindi had the idea of starting *jozi.tv*—a TV channel on the World Wide Web—that aim of which was to counter the often-stereotyped representations of Africans in the German mainstream media. He mainly wanted to portray Africans in Berlin and tell their stories. After some time, he met T.S., a Black South African and former MK member who lived in Germany and worked at the South African embassy in Berlin. T.S. had a film project in mind and found in Thindi the appropriate partner for technical support. The original idea was to make a movie about one of the ANC's attacks against infrastructural targets in apartheid South Africa—it is here where their research for former MK members in South Africa as well as in Germany began. Thindi told his project partner that, beside providing the technical support, he also wanted to

to the (old) FRG. The other one first migrated to the Netherlands in 1969, before moving to reunified Germany in 1990, and was politically active in both countries.

⁷⁶ The one I had read about before in a publication from Solidaritätsdienst-international e.V. (SODI) was Sacks Stuurman/Bert Seraje (see Schleicher 2012). SODI, founded in 1990 as an NGO, is the legal successor of the GDR's Solidarity Committee. Its foundation was preceded by a conflict between the Solidarity Committee and East German NGOs about how to secure several million euros which were left from donations of GDR inhabitants to the Solidarity Committee before 1990, against the FRG authorities' intent to simply seize the money. The money was split, and a part of it remained with SODI while the other part was given to a newly created foundation called *Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken*, with the objective of supporting smaller East German NGOs. Publications from SODI normally cannot be found in libraries.

⁷⁷ This information as well as the following on the project's history stem from several personal talks which I had with Thindi in 2015–2016. To secure the anonymity of his former project partners, I use acronyms.

create material which he could later reuse for documentary purposes. T.S. knew another former MK member in South Africa, A.G., whom he thought he might be interested in financing the project. The latter was already working on a government-sponsored digitalization project about South Africa's liberation history, focused on a national perspective. The idea was born to expand this project by taking a broader perspective that included the international level and, thus, the South African exile community.

In the meantime, two more South Africans, one of them residing only temporarily in Germany, joined the project: a journalist, who not only became the only woman but also the only white member of the team, as well as a PhD student. Thus, five South Africans, four of them living permanently or temporarily in Berlin, were initially involved in the project. T.S. and Thindi, who was also doing the editing work, were to conduct the interviews while the journalist and doctoral student were to do the necessary research. A.G. asked for exemplary material from the project's expanded perspective on exile—four or five documentary videos—so that he could show it to those responsible from the South African government to secure its financing. What happened then must have been an internal conflict about money, which broke up the group and left Thindi with some hardware and the videos he had already edited. From then on, he continued with the project alone,⁷⁸ produced several more interviews and began to present them at cultural institutions such as the HKW in Berlin or the *Iwalewaha* at the University of Bayreuth as well as at several South African embassies within Europe. Something what Schade and also myself have needed years of research for—to generate and spread knowledge about the African exile community in the GDR—Thindi and his former project partners achieved with relative ease.

1.6 Conclusion

If we compare only the examples of those who have written about or artistically worked on the South African exile in the GDR presented above, a noteworthy feature appears. Half of the authors—Jana Simon, Patrice G. Poutrus, Anja Schade, and Ulrich van der Heyden—are of East German origin. Additionally, we have Yoliswa Ngidi and Eric Singh, South African exiles themselves; Thabo Thindi, who belongs to a younger generation of migrants from post-apartheid South Africa; and May Ayim, as the one who transcribed Ngidi's life story and secured its publi-

⁷⁸ Thindi told me that the conflict within the group also negatively affected the idea of putting on an exhibition supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

cation. Curiously, Ayim is the only *West German* among these authors, and she has an African parent, a feature she shares with the East German Poutrus. The two could, thus, be additionally described as Black Germans, even though Poutrus would probably never thematize this identity in the same way as Ayim did. Hence, the South African exile community in the GDR is approached exclusively either by South African exiles and migrants or by East and/or Black Germans, with *white West Germans* being strikingly absent from this discourse (I could add myself as the exception to this rule). That we owe one of this discourse's earliest manifestation to a Black German activist and another to a group of South African migrants, points to the creative potential of marginalized migrant and/or minority communities. Similarly, the outstanding role of East Germans in approaching this topic can be linked back to the latter's own contested status of being a minority group within reunified Germany. The minority status of both groups and the partially contradicting stories they tell us about the same topic reveal, once again, that reunified Germany has experienced a huge problem in coming to terms with its socialist past, even when such a marginal theme as the (South) African exile community is concerned.

However, as Carpenter and Lawrance's volume *Africans in Exile* and older writings of African intellectuals such as Paul Zeleza or Es'kia Mphahlele show, exile is a highly relevant issue in the context of Africa, one that unsurprisingly takes colonization by the West as its main starting point. *Africans in Exile* highlights exile's political dimensions, such as the fragility of postcolonial nation states. Though generally focusing on the West, it evokes the African exile in the Eastern bloc in an exclusively positive way that is closely linked to social and educational advancement as well as Black liberation and—in the case of South Africa—to a pronounced *critique of capitalism*. Zeleza, in turn, while also pointing towards some liberating or emancipatory effects exile might have, underscores its tragic dimensions by examining a large corpus of popular literature by African authors. Correspondingly, he problematizes an uncritical celebration of mobility in Western academia, which he attributes to postmodern thinking and Edward Said's influential figuration of the exiled intellectual, among other things. Mphahlele, who wrote his article already in the early 1980s and, thus, several years before the Cold War's end, equally highlights the tragic dimensions of African exile but departs from taking a literary approach by strongly mirroring the political circumstances of his time, with the high hopes raised by African independences dashed, displaced Africans spread around the globe (though Mphahlele too has a Western focus), and the apartheid regime still in power. He identifies an older discourse on exile, marked by diasporic and spiritualistic African thought which came from the Caribbean, took roots in West Africa, and became intertwined with a more "bodily" socialist discourse—a critique of capitalism—the more it moved southwards, where white

settler rule went hand in hand with industrialization, racialized processes of uprootedness and pauperization, and corresponding forms of resistance. Given this observation, it comes as a surprise that African exile in the Second World has received so little attention. I have suggested reading Christopher Lee's 2017 edition of the exiled South African writer Alex La Guma's *A Soviet Journey* (1978) as a suitable approach for contextualizing this field, though still centered within a more familiar setting that echoes the Black Atlantic. Moreover, La Guma's exile points even further East, not only through his strong communist beliefs and various travels to the Soviet Union but also due to his children's migrations from British exile to the GDR and the Soviet Union.

I began this chapter by broaching the current anthropological discussion about exile as a key figure of mobility, as proposed by Andreas Hackl, whose reflections resemble Zeleza's in many respects. Additionally, I looked at examples of the concept's usage in other academic fields such as history, literature, political science or in the essayistic work *The Anatomy of Exile* by Paul Tabori. There is a general difficulty in defining exile, perhaps best exemplified by the striking differences between the more metaphorical usage in anthropology and the more rigid definition in political science, where exile appears to be necessarily tied to oppositional engagement against the politics of one's homeland. Concerning the strained but close relationship between the exile and the refugee, a relationship which is of particular importance with regard to my subject, Liisa Malkki has shown that the refugee became a figure associated in the West with Third World collectives, whereas Bhupinder Chimni specifies that, during the Cold War, the West welcomed a very different kind of refugee: the white (and predominantly male) anti-communist fleeing the Eastern bloc, a figure against which the Black (but again predominantly male) African exile who found refuge in the Eastern bloc stands in utmost contrast.

Hackl's argument that exile, as a type of forced displacement as well as a prolonged condition, always contains a historical dimension and combines subjective and socio-political aspects of displacement, seem particularly important to me. This perspective not only implies that studying African exiles can retrieve a marginalized or—as Hackl calls it—lost history of the wars and colonialism which provoked massive displacements; together with my assumption that the kind of displacement I am concerned with is the clearest manifestation of African exile as a critique of capitalism, it also implies that studying Africans who were exiled in the GDR can enable a historically informed perspective on South–North migrations that takes the *political-economic* processes which continually shape these displacements seriously. Moreover, exile's conceptual entanglement with the modern

nation state, be it in its older European or in its more recent African forms, makes a thorough consideration of concrete political processes on a transnational level mandatory. That there were two separate German nation states, of which the one conceived here as the primary host country ceased to exist by being taken over by its Western counterpart, only adds to this complexity, as my following two case studies of a Malawian and a South African political exile seek to show.