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SOME REMARKS ON INTERCULTURAL GERMAN STUDIES, THE HERMENEUTICS OF OTHERNESS AND THE CONFLICT OF CULTURES ON READING THE ESSAYS OF BOTHO STRAUSS

THE MIGRATION CRISIS: THE GERMAN AND POLISH PERSPECTIVES

The considerations in this article have several inspirations. The chief one is the events related to the migration crisis that intensified after the outbreak of war in Syria, and the controversies surrounding the European Commission's decision of May 2015 on the relocation of refugees¹, which was accepted in Western Europe, but was seen differently from the perspective of Poland and other Central European states (such as Hungary). A particular role here was played by German policy conducted in the spirit of *Willkommenskultur* – the culture of openness – which resulted in the application of special procedures with respect to refugees in 2015 and the arrival of a million more migrants.² In connection with this, there is even stronger pressure in Germany for intercultural openness.³ It is helpful in this context to look at the concept of interculturalism itself, and how it was understood in academic circles (in the humanities, and language studies in particular) in the 1980s and 1990s. We shall therefore be mentioning – and this is the next inspiration – the academic and educational concept called intercultural German studies. It is important to draw attention to this context, because it is necessary to separate considerations in the domain of literature and cultural studies from those that belong to political studies, and further from the current journalistic and media rhetoric, which sometimes takes very extreme forms, encouraging participants in the debate to adopt their own, opposing, emotional viewpoint. It is therefore worth taking a look at how interculturalism is dealt with in the aforementioned con-

¹ Polish Radio, *UE klóci się o przyjmowanie imigrantów. „Ich liczba jeszcze wzrośnie”*, 31 May 2015, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1453437,UE-kloci-sie-o-przyjmowanie-imigrantow-Ich-liczba-jeszcze-wzrosnie> (accessed 25 July 2017).

² Keine Abschiebung. So kam es zum Tweet, der so viele Syrer von Deutschland träumen lässt, *Focus Online* 19 September 2015, http://www.focus.de/politik/videos/keine-abschiebung-so-kam-es-zum-tweet-wegen-dem-syrer-ihre-zukunft-in-deutschland-sehen_id_4959524.html (accessed 25 July 2017).

³ See for example the handbook for municipalities published by Schader-Stiftung, *Interkulturelle Öffnung und Willkommenskultur in strukturschwachen ländlichen Regionen. Ein Handbuch für Kommunen*, https://www.schader-stiftung.de/fileadmin/content/Handbuch_interkulturelle_Oeffnung_ueberarbeitet_01-2015.pdf (accessed 25 July 2017).

texts, taking as a counterpoint (and a further inspiration) the views expressed in the essays of Botho Strauß. Born in 1944, Strauß is a writer, dramatist and essayist who for years – since the publication in 1993 in the German weekly *Der Spiegel* of the politically scandalous essay *Anschwellender Bocksgesang* (“The Swelling Goat Song”) – has been seen as a voice of opposition to the German intellectual mainstream. His is nonetheless a voice that is tolerated and heard, since his essays (sometimes shorter texts having the form of commentaries or glosses) appear once every few years in *Der Spiegel*, which is undoubtedly one of the country’s most widely read magazines.

It would appear that the development of intercultural German studies in the 1980s and early 1990s, which dealt in various categories on the boundaries of literature and cultural studies, such as “foreignness” and the “hermeneutics of otherness”, was on the one hand a response to the demographic changes taking place in a country which, in spite of its attempts (as early as 1973) to stem the flow of *Gastarbeiter*, had become a land of migration (*Einwanderungsland*)⁴, and on the other hand an anticipation of something that politicians would later attempt to translate into concrete integrative projects (interculturalism, multiculturalism, transculturalism).⁵ It also anticipated a certain way of speaking about emigrants in the spirit of political correctness, which in the following decades would regulate the principles of public discourse. As it soon turned out, however, even in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s, and under the influence of the so-called “cultural turn”, promulgated by such figures as Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said, the way of defining foreignness in the original spirit of intercultural German studies would be evaluated as insufficient, and even criticised as too Eurocentric. Interestingly, that trend in Germany, consisting in something of a deconstruction of the country’s own culture, was maintained even after the events of 11 September 2001, when Islamic extremists carried out a terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. This attack became a symbol of the clash of civilisations, or war of cultures, that had been described some years earlier by Samuel Huntington (1993).⁶ A sort of turning point, although not an obvious one, was the pronouncement of Angela Merkel in 2010 that the *Multikulti* concept had been an absolute failure⁷ although the position of that politician, who might have appeared to be signalling an anti-immigration viewpoint, has not been consistent, as is evidenced by the aforementioned decision to allow a wave of migration in 2015.

The question arises whether it is possible for public discourse to be expanded in such a way that views similar to those articulated over the years by Botho Strauß

⁴ A. Schildt, D. Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte. Die Bundesrepublik – 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Bonn 2009, pp. 350ff.

⁵ See e.g. B. Bartz, *Idea wielokulturowego wychowania w nowoczesnych społeczeństwach*, Duisburg–Radom 1997, pp. 7–9.

⁶ Originally published as an article in *Foreign Affairs* in summer 1993, later expanded to book form: S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1996.

⁷ Integration: Merkel erklärt Multikulti für gescheitert, *Spiegel Online* 16 October 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/integration-merkel-erklaert-multikulti-fuer-gescheitert-a-723532> (accessed 25 July 2017).

become a norm. These views, critical of the German mainstream, are close to those being expressed at present in right-wing periodicals in Poland.⁸ As regards the Polish journalism typically found in the weeklies *Do Rzeczy* and *wSieci*, and to some extent also *Wprost* (it should be added that this is relatively moderate, since much more ideologically expressive writings can be found in *Gazeta Polska* and *Nasz Dziennik*), and its attitude to the European migrant crisis, it is hard to imagine that a text containing such views as those expressed by Rafał Ziemkiewicz in his article “They are invaders, not refugees. Let’s close Poland’s borders to them”⁹ could possibly appear in any mainstream German journal. Indeed, much more critical views on Merkel’s policies are expressed by such independent intellectuals and journalists as Bogusław Wolniewicz, who in one online interview explicitly constructs, in full seriousness, a parallel between National Socialism and multiculturalism, between the policies of the Third Reich and Chancellor Merkel’s policy of accepting and relocating refugees. In Wolniewicz’s view, the latter policy stems from a “broken moral backbone”, and will lead – like the aggression towards other countries and the atrocities committed by the Nazis – to the annihilation of Europe.¹⁰ In Germany, critical opinions of this type must rather be considered marginal, confined to the right-wing press, although for several years this “margin” has been expanding significantly, with the formation of political groupings such as AfD and the Pegida movement. While it is hard not to take note of the permeation into the intellectual mainstream of certain views that three decades ago would have been regarded as extremist,¹¹ in public debate the anti-immigrant views of, for instance, Thilo Sarrazin not only come up against powerful institutional resistance (expulsion from the SPD and an attempt to dismiss him from the executive board of the central bank), but are also immediately reflected in critical academic thought by being placed within the “incorrect” intellectual tradition dating back to Oswald Spengler.¹²

A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT INTERCULTURAL GERMAN STUDIES

Attempts – inspired by cultural studies – to redefine modern language studies have been made in Germany since the early 1980s. They have been made under the slogan of intercultural German studies. That school is associated primarily with its founder,

⁸ It is hard to find far-going univocal comparisons to the writings of Rafał Ziemkiewicz or Paweł Lisicki, although many views coincide, and it is no accident that it was in the right-wing magazine *Arcana* that a translation of Strauß’s Goat Song essay appeared: *Wzbierająca pieśń kozła*, *Arcana* 1(31) 2000.

⁹ *Do Rzeczy* 13 September 2015, <https://dorzeczy.pl/7122/38-to-najezdzcy-zamknijmy-granice.html> (accessed 25 September 2017).

¹⁰ B. Wolniewicz, *Trzecia rzesza, czwarta rzesza* [video interview], published 5 January 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHgpAtm_51Y (accessed 9 July 2017).

¹¹ A. Denka, *O roli duchowych podżegaczy w przemianach tożsamości historycznej i politycznej Niemiec od połowy lat 80. do końca XX wieku*, *Przegląd Zachodni* no. 4(357), 2015, pp. 269–282.

¹² T. Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*, Munich 2010. Cf. V. Weiß, *Deutschlands Neue Rechte. Angriff der Eliten – Von Spengler bis Sarrazin*, Paderborn 2011.

Alois Wierlacher, in view of not only his research work, but also the rapid progression of institutionalisation: the offering of degree courses in intercultural German studies (initially at Bayreuth, but now at many German universities), and subsequently the foundation of the *Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Germanistik* (GiG) in 1987. The concept of intercultural German studies grew out of the discussion concerning the status of the subject called *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a Foreign Language), which was understood not only as the teaching of German to foreigners, but also as an academic discipline and research field.¹³ A representative collection of texts in the field is *Hermeneutik der Fremde* (“Hermeneutics of Otherness”), published in 1990 and edited by Wierlacher and Dietrich Krusche. It contains articles written by the editors themselves and by Götz Großklaus, Walter Hinderer, Hans Robert Jauf, Willy Michel and Harald Weinrich.¹⁴

Following careful re-reading, it would appear inappropriate to attempt a complete historicisation of the views of Alois Wierlacher, or even of those which he put forward in one of his programmatic papers *Mit fremden Augen oder: Fremdheit als Ferment* (“Through Foreign Eyes, or Otherness as Ferment”), which appeared in 1983 and was reprinted in the aforementioned volume in 1990.¹⁵ While this text exposes a perspective that is more than thirty years old, and allows one to evaluate how much has changed, it also contains theoretical theses (relating to the study of culture) which still seem valid today, and which in some cases might be confidently supported. Wierlacher should certainly be criticised for the fact that his work failed to reflect certain aspects of the geopolitical reality of the time; one might indeed repeat the diagnosis given by Polish literature scholars in the 1970s (with a different cultural reference, of course) according to which there is some “unpresented world” out there (Zagajewski/Kornhauser). We see an attempt at intercultural redefinitions of concepts such as foreignness (*Fremde, Fremdheit*) and otherness (*Alterität*), a search for an adequate concept of culture, mention of the hermeneutic situation of a linguistically and culturally foreign reader of texts from a native culture; the perspective would appear to be supra-European, even global, but there is no mention at all of the most significant divisions and conflicts of the time. There is not a word about the conflict between the Communist bloc and the free Western world; about the fact – which from the standpoint of the old Federal Republic ought to be the most significant – that there existed two German states; about Reagan’s crusade against the “evil empire”; about the spirit of moral renewal following Helmut Kohl’s becoming chancellor. Taking a sceptical view of Gadamer’s hermeneutics as a basis for a model of otherness that would be useful in intercultural German studies, Wierlacher points out the dangers

¹³ The broad discussion around this subject is described by C. Karolak, *Dydaktyka literatury wobec potrzeb nauki języka w warunkach obcokulturowych*, Poznań 1999, pp. 23–35.

¹⁴ D. Krusche, A. Wierlacher (eds.), *Hermeneutik der Fremde*, Munich 1990. Like many other books on intercultural German studies, it was published by Iudicium.

¹⁵ A. Wierlacher, *Mit fremden Augen oder: Fremdheit als Ferment. Überlegungen zur Begründung einer interkulturellen Hermeneutik deutscher Literatur* (1983), in: D. Krusche, A. Wierlacher (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 51–79.

of the proposals being made by the Swiss Humanities Association (*Schweizerische Geisteswissenschaftliche Gesellschaft*), having in mind the words of Rüdiger Bubner that otherness is both an opportunity and a challenge to better understand that which is our own; that the intention of all hermeneutics is the “assimilation of resistance and integration of differences” (*Anverwandlung des Widerspenstigen und Integration des Differenten*).¹⁶ One would wish to ask about the hermeneutic model of otherness that was preferred at that time by the analogous institutions of the other former German-speaking state, the DDR – or about that which originated from the Soviet Union. It is strange that these do not give the author concern.

The date of the republication of the article (1990), in view of the fall of communism and the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, somewhat reduces that deficiency, although certain of the theses – given the re-emerging political power of Germany (one of the opponents of reunification was Günter Grass himself) – might be disturbing. The undertaking launched under the banner of intercultural German studies is intended, after all, not only as a scholarly and educational project which as an academic subject would merely supplement the pragmatically and linguistically defined *Deutsch als Fremdsprache*:

The attempt of German as a Foreign Language to make available and explain German literature to multicultural groups of foreigners and to German-speaking students interested in becoming teachers, is incorrectly understood if it is seen as a didactic undertaking, rather than being interpreted *eo ipso* as an undertaking having the aim of *facilitating the global reception of German literature* [my italics].¹⁷

Nonetheless, globalist and anti-globalist discourses began to gain importance only in the 1990s, and Wierlacher himself warned in the very next sentence that this undertaking “should not be promulgated with fear, nor should it have a colonial character”¹⁸. Moreover, in the text as a whole there are several instances of dissociation from the hermeneutics of understanding in the spirit of the tradition of the national community. However, in the context of Germany’s new economic position (which became ever stronger with the unstoppable reunification process), it is hard not to get the impression that the quoted postulate was strongly embedded in German megalomania, colonialist thinking, missionaryism and ethnocentrism. It could have been received as a form of cultural imperialism accompanying plans for the political and economic domination of Europe, or even the world – which by that time was already unipolar. The fact that questions soon came to be asked about symmetry – that is, whether there similarly exists something like intercultural English, French or Polish studies – provides an interesting thought experiment in this context. For how was it supposed to look in practice? Wierlacher used the concept of application; he spoke of the “applicative nature of intercultural German studies”, of a “whole series of hermeneutic

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 59. All translations of quotations, unless otherwise noted, are by the translator of this article.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

applications”, of special cases such as Switzerland, of different programmes for Germany’s monolingual (*einsprachig*) neighbours (Austria, and at the time presumably also the DDR), and of foreign versions of German studies. The latter were to extend as far as African German studies, to be characterised by an “identity-building interest in foreignness” (*identitätsbildendes Fremdheitsinteresse*), and Japanese German studies, marked by an “alternative attitude to the world” (*alternatives Weltverhalten*).¹⁹ A kind of application is represented by the examples described by Dietrich Krusche resulting from his work as a lecturer in Asia, which he calls “concretisations”, under the notable title *Goethe in Sri Lanka, Brecht in Japan*.²⁰ Examples of this type, descriptions resulting from didactic work with foreign-language cultures and from analysis of the reception of German cultural texts in other countries and parts of the world, should be evaluated highly positively from the perspective of a person interested in German culture (whether for professional reasons or out of amateur interest). They are of particular interest to scholars of German language and literature abroad, including in Poland, who teach and research German literature. This legacy (series of scholarly and didactic publications from *Iudicium Verlag*, *Internationes*, etc.) is probably the greatest product of intercultural German studies.

Wierlacher’s text itself also contains much that is extremely valuable, including at least the indication of selected examples of German-language literature from 1945–1980 which the author (in attempting to define the concept of foreignness) presented as model works for a change of viewpoint – in other words, for changing how one looked at one’s own society, at the Federal Republic of Germany. Wierlacher focused here on the model of aesthetic anamnesis, histories of disease, seen in the worlds of the heroes (or rather antiheroes) of Koeppen, Nossack, Grass, Lenz, Johnson and Handke, whose seeing was said to simulate the experience of foreignness, to enable one to feel the position of someone arriving in Germany as a foreign country, and to exercise those experiences.²¹ As a form of re-education of German citizens following the German aggression against Europe and the world and the atrocities of World War II, this is undoubtedly something extremely valuable.

One can get somewhat lost, however, in the changes of perspective that Wierlacher makes. The aforementioned text contains several leaps with which it is hard to keep up. The author makes various references to the hermeneutic position of the recipient or reader of a text, but it is not always clear whom this concerns. When he presents his idea of the applicative nature of intercultural German studies, he evidently has in mind specific institutions (the whole of German studies in particular countries or continents), namely the whole of the community studying and researching literature

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 54–57. Considering the variety of papers and speakers at the first GiG congress in 1987, it may be thought that intercultural German studies was supposed to become an umbrella organisation for foreign German studies. See A. Wierlacher (ed.), *Perspektiven und Verfahren interkultureller Germanistik. Akten des 1. Kongresses der Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Germanistik*, Munich 1987.

²⁰ D. Krusche, *Die Kategorie der Fremde. Eine Problemskizze* (1980), in: D. Krusche, A. Wierlacher, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–23 (here especially 17–20).

²¹ A. Wierlacher, *op. cit.*, pp. 62ff.

there. From time to time, however, he turns towards the individual, the *multikulturelle Rezipient*: a person who is studying abroad or – at a somewhat higher level of generality – living in a foreign country as a *marginale Person*.²² Also when he alludes to Christian concepts such as the ascetic *peregrinatio* and *xeniteia*,²³ it is not clear whether this is to refer to a foreigner arriving in Germany, a foreigner studying German literature in his or her own country, a German citizen going abroad, or perhaps an institution (although this last option would appear absurd).

INTERCULTURAL LITERATURE STUDIES AND THE CULTURAL TURN

When we look at the criticism formulated in later works on what is called intercultural literature studies (Bachmann-Medick 1996; Hofmann 2006, 2009)²⁴ – namely those which appeared after or as a result of the “cultural turn” – and referring to the earlier assumptions of intercultural German studies, that criticism does not seem fully persuasive. The newer assumptions arise out of a postcolonial perspective (Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said), deconstruction (Jacques Derrida) or elements of critical theory (Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno).²⁵ While in Wierlacher’s conception the didactic aspect was more important, in as far as it could be treated as “the study of the teaching of literature” (*Literaturlehrforschung*), with such goals as the “presentation of culturally conditioned differences in reading” (*Herausarbeiten kulturell bedingter Lektüreunterschiede*),²⁶ the newer intercultural literature studies to a greater extent adopted the goal of researching intercultural complexes within the literary work itself, seeing literature (selected literature, naturally) as a “simulation of foreign-culture experience”.²⁷ At the outset, Hofmann makes a fundamental distinction between the “ethos of understanding” (*Ethos des Verstehens*) and “insistence on cultural difference” (*Beharren auf kultureller Differenz*).²⁸ Citing the literature scholar Peter J. Brenner, he states that:

The problem with intercultural hermeneutics as a hermeneutics of otherness is [...] that it simplifies the European lines of tradition and at the same time absolutises them, moving the content of our own cultural traditions to a transcendental plane, that is, it explains the entirely contingent traits and norms of the European as belonging to humanity as a whole.²⁹

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 55ff.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 63ff.

²⁴ D. Bachmann-Medick (ed.), *Kultur als Text. Die anthropologische Wende in der Literaturwissenschaft*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996; M. Hofmann, *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft. Eine Einführung*, Paderborn 2006.

²⁵ M. Hofmann, *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft...*, pp. 27–51; D. Bachmann-Medick, *Multikultur oder kulturelle Differenzen? Neue Konzepte von Weltliteratur und Übersetzung in postkolonialer Perspektive*, in: idem (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 262–296 (here especially 278–290).

²⁶ A. Wierlacher, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²⁷ M. Hofmann, *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft...*, p. 55.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 41ff.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

It may be somewhat surprising that the ideas of the theologian Hans Küng, oriented towards seeking a “world ethos” (*Weltethos*) of different religions, aimed at overcoming “Eurocentric prejudice” (*das eurozentrische Vorurteil*) and finding supra-cultural beliefs from different world cultures, is perceived by Hofmann – apparently fairly sceptically – as an attempt to overcome the dilemma of the European and German hermeneutic tradition.³⁰ It is certainly surprising, however, that he distances himself to such an extent from the “hermeneutics of otherness” of Krusche and Wierlacher, since as has already been mentioned, Wierlacher at least makes several explicit statements in which he dissociates himself from certain traditions of the German humanities (*Geistesgeschichte*). In commenting on the concept of understanding in the German humanistic tradition, Wierlacher wrote that:

The self-awareness and history of German studies were (not only in Germany) in the perspective, as Schlegel states, of a general “European character”, being oriented towards conditions for the assimilation of German or would-be German (e.g. antique) texts received by the mother-tongue reader. From Schleiermacher through Dilthey and Gadamer, up to Flashar and, if I understand him well, Frank, the triad of the hermeneutic process – understanding, interpretation, application – has been viewed as a function of this condition. [...] It served to overcome the historical distance between the text being subject to understanding and its contemporary reader in a defined community of tradition.³¹

The constitution of the hermeneutics of otherness thus represented, even for Wierlacher, a break with the vertical viewpoint (overcoming of the historically conditioned distance) and a focus on the horizontal perspective (overcoming of the geographically and culturally conditioned distance). Wierlacher, effectively explaining himself, pointed to the 19th-century German imperialist tradition.³² When this is juxtaposed with the tendencies, reported for instance by Krusche, to “avoid the problem”, in relation to such distant forms of German studies as the Japanese variants, and the explanation of certain hermeneutic problems by the adoption of a Eurocentric (*europa-zentrisch*) or “Euro-analogous” (*europa-analog*)³³ picture of the world – and this is supposed to happen not only at the initiative of the European side – then there appears already to be an anticipation of the polycentrism and ethno relativism that will follow in the next decade, partly as a result of the cultural turn.

If these two approaches are indeed to be differentiated, then reference should be made to what Bachmann-Medick defines as the “cultural-political accent”.³⁴ On the one hand she argues for the achievements of intercultural German studies: “The desired optical expansion in cultural studies was pushed significantly forward in our

³⁰ M. Hofmann, *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft...*, p. 42.

³¹ A. Wierlacher, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³² Primarily citing F. Kramer, *Verkehrte Welten. Zur imaginären Ethnographie des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. M. 1977.

³³ D. Krusche, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³⁴ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Einleitung*, in: idem (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 7–64 (here: 12).

country by the Intercultural German Studies project.”³⁵ However, she goes on to indicate a need for further examination of the problem of the cultural experience of foreignness, defining it precisely thus:

If the cultural turn in literature studies were to be expressed also in the fact that the study of foreign literatures and cultures is seen as a challenge, then it would be necessary to give up the *fixation on German studies in favour of the consideration of world literatures*. Intercultural Literature Studies would then mean that one should re-examine methods of cultural interpretation in a supra-disciplinary context, break down the boundaries between linguistic disciplines, question the traditional canon and give up universals [my italics].³⁶

It is hard to resist the impression that the programme described above is not merely a scholarly programme, but also an ideological manifesto, since it carries with it proposals, veiled to a greater or lesser degree, for the depreciation of traditional literature. The expectation, cited in this context, of the American anthropologist Paul Rabinow (“We must carry out the anthropologization of the West: show how exotic is the constitution of its reality [...]”³⁷) is an obvious continuation of that picture. It is no surprise, then, when there appears in this context a thesis about the “tropical Germany” (*tropisches Deutschland*), about a society that must shift from seeing its own culture as homogeneous (essentialist), from an anthropological universalism, towards the development of a hybrid identity, one which provides continuous exchange between what is “our own” and what is foreign, in the search for new cultural experiences.³⁸ This is therefore a proposal for the deconstruction of the great stories about German literature and culture, but also about other cultures of the Western world. Anthropologisation means looking at culture like at a text, at a metanarrative (in line with the title of the volume edited by Bachmann-Medick: *Kultur als Text*), for if Western culture, the culture of the individual nations of the West, is just a text, then it is possible to decompose it into layers, to read it backwards, to demonstrate its relative nature. It is necessary to reject the humanistic and philosophical universals that were born in the Enlightenment tradition, in order to go beyond “Eurocentric categories” (Frühwald),³⁹ and moreover to reject the basing of a “culture of memory” on permanent written texts in favour of “orality”, “foreign-culturalism” and critical “self-examination of European culture”, the “history of colonialism” and the “post-colonial discourse”.⁴⁰ This is the direction of the critique of “ethnocentric positions” in the spirit of Michael Fischer and George E. Marcus (“cultural critique”), and thus the search for research perspectives

³⁵ *Ibidem*. Note should also be taken of the standard literature on the subject given in note 15.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ M. Hofmann, *Klimaforschung im tropischen Deutschland. Interkulturelle Reflexionen zur Identität unserer Einwanderungsgesellschaft und zu deutsch-türkischen Konstellationen*, in: O. Iljassowa-Morger, E. Reinhardt-Becker (eds.), *Literatur – Kultur – Verstehen. Neue Perspektiven in der interkulturellen Literaturwissenschaft*, Duisburg 2009, pp. 43–64 (here especially 44ff).

³⁹ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Einleitung*, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

“beyond the traditional narrowing to national literatures” (*jenseits der überkommenen Verengung auf Nationalliteraturen*).⁴¹ There is certainly space in this research perspective for the publications of anthropologists that we have already mentioned, such as Homi K. Bhabha, with the key categories of “hybridity” (*Hybridität*) and “third space” (*dritter Raum*),⁴² and Edward Said (his concept of orientalism), also naturally supporting that perspective. However, in relation to Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978),⁴³ which was enthusiastically received – both in Germany and Poland – only some time later, attention should be drawn to the controversies which it aroused due to the charges levelled against the author of elementary gaps in linguistic knowledge, particularly in the area of historical linguistics (such as neglect of the role of Sanskrit).⁴⁴ Note should be made of the much blunter assessments made of Said’s book, such as that by Agnieszka Kołakowska:

[...] it is simply grim postmodernist nonsense, full of internal inconsistencies. Said claims that there is no objective truth, particularly truth about the East, while at the same time accusing Western orientalist of having failed to uncover this non-existent truth; he maintains that the reality of the East is quite different from that presented by Western orientalist, while maintaining simultaneously that there is no such reality.⁴⁵

Were one to attempt to outline some kind of dichotomy of viewpoints, then on one side would stand the adherents of the cultural turn, inspired by American cultural studies; and on the other those who employ the paradigm of the war of cultures as Samuel Huntington does, where in the latter case the conception of Western culture is decidedly homogeneous. Huntington himself belongs to the group of scholars who have described history, politics and culture in the categories of civilisation, similarly to Feliks Koneczny, associated in Poland with the nationalist tradition, and Oswald Spengler, viewed unsympathetically in Germany for similar reasons.⁴⁶ Out of scholarly obligation, Bachmann-Medick notes Huntington’s theses as controversial, but in her own argumentation she takes an entirely different course.⁴⁷ It must be recalled

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 15ff. See also *idem*, *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, English edition Berlin 2016 (orig. 2006), cited from the Polish edition, Warsaw 2012, pp. 110–115.

⁴² D. Bachmann-Medick, *Multikultur oder kulturelle Differenzen?...*, pp. 278–284; M. Hofmann, *Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft...*, p. 13. See also H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994.

⁴³ E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1978.

⁴⁴ A. Kołakowska, „Orientalizm” Edwarda Saida. *Uwag kilka* (2008), in: *idem*, *Wojny kultur i inne wojny*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 133–148 (here especially 145ff).

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 146. Also the writer of the introduction to the Polish edition, Zdzisław Żygulski, while acknowledging the great amount of research work done by Said, makes many critical remarks, e.g. “On the other hand, Said’s attitude takes on obsessive features expressed in the repetition of theses that have been accepted apparently *a priori*, or rather one basic thesis, which might be stated thus: orientalism is an instrument invented by the West for the purpose of controlling, enslaving and transforming the East, above all the Islamic Middle East.” See E. Said, *op. cit.*, Polish edition, Warsaw 1991, p. 9.

⁴⁶ F. Koneczny, *Różne typy cywilizacji*, Krzeszowice 2005. See also S. P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, Polish edition, Warsaw 2003, p. 46.

⁴⁷ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Multikultur oder kulturelle Differenzen?...*, p. 263.

that one of Huntington's most bitter critics was Said himself.⁴⁸ The difference is easily perceptible. While the adherents of the cultural turn tend to attempt to undermine the Western metanarratives, Huntington draws attention to the flashpoints on the borders between civilisations following the breakdown of the bipolar world, emphasising that most of the conflicts in today's world (he is writing from the perspective of the 1990s) occur where the Islamic world comes into contact with other civilisations.⁴⁹ He explains this on demographic grounds (by the large numbers of young people from the Islamic world in particular societies), which in turn provided an opportunity for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* journalist Frank Schirrmacher to draw attention to demographic changes (the ageing of German society and the developing demographic vacuum) in his much-discussed book *Das Methusalem-Komplott (The Methuselah Conspiracy, 2004)* and generally to soften Huntington's theses somewhat, with reformulation of the "war of cultures" hypothesis to refer to a "war of generations".⁵⁰ In the light not only of the events of 11 September 2001 (in this matter the perceptiveness of Huntington is acknowledged by most intellectuals), but also of the latest migration crisis, it is worth asking the question of which of the models – the cultural turn or the clash of civilisations – is more apt. Everything would appear to indicate that something that was merely an innocent proposal for the anthropologisation of the West, an ordinary deconstruction of a cultural text, is coming to be manifested as the end of European ethnocentrism (*tropisches Deutschland*), and the heating up of the war of cultures is becoming more and more a reality.

BOTHO STRAUSS – THE LAST GERMAN?

The essays of Botho Strauß from the years 1993–2015 (that is, from the publication of the "Swelling Goat Song" article in 1993 up to his latest writings) cast an interesting light on the aforementioned theses in relation to intercultural German studies, intercultural literature studies, the hermeneutics of otherness and the conflict of cultures. It should be noted at the outset that Strauß is not in fact such a strongly right-wing writer and intellectual as he is generally made out to be. His views were strongly influenced by the student protests of 1968, which in some way shaped him both aesthetically and intellectually. Another enormous influence was Adorno, from whom Strauß nonetheless quickly (even at the end of the 1970s) distanced himself, and not only in declarative terms. It should be noted in the context of the hermeneutics of otherness that Strauß is also the author of his own concept of an "aesthetics

⁴⁸ E. Said, *The Clash of Ignorance*. Labels like 'Islam' and 'the West' serve only to confuse us about a disorderly reality, *The Nation* 4 October 2001, <https://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/> (accessed 25 July 2017).

⁴⁹ S. P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, here especially the subchapters "The bloody borders of Islam" and "Causes: History, demographics, politics" (Polish edition pp. 445–463).

⁵⁰ E. Rathgeb, *Die engagierte Nation. Deutsche Debatten 1945–2005*, Munich–Vienna 2005, pp. 430ff.

of otherness”, which certainly, in spite of the condensed aestheticism, corresponds to certain of the theses of intercultural German studies.⁵¹ It is not their equivalent, of course, because Strauß does not create political and ideological statements; he attaches no importance to what seem to him to be secondary discourses. However, it is worthwhile to examine the metaphors that he employs when writing, for example, about the relationship with a work of art (in an introduction to George Steiner’s 1986 book *Real Presences*):

A work of art, in order to meet with it again, must be treated *as a guest, a stranger, who suddenly appears in our everyday life*, whose arrival is accompanied by joy and silent trepidation. *Limits must be set on the understanding of otherness; it is not possible to do more than come close, employing “cardinal discretion”*. It is more important how the involved person behaves: is his ability sufficient to allow himself to be moved; will he be sufficiently strong, and at the same time non-resistant to a single strike [*Zustoßen*] of the poetry, music or sculpture, and at the same time sufficiently attentive as not to confound otherness with multiplicity, not to use it up and not to mistake it for everything else [*italics A.D.*].⁵²

It is hard not to get the impression that what Strauß is merely evoking in a very subtle message can be found at least in the work of Götz Grobklau, when as a remedy for difficulties in communication between cultures he proposes the “aesthetic text” and “aesthetic event”, which become possible in conditions of a certain “slowing down”, a rejection of the directness of the message⁵³; or even in the writing of Hofmann (compare the aforementioned juxtaposition of the understanding of cultural difference). One would like to say that someone who is so subtle, who understands the need for a discreet meeting with otherness – perhaps somehow anticipating in a self-examining manner the position of the outsider in “The Swelling Goat Song” (1993), reserving himself the privilege of being incomprehensible (“Incomprehensibility becomes all the more so the privilege of a work of art, which demands interpretation and expresses no judgement”⁵⁴), the privilege of being treated as a stranger and (as such) being tolerated for his views as well – cannot be a bad person, and therefore cannot be a xenophobe. However, that assumed charge of German xenophobia is addressed by him even in the Goat Song essay of 1993 (the year of Huntington’s publication of *Clash of Civilisations*), with a bold argumentation that causes him to be irreversibly labelled not only as a xenophobe, but also as a right-wing radical or neo-Nazi.

⁵¹ A. Denka, *Skandal oder Engagement? Eine systemtheoretische Untersuchung zu Peter Handke und Botho Strauß nach 1989*, Poznań 2013, p. 301.

⁵² B. Strauß, *Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt. Bemerkungen zu einer Ästhetik der Anwesenheit*, Munich–Vienna 1999, p. 46.

⁵³ G. Grobklau, *Raum als traditionelles Medium der Eigen- und Fremdbestimmung. Interkultureller Dialog unter den Bedingungen der neuen Kommunikationstechnologien*, in: E.W.B. Hess-Lüttich, J. Papiór (eds.), *Dialog: interkulturelle Verständigung in Europa – ein deutsch-polnisches Gespräch*, Saarbrücken–Fort Lauderdale 1990, pp. 97–106 (here: 105).

⁵⁴ B. Strauß, *Anschwellender Bocksgesang*, transl. K. Polechoński as *Wzbierająca pieśń kozła*, in: J. Jabłkowska, L. Żyliński (eds.), *O kondycji Niemiec. Tożsamość niemiecka w debatach intelektualistów po 1945 roku*, Poznań 2008, pp. 485–495 (here: 494).

When one reads “We are fighting only in our own interior for that which is ours. We are not being called to battle by enemy [aggressors]. We are provoked to pity and help towards an army of expellees and homeless, we are statutorily obliged to show kindness”,⁵⁵ we cannot but ask whether this relates to the current debate about the German culture of openness in the year 2015. Does the controversial Wolniewicz not argue in the same way? In the next part of his reasoning, which in its fundamental layer is aimed against the current model of a left-liberal intellectual, Strauß seems to answer the expected charge of xenophobia:

At the same time it should be checked what in tolerance is sincere and spontaneous, and what is due to the searing German self-hate [*Selbsthaß*], which calls strangers to us so that here, in the hated fatherland, the social situation might reveal its famed (“Fascist-like”) characteristics, as it was described formerly (and quietly even today) in the criminal dialectics of left-wing terror.

Intellectuals have a favourable attitude towards the foreign not because of the foreigners, but because they are full of rage towards what is their own, and approve everything that might destroy it [...].⁵⁶

Hatred towards what is one’s own, and love for what is foreign – just such an idea is formulated by the palaeoconservative philosopher Roger Scruton, using the terms *oikophobia* and *xenophilia* and giving them fairly negative connotations – while in liberal rhetoric, essentially nothing like oikophobia appears, and xenophilia is regarded as the most democratic virtue.⁵⁷

In the Goat Song essay, Botho Strauß creates complexes of a kind: “thought figures” (*Denkfiguren*) which he will also develop in his subsequent important essays, including *Der Schlag* (“The Strike”, 2001) and *Der Konflikt* (“The Conflict”, 2006). These thought figures are at the same time three different attitudes (*habitus*es), which it is worthwhile to recognise in order not to accuse Strauß of having Nazi or Fascist-like views. If one is truly to neglect the mythical, poetic, anthropological layer of the Goat Song essay (alluding among others to the concepts of René Girard in *The Scapegoat* and *Violence and the Sacred*) and try to reduce them to concepts of political science, then Strauß’s own viewpoint would have to be seen as distant from current conservative policy (even though he describes himself rather as a reactionary). However, the attitudes that Strauß decisively rejects are those typical of the aforementioned left-liberal intellectual and indeed of the neo-Nazi. In his essays *Der Schlag* (2001) and *Der Konflikt* (2006) the attitude of a neo-Nazi seems to be taken by the Islamic suicide bomber (*Assassin*) or other Islamic radical using violence and driven by hatred.⁵⁸ It may also be assumed that both types (the neo-Nazi and the Islamic radical) operate as two variants of the attitude that Strauß rejects. He expresses this especially in the essay *Der letzte Deutsche* (“The Last German”, 2015), when he juxtaposes the following two scenes:

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 486.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 487.

⁵⁷ R. Scruton, in Polish translation by A. Nowak, Oikofobia i ksenofilia, *Arka* no. 46(4), 1993, pp. 5–10.

⁵⁸ A. Denka, *Skandal oder Engagement...*, pp. 174–176.

What appears in the newspaper brings interested parties into greater and greater confusion. I read of the lynching of a deeply religious Afghan woman. She had mocked trade in devotional goods as Muslim superstition and was unjustly accused of burning the Koran. Attacked by young men, she was beaten and kicked to death in the street. The crowd stands around and films this crime on a smartphone. From time to time someone takes a break from filming, goes up to the victim and kicks her in the face.

In what way can this be tolerated?

On the next page there is a report of an investigation against a gang of right-wing radicals who throughout the country were preparing to set fire to refugee hostels.⁵⁹

Anyone who knows Botho Strauß's work – including his essays – sufficiently well will recognise that the author is in no way explaining, relativising, or justifying the position of the right-wing radical. Before we address this point, it will be useful to consider a typology of ways of experiencing otherness, put forward by Ortfried Schöffter (1991) and adapted by Hofmann as follows: type 1 – “otherness as a resonance box of what is one's own” (*Resonanzboden des Eigenen*); type 2 – “otherness as contrast” (*Gegenbild*); type 3 – “otherness as supplementation” (*Ergänzung*); and type 4 (the most desirable) – otherness as “complementarity” (*Komplementarität*).⁶⁰ If one were to apply this typology to the situation described by Strauß, then between the right-wing potential arsonists and the refugees the mode of experiencing otherness is of the second type (since phenomena such as racism and nationalism are usually assigned to that type), but it should be noted that the same type of otherness exists between the Muslim crowd and the lynched Afghan woman. But what type of otherness can be recognised in the relationship between an outside observer of the two situations and the protagonists, members of two groups that are apparently hostile to each other (right-wing radicals and Islamic radicals)? The thesis is interesting, since it should be differentiated in relation to the two kinds of habitus described by Strauß: that of the left-liberal German/European intelligentsia, and the conservative (or as he puts it, reactionary) attitude to which Strauß feels closer. While Strauß did see in the neo-Nazis “children neglected by us”,⁶¹ meaning that one might try to assign type 1 here (“detached nativeness”, *abgetrennte Ursprünglichkeit*⁶²), it is nonetheless necessary to ask to whose perspective this would apply (the children's or the parents'). The question arises of whether the only possible way of experiencing otherness which might be adopted in relation to suicide bombers and radical Islamists is type 2: treating them as contrasts. After all, what attitude towards “such a foreigner”, equating foreigner with enemy, appears in times of war? And we have been dealing with a war – or an open military conflict, in other words – since 11 September 2001: first the attack on the World Trade Center, then the interventions in Afghanistan and

⁵⁹ B. Strauß, Der letzte Deutsche, *Der Spiegel* no. 41, 2015, pp. 122–124 (here: 124).

⁶⁰ M. Hofmann, *Klimaforschung im tropischen Deutschland...*, pp. 45–48. O. Schöffter, *Modi des Fremderlebens. Deutungsmuster im Umgang mit Fremdheit*, in: idem (ed.), *Das Fremde. Erfahrungsmöglichkeiten zwischen Faszination und Bedrohung*, Opladen 1991, pp. 11–42.

⁶¹ B. Strauß, *Anschwellender Bocksgesang*, *op. cit.*, Polish translation p. 488.

⁶² M. Hofmann, *Klimaforschung im tropischen Deutschland...*, p. 45.

Iraq, and a series of attacks by Al Qaeda and lately the so-called Islamic State in major European capitals (London, Madrid, Paris, etc.) and across the world. Should the very question of the open conflict of cultures, the clash of civilisations, in fact be pushed into the background, and should Western societies, including that of Germany, taking a critical view of their own neglect, support integrative ideas and the attitudes of those Muslims (living in Europe) who reject terrorism and violence and take a critical view of their own traditional culture?⁶³ Maybe they should instead concentrate on a defensive stance? Strauß's diagnosis is generally critical – he believes that among the European elites there exist no axiological foundations that would guarantee the effective defence of civilisation. Commenting on the September 11 attacks in *Der Schlag* (2001), he writes:

Islam will never enter my heart, because it defends its Christian ruins? “Our faith is in reason and the values of civilisation” (Tony Blair). This faith is just pragmatism. It has conducted a mission throughout the world in a more permanent way than some religion. On those blinded by holy war, no declaration of this kind by an unbeliever will make any impression.

[...]

Our most important civilised values: do they not come from a “society” which did not use that name and was a long way from being “open”?⁶⁴

What sort of hermeneutics of otherness, then, should we apply to Islam, which day by day is changing the substance of Western culture? Which type of experiencing of otherness does Strauß consider appropriate? He generally rejects the attitude which we might describe as unilateral openness, namely the naive imposition on Islamic immigrants and refugees of European civic freedoms of which they have no need, because they themselves place limits on such freedoms – through religion and fixed traditional values. Paradoxically, it is the liberal attitude here that is the position of distance and hostility towards otherness (type 2). Even when a Green politician justifies the “right” of Turkish Muslim women to wear headscarves:

The headscarf as a mark of the religious self-realisation of a woman, as a forgiving female member of the Greens claims. It is not possible more accurately to express in words one's fully understanding lack of understanding. Even ritual subservience needs to be translated into the language of emancipation.⁶⁵

One may perceive a certain ambivalence in what Strauß writes in the essay *Der Plurimi-Faktor* (2013), where he indicates that the Muslim community in Europe

⁶³ Examples might include the issue of forced marriages and covering of the face in public places. Hofmann refers here to the controversy surrounding the Islamic dissident Necla Kelek. M. Hofmann, *Klimaforschung im tropischen Deutschland...*, pp. 53ff.

⁶⁴ B. Strauß, *Der Schlag*, *Der Spiegel* no. 41, 2001, p. 225.

⁶⁵ Idem, *Der letzte Deutsche*, p. 124. Strauß is probably making an allusion here to Renate Künast, who argued for allowing the wearing of the headscarf in the legal professions. See Künast gegen Kopftuchverbot für Richterinnen, *Junge Freiheit* 9 August 2016, <https://jungefreiheit.de/politik/deutschland/2016/kuenast-gegen-kopftuchverbot-fuer-richterinnen/> (accessed 25 July 2017).

is one from which we should learn certain things: paternal authority, religiousness, obedience, cultural preservation, tradition: “We impose our own freedoms irresistibly on both believers and infidels, not considering at all whether even the smallest part of their customary limitation of freedom might be worthy of imitation, or whether to allow ourselves to be influenced by it.”⁶⁶ Lamenting the lack of continuity between the cultural and literary tradition and contemporary German reality, Strauß writes: “On the question of what is tradition [*Überlieferung*], we are given a lesson, perhaps the most important one, by those who are faithful to Islam.”⁶⁷ One is tempted to say, paraphrasing an ideologically ambiguous slogan from the former East Germany: *Von Islam lernen, heißt siegen lernen*.⁶⁸ There is ambivalence because the described mode of experiencing otherness (type 4: otherness as complementarity) entirely fits what Strauß proposes, even though this was not the intention either of the inventor of the typology or of those who proposed anthropologisation of the West and the giving up of a culture of memory based on our own written tradition: “In the mode of otherness as complementarity, all kinds of definitions and fixing terms prove to be impossible. Hence the conclusion that the radically tolerated otherness of that which is foreign also causes a lack of transparency in relation to that which is our own.”⁶⁹ Of course the intention here is to call into question our “own” traditional culture – but this was long ago replaced as the main current in Western democratic society by pragmatism, the open society, secularity, religious indifferentism and an axiological void, and it is these phenomena that decide what is “ours”. “The most democratic path today would be to give up religious identity and traditional upbringing. For education and career, what is recommended today is secular beliefs and lifestyle.”⁷⁰ Strauß diagnoses the formation of a vacuum, which Islam, as an “unfriendly sacral power” (*gegnerische sakrale Potenz*)⁷¹ fills with the greatest of ease. This corresponds well to the charges formulated by Kołakowska against Said, who disavowed the Western picture of the Islamic Orient, although he did so rather from a left-liberal and postmodernist position: “Postmodernism and Islamic fundamentalism meet here in a natural alliance.”⁷²

On the other hand, those who use postmodernist instruments forget that they are a double-edged sword (for example, Lyotard was accused by Habermas of neo-conservatism), and deconstruction may strike back against those doing the deconstructing. Strauß thus used a highly refined trick (but one that reflects not so much cynicism as deep perceptiveness) to avoid exposing himself to the charge of religious hatred, ad-

⁶⁶ B. Strauß, Der Plurimi-Faktor. Anmerkungen zum Außenseiter, *Der Spiegel* no. 31, 2013, pp. 108–112 (here: 110).

⁶⁷ Idem, *Der letzte Deutsche*, p. 124.

⁶⁸ “Von der Sowjetunion lernen heißt siegen lernen” [To learn from the Soviet Union means to learn how to be victorious] – a slogan that is ambiguous because in the final period of the DDR’s totalitarian regime it was interpreted as a call not to follow the path of perestroika being followed by Gorbachev.

⁶⁹ M. Hofmann, *Klimaforschung im tropischen Deutschland...*, p. 48.

⁷⁰ B. Strauß, Der Konflikt, *Der Spiegel* no. 7, 2006, pp. 120–121 (here: 121).

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² A. Kołakowska, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

vanced when any intellectual begins to criticise Islam with reference to the defence of civilisation. Strauß therefore formulated his thesis as follows: We must learn from Islam, but not the radical, militant, criminal kind, but the traditional, conservative kind that respects the family, religion, culture and authority, in order to survive as a civilisation, as a cultural community. The sentence cited earlier – “Islam will never enter my heart, because it defends its Christian ruins?” – should not be embellished with a question mark. It is necessary, then, to return to such derided values as religion and the soldierly ethos, of which Strauß wrote in “The Swelling Goat Song” (1993). In this matter too, the author’s diagnosis is not optimistic: Germany as a nation, understood as a cultural community, will not survive. Even the title of the essay *Der letzte Deutsche* (“The Last German”) leaves no illusions; nor do statements of the type: “The migration of the uprooted will mean the end of the nation and national literature.”⁷³ Sensing that the programmatic rejection of national culture and literature advanced by the “open society” is a greater threat than the Islamic deluge itself, the author tries to find a dubious consolation in the fact that perhaps moderate Muslims will find in themselves a desire to discover and assimilate the heritage of German literature (entirely in the spirit of Wierlacher and Krusche): “A Syrian will more likely educate himself sufficiently in German as to be able one day to discover Achim von Arnim’s *Die Kronenwächter*, than an educated German to know who Ephrem the Syrian was.”⁷⁴ Strauß also refers to *Geheimes Deutschland* (“Secret Germany”), a group of creators close to Stefan George at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and has in mind his own intellectual brothers: Hamann, Jünger, Böhme, Nietzsche, Klopstock and Celan. This might suggest that his diagnosis has only the dimension of an aesthetic manifesto. Nonetheless, that reference made in 2015, a year of unprecedented openness to migrants, may also have the nature of a diagnosis – expressed by means of a metaphor – that must evoke very specific and grim associations, including demographic ones, linked to the analyses of Schirrmacher and Huntington. Strauß’s current diagnosis appears to be so pessimistic that he does not even repeat some of the theses from his essay of 11 years previously, *Der Konflikt* (they might see him accused of taking a concrete political stance against immigration, and Strauß would certainly wish to avoid being associated with any political grouping, such as Pegida); nonetheless it is worthwhile to conclude by quoting them:

Some time ago in France, Jean-Marie Le Pen was fined €10,000 euro for observing, polemically, that in his country there would soon be 25 million Muslims, beside whom the French people would have to walk with their heads lowered.

Liberal spirits might also ask, on the occasion of the current unrest, whether the victorious defensive battles that Christian Europe once fought against the invasion of Arab powers were, from today’s point of view, waged in vain.

The Muslim population of Amsterdam and other metropolises, which to an increasing extent is becoming a majority, will shortly have no need of our tolerance.”⁷⁵

⁷³ B. Strauß, *Der letzte Deutsche*, p. 124.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ B. Strauß, *Der Konflikt*, p. 120.

It is also significant that this short essay was illustrated by an engraving showing Charles Martel, who defeated the Arabs at Poitiers (732), and thus prevented the Islamisation of Europe. This quite significant place of memory is supplemented by another – the Reconquista, in which the Moors were successively forced out of the Iberian peninsula between the 7th and 15th centuries, although this appears only incidentally and carries many “buts” that distance the author from xenophobia and racism. Indeed, Strauß writes explicitly:

Nobody with a proper conscience can be charmed or seduced by the currish mark of racism along with its xenophobic mutations. But when on the playground young German Turks call their son a “Christian swine”, we hesitate, even though we previously neither felt nor confessed to being Christian. The aversion to any form of religious defamation seizes everyone, together with all kinds of banal pretensions to rule the roost, and maybe even with a certain amount of hidden desire for a Reconquista.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, the citing of the aforementioned places of memory arouses certain associations that reflect some potential reality. It might only be wondered to which mode of treatment of otherness these emotions should be assigned. Do the emotions resulting from a feeling of identity, identification with the remnants of Christianity, constitute an attitude comparable to racism (which Strauß, after all, rejects)? And which model of the hermeneutics of otherness and interculturally oriented language studies is appropriate here? Perhaps it is after all too early to discard the traditional hermeneutics of Gadamer? Is it possible to have some kind of Intercultural German Studies 2.0, which will take seriously the problem of the war of cultures and civilisations, and see also the destructive effects of mixing ideology with learning? It would appear that scholarly reflection is not fully keeping up with everything that we currently have to deal with in Europe and throughout the world, insisting on polycentric models (which have not only a descriptive but also a performative potential, since they make a significant contribution to the creation and reinforcement of this new reality). We see how in theoretical conceptions the view of Europe as a centre has changed, and what changes have taken place in relation to traditional German studies, including institutional ones (the academic courses in intercultural German studies and world literature). What is happening is reflected in cultural texts, in literature and film, and in political and media discourse. Scholarly reflection always arrives somewhat late – and rightly so. The time will certainly come when it responds to what is the reality of these difficult, albeit interesting, times.

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Keywords: intercultural German studies, hermeneutics of otherness, clash of civilisations, Botho Strauß

⁷⁶ *Ibidem.*

ABSTRACT

The migration crisis that followed the outbreak of war in Syria and the German policy of openness (Willkommenskultur) – which has triggered somewhat critical opinions in Polish right-wing periodicals – is a good opportunity to examine the term “interculturalism”. Even at the beginning of the 1980s, German academics attempted a redefinition of language studies, giving rise to “intercultural German studies”, associated with their most famous advocate, Alois Wierlacher. One of the premises involved going beyond Eurocentrism and abandoning the hermeneutics traditionally applied in the German humanities, in favour of what has come to be named the “hermeneutics of otherness” (Hermeneutik der Fremde). German literature was supposed to open up to new interpretations made from the point of view of remote cultures. Much more profound changes were proposed as a consequence of the “cultural turn” and taking account of the post-colonial perspective associated with such scholars as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. Now German studies were supposed to be given up in favour of intercultural literature studies or the trend known as “world literature”. Even after 11 September 2001, this conceptual and institutional development appeared to completely ignore the diagnosis presented by Samuel P. Huntington in 1993 as the “clash of civilisations”. The ideas formulated by Botho Strauß provide a counterpoint to the German postulates of the anthropologisation of the West. Given the clash of civilisations and the migration crisis, his diagnosis is extremely pessimistic: German society and culture will not survive being separated from their traditional values. A thorough perusal of his essays demonstrates that academic models do not provide adequate descriptions of reality and are actually destructive to Western societies.

