



| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Title | Sufism and Insurgency: Religiosity and Cosmopolitanism in Schwarze Jungfrauen by Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel |
| Authors(s) | Twist, Joseph |
| Publication date | 2014-12-23 |
| Publication information | Twist, Joseph. "Sufism and Insurgency: Religiosity and Cosmopolitanism in Schwarze Jungfrauen by Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel." Oxford University Press, December 23, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqu068 . |
| Publisher | Oxford University Press |
| Item record/more information | http://hdl.handle.net/10197/9844 |
| Publisher's statement | This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in Forum for Modern Language Studies following peer review. The definitive publisher-authenticated version Joseph Twist; Sufism and Insurgency: Religiosity and Cosmopolitanism in Schwarze Jungfrauen by Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel, Forum for Modern Language Studies, Volume 51, Issue 1, 1 January 2015, Pages 53–67, https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqu068 is available online at: https://academic.oup.com/fmls/article/51/1/53/599917 . |
| Publisher's version (DOI) | 10.1093/fmls/cqu068 |

Downloaded 2026-05-02 00:25:12

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)



© Some rights reserved. For more information

SUFISM AND INSURGENCY: RELIGIOSITY AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN *SCHWARZE JUNGFRAUEN* BY FERIDUN ZAIMOGLU AND GÜNTER SENKEL

JOSEPH TWIST

ABSTRACT

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Islam is increasingly being viewed as the Other of an enlightened and tolerant Germany. Turkish-German author Feridun Zaimoglu and his co-writer Günter Senkel destabilize these Western assumptions in the play *Schwarze Jungfrauen* (2006), in which performed monologues from the perspective of Muslim women evoke both fundamentalist and mystical (Sufi) manifestations of Islam. The play challenges contemporary cosmopolitan theory's engagement with religion, implying that its insistence upon the rational individual's exercise of free will is actually conducive to fundamentalism. Instead, *Schwarze Jungfrauen* suggests, corresponding with Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy, that any hope of stemming religious fundamentalism rests not in the perpetuation of immanent identities and universalizing ideologies, but rather in notions of religiosity and community beyond representation. Thus, rather than acting as a barrier to cosmopolitan solidarities, Islam, in the form of Sufism, in fact provides inspiration for a non-identitarian religiosity that would avoid religion-based conflict.

Keywords: Feridun Zaimoglu; Günter Senkel; *Schwarze Jungfrauen*; Jean-Luc Nancy; Islam; religion; cosmopolitanism; terrorism; German literature; Islam in Germany

FERIDUN ZAIMOGLU is one of the most celebrated contemporary German writers, and certainly one of the most controversial. He presents himself as a German Muslim,¹ and religiosity typically permeates his texts, which frequently highlight the multifaceted nature of Islam. Although his writing does not shy away from depictions of Islamic terrorism, it invariably challenges the media's stereotypical equation of Islam with insurgency, often evoking an unorthodox religiosity, inspired by Islamic mysticism (Sufism). The short story 'Gottes Krieger' (2004), for example, depicts a disillusioned Islamist who abandons his terrorist cell in Germany and becomes intimately acquainted with a Turkish widow with Sufi tendencies. His polemical monologue-based play *Schwarze Jungfrauen* (co-written with Günter Senkel, 2006) also engages with these two conflicting aspects of Islam, at times problematizing their clear-cut separation. The play is their most successful collaboration to date, in terms both of tickets sold and of academic attention. Yet

whereas other interpretations positively evaluate how the protagonists assert their subjectivity, I will argue that the play implies that the insistence of contemporary cosmopolitan theory on the rational individual's free will is actually conducive to fundamentalism, whilst also hinting at an alternative religiosity beyond representation – that is to say, an affective experience of the divine that is stripped of identity and doctrine.

Zaimoglu has himself expressed interest in an uninstitutionalized religious intensity:

Die Verdinglichung des Volksglaubens zum öffentlichen debattierten Tand, nämlich die totale Säkularisierung, und die Verdinglichung des Volksglaubens der Kirche mit einem Hohepriester als Verwalter einer Legende an der Spitze, sind beides Lügen. Denn es gibt einen Glutkern. Ganz gleich, ob man ihn postideologisch oder posthistorisch bezeichnet.²

This 'Glutkern' often comes through in passionate relationships in Zaimoglu's oeuvre,³ echoing Medieval Sufi poetry's conflation of divine and human love, and it is central to my understanding of the critique of fundamentalism implied in *Schwarze Jungfrauen*. Although only five monologues were performed for Neco Çelik's premiere (three, five, six, seven and ten, as they appear in the script, albeit with some discrepancies), I base my interpretation on the unpublished script of ten monologues, as this provides a more comprehensive insight into Zaimoglu's (and Senkel's) engagement with religious belief, and also because other versions of the play have made use of different parts of the script. I therefore read the script as a dramatic text, but will occasionally supplement my reading with reference to Çelik's direction.⁴

Schwarze Jungfrauen, supposedly based on authentic accounts by Muslim women, follows the recipe for success of Zaimoglu's earlier monologue-based texts *Kanak Sprak* (1995) and *Kopfstoff* (1998), but whereas these earlier texts offer the 'Turkish' insider perspective desired by the German public in the 1990s, *Schwarze Jungfrauen* reflects the post-9/11 *Zeitgeist*, affording a glimpse into the 'Muslim world'.⁵ Writing in 2006, Tom Cheesman originally described the religiosity of Zaimoglu's post 9/11 work as challenging 'left-liberal cosmopolitanism to lower its guard to presumed fanaticism',⁶ but reassessed his claim of cosmopolitanism's detachment from religion after engaging with Ulrich Beck's book *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence* (2010, first published in German in 2008),⁷ in which Beck discusses the possibility of shaping one's own religious identity. However, Cheesman detects tensions between Beck's assertion of subjective autonomy and Zaimoglu's rejection of the 'ideology of "freedom"',⁸ that is to say, the idea of the autonomous individual. Zaimoglu has criticized the term 'hybridity' for its association with the freedom to construct one's own identity,⁹ and such theories of individualism and free will, I will argue, are similarly undermined in *Schwarze Jungfrauen*. Indeed, just as Zaimoglu's cosmopolitanism has been understood as 'beyond identity',¹⁰ I will argue that any approach based on identity and subjectivity is equally inadequate to understand his religiosity. I propose an appeal to Jean-Luc Nancy's non-foundationalism in order to

illuminate both how *Schwarze Jungfrauen* critiques the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous individual found in Beck's writing, linking it with the identity conflicts of Islamic extremism, and how the play intimates a religious intensity outside of representation, a topic which echoes Nancy's recent writing on religion. Thus, whereas Frauke Matthes maintains that 'the play conveys the idea that freely choosing the components that make up a woman's Islam is itself something progressive',¹¹ I will argue that the play criticizes precisely this perceived individual autonomy, presenting it as conducive to fundamentalism and conflict.

For Nancy, community is 'neither work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self'.¹² Rather than the fusion of absolute individuals with a common identity, there is a shared exposure to finitude, resulting in 'a mutual interpellation of singularities prior to any address in language'.¹³ Nancy advocates thinking in terms of 'singular beings' who are ontologically interrelated – as Jane Hiddleston states: 'If the individual could traditionally be thought of as self-contained and autonomous, the singular being is defined by a series of linkages and interlacings with others.'¹⁴ This ontological interconnectedness, referred to as the 'inoperative community' by Nancy, arguably leads to cosmopolitan solidarities without the need for a universalizing ideology, such as human rights. Indeed, Nancy asserts that such ideologies violently impose a false uniformity on the world, closing down meaning, and this is partly to blame for his rejection of the term 'cosmopolitanism'.¹⁵ Instead, he demands that we no longer see the world as a representation or object outside of ourselves which can have a sense, but rather recognize that the circulation of meaning resulting from our 'being-in-the-world' is its sense.¹⁶

This weakening of the boundaries of subjectivity calls into question wider cultural boundaries. For Nancy, identity avoids completion and is subject to constant change, and is therefore devoid of any essence. Consequently, cultural identity cannot be considered a 'mélange', where immanent identities are mixed together,¹⁷ but must instead be regarded as a 'mêlée': '[Identity] never comes to be; it never identifies itself, even as an infinite projection, *because it is already there*, because it is the mêlée'.¹⁸ Hence identity is not a 'being', but a 'doing' that resists representation. This radical reconceptualization of community and rejection of absolute subjectivity informs my investigation of the competing strategies for thinking religiosity unconducive to identity conflict which are hinted at in *Schwarze Jungfrauen*.

Religion and cosmopolitanism in the post-9/11 world

In the wake of the terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam on 11 September 2001, contemporary cosmopolitan theory has been forced to acknowledge religion, which Beck does in *A God of One's Own*. Here, Beck argues that secularization in Europe has separated religion from the nation state, freeing it to be 'religion and nothing else',¹⁹ and that this decoupling of institutionalized/nationalized religion and subjective faith, together with the mass movement of people of various beliefs not formerly considered European, has led to the 'individualization'

and ‘cosmopolitanization’ of religious belief.²⁰ Religious belief is individualized, as it is determined by the believer rather than rigid and divisive institutionalized dogma, and it is cosmopolitanized, as globalization brings an increasing number of people into contact with ‘words and symbols which have abandoned their fixed “orbit” in the institutionalized coordinates of sovereign world religions’.²¹ People are therefore supposedly free to ‘write their own faith narratives’²² and consequently resist categorization within one homogeneous religious group, thereby avoiding religion-based conflict.

Nonetheless, although he does not envisage communal unity, Beck’s thinking is still problematic in its emphasis on the rational individual’s freedom to define their own religious identity – even if ‘[t]hey are not artists creating themselves, but bunglers cobbling an identity together’.²³ Although not implying a fixed identity, Beck’s theory is nevertheless incompatible with the singular being for whom identity is never a completed product. As Ignaas Devisch affirms, for Nancy,

[t]he ideology of the free individual is not so much a break *with* than a continuation *of* the desire for an immanent identity. In both cases, auto-production, be it individual or collective, is the beginning and end point.²⁴

Nancy asserts: ‘As soon as the proper name points to [*arraisonne*] a presence in person, a sovereign Subject, this sovereign is threatened; it is encircled, besieged,’²⁵ and this can shed light on the defensive behaviour that many of the ‘black virgins’ display regarding their identity.

For the singular being, however, it is not a matter of selecting an identity against which other identities may be judged. Rather, there are only constantly shifting identities whose transformations, in turn, change the sense of the world. Thus, given that Nancy regards meaning as arising from our being-in-common rather than any deity, it is no surprise that he believes that we gave religions their morals, rather than the reverse.²⁶ If religious identities are not fixed, they are equally open to new transformations that can revitalize religious culture, replacing fixed moral codes with contingency, and this process can be glimpsed in some of the women’s open attitudes towards sexuality in the play. Hiddleston’s book *Reinventing Community: Identity and Difference in Late Twentieth-Century Philosophy and Literature in French* (2005) also deals with Nancy’s notion of community and minority authors of a Muslim background, in Hiddleston’s case in North Africa, and she too argues for an understanding of Islam as ‘a series of singular-plural interpretations rather than as a cultural whole’.²⁷ Yet, whereas she focuses on authors who rebel against Islam, my aim is to highlight how Zaimoglu and Senkel work with Islam in *Schwarze Jungfrauen* in order to intimate a non-identitarian religiosity that would be compatible with cosmopolitanism.

Nancy avoids an atheist position, stating: ‘God is the being we are not, which is not at our disposal, either, but which appears or disappears before the face of the existing, mortal beings we are.’²⁸ He is, nevertheless, particularly scathing of institutionalized religions since, like his understanding of cosmopolitanism, they finish identities and remove death’s singularity.²⁹ Nancy does, nevertheless, offer

different ways of thinking about religiosity. In his early essay 'Of Divine Places' (1991; first published in French in 1986), he seems to demand that we 'abandon mediation',³⁰ leaving room, however, for 'the possibility of gods wandering from place to place, without allotted temples or established rituals'.³¹ As B. C. Hutchens mentions, for Nancy, it is not a question of 'whether a God exists, or what essential properties it possesses, but rather *how* it figures in empty sacred places',³² and the divine as empty sacred space is an important theme in Nancy's work concerning the deconstruction of monotheism and, more specifically, Christianity. In *The Creation of the World; or, Globalization* (2007; first published in French in 2002), Nancy draws upon the thought of the Lurianic kabala (and later will say that such thinking is present in the mysticisms of all the monotheisms³³), arguing:

the 'nothing' of creation is the one that opens in God when God withdraws in it (and in sum *from* it) in the act of creating. God annihilates itself [*s'anéantit*] as a 'self' or as a distinct being in order to 'withdraw' in its act – which makes the opening of the world.³⁴

Such thinking maintains the necessary non-foundationalism of Nancy's thought, and suggests a God that, rather than existing separate from the world, 'merges with it'.³⁵

In the more recent essay collection *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (2008; first published in French in 2005), Nancy develops his understanding of the divine as the nothingness of the origins of the world. He proposes, borrowing from mysticism, a God not as 'the "other world" [. . .], but the other of the world'.³⁶ Such a religiosity does not position God as the subject of the world and its organizing principle, but concerns itself instead with glimpsing the divine in the alterity in our world, which results from the very nothingness of its origins. As Christina M. Smerick explains:

Nancy underlines the notion of a content-less faith that ad-vocates nothing, but that is in and of the world, and is orientated to the void at the heart of being-with (a necessary void, in that it is an opening-up that allows being-with to be).³⁷

By emphasizing the religiosity of profane experiences, the immanentist strain of Sufism can imply a holiness that figures in the alterity of the world, rather than an other world. It is fitting, then, that in *Schwarze Jungfrauen* the divine, understood as the nothingness of the world's origins, should be glimpsed in the protagonists' openness towards others, for, as Nancy states: 'The alterity of the other is its being-origin.'³⁸

Similar to Nancy's notion of an unrepresentable community, his philosophy arguably leaves space for a religiosity beyond representation, which neither fosters communal unity and immanent identities, nor attempts to give clear meaning to death. As Nancy argues:

Holiness is neither determinable, nor representable, nor prescribable. It opens to or in man (unless we should say: it opens to the world or in the world, and not for man alone) the dimension and the movement, or gesture, of an 'infinitely coming to pass' [*d'un 'se passer infiniment*].³⁹

It is, therefore, perhaps better to think in terms of ‘singularization’ instead of ‘individualization’ when considering a religiosity that is compatible with cosmopolitanism in the form of the inoperative community. This would be a non-foundational religiosity, embedded in the mobile relations of our being-in-common, an openness towards the divine found in the alterity of the world and a scepticism of God as the Other of the world who bestows meaning upon it. Such a religiosity has no universal guiding principle and pacifies the active role of the believer, avoiding the ‘hierarchy of superiority and inferiority’ brought about by the ‘dualism of believers and unbelievers’, which Beck concedes is problematic for his individualization theory.⁴⁰ Whereas Beck maintains the immanence of identity and the dichotomy of self and other, sharing and differentiation are a fundamental aspect of Nancy’s singular-plural ontology, shifting emphasis away from thinking in terms of insurmountable others that breeds indifference or rejection and towards an openness towards others and the divine. These notions of ‘individualization’ and ‘singularization’ reflect the differing mindsets of the black virgins, and will be explored in the following section.

Gods of their own: the competing religiosities of ‘Schwarze Jungfrauen’

Schwarze Jungfrauen supposedly allows its audience to peek behind Muslim women’s veils – both metaphorically and literally, as in Çelik’s opening sequence the actors, arranged in a vertical grid, remove their long black coats, headscarves and wigs to reveal their skin-coloured body suits and shaven heads, which, together with their slow, stilted body movements, give them the appearance of naked shop manikins or dolls (see **Figure 1**). The women of Zaimoglu’s play paradoxically unsettle and confirm prejudices simultaneously, reversing gendered Muslim stereotypes of zealous and violently fanatical men and meek, oppressed women. The play, as Katrin Sieg summarizes, ‘confronts spectators with Muslim women’s complex ethnic, sexual, and religious negotiations that explode any simplistic binaries.’⁴¹ Like the unnamed protagonist of ‘Gottes Krieger’, who also, despite enjoying extramarital sex, never relinquishes his aspiration for an Islamic state, these women are unsettling characters who provoke both identification and repulsion. For example, their feminist⁴² demands to have control over their own bodies would perhaps be applauded, if they were not articulated alongside vitriolic attacks on Jews and homosexuals – such as the ‘party girl’ (the sixth monologue⁴³), who lambasts imams for perpetuating the patriarchy of the Qur’an, which she interprets herself, but also believes in a theocratic state and cries: ‘Nieder mit dem Jüdisch-Amerikanischen Imperium’ (pp. 31–33). It is indicative of German preconceptions and expectations that the ‘party girl’, who practises her belief in private, does not wear a veil, believes in extramarital sex, and must leave her family home after naked photos of her are uploaded to the internet, attracted the most attention from reviewers. As Ipek A. Celik affirms: ‘The critics consider her to be “almost” the perfectly integrated minority woman – if only she had not evaded her secular propriety by saying, “Long live theocracy.”’⁴⁴

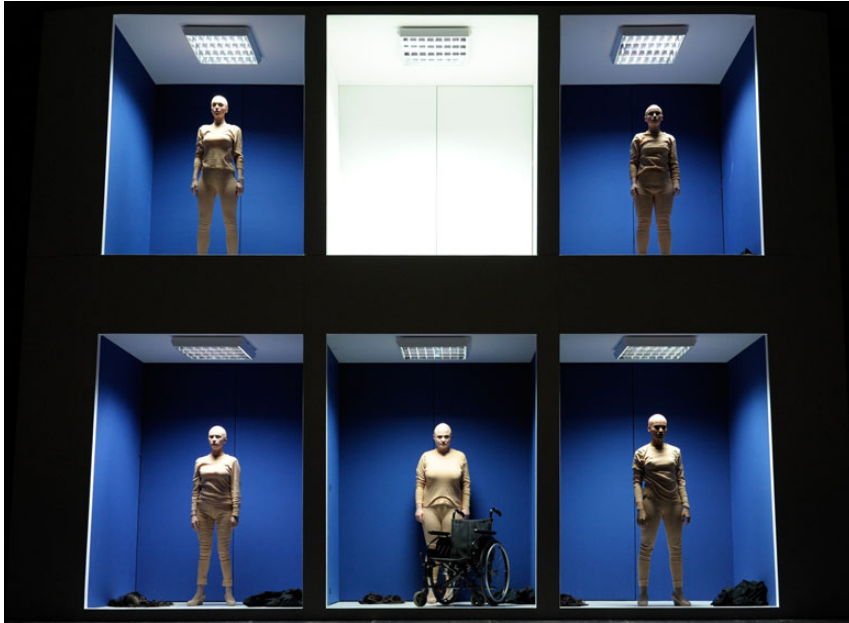


Figure 1: The ‘Black Virgins’ with their discarded clothes, ©Thomas Aurin.

Schwarze Jungfrauen aggressively overfulfils stereotypical expectations, incorporating ethnic Germans’ main fears regarding their Muslim ‘Others’, such as Germany becoming an Islamic country (pp. 3, 5 and 33), a return to anti-Semitism (pp. 14 and 46) and, of course, Islamic terrorism and *jihad* (pp. 2, 18, 23, 41 and 46). Despite confirming some clichés, the play also exposes them as contradictory, shattering any preconceived ideas of Muslim homogeneity. The black virgins come from Germany, Turkey and Bosnia, and they also vary in their orthodoxy. Some are violent, while others are not, and their attitudes vis-à-vis sexual behaviour can directly contradict one another. In particular, the second and seventh monologues, of which only the seventh is performed under Çelik, stand out as more sceptical but genuine attempts to access the religious ‘Glutkern’. This has hitherto gone unnoticed in the scholarship, as previous interpretations have omitted the unperformed monologues, focusing instead on either Çelik’s staging or the monologues published in the magazine *Theater heute*, but also because scholars have tended to categorize all the women as ideologically Islamist.

Interpretations overwhelmingly attribute significance to the women’s autonomous individuality⁴⁵ – in Celik’s words: ‘The black virgins’ beliefs are defined not through influence of a collectivity or tradition but through self-discovery or freedom of choice.’⁴⁶ This implies that their fundamentalist standpoint emerges from an individualized religiosity. Beck argues that Islamic fundamentalism in Europe has not been imported, but stems in fact from separation from the culture

of origin,⁴⁷ and *Schwarze Jungfrauen* stresses the arrival of a specifically German Islam. Most of the women appear to be recent converts; the woman of the first monologue reads the Qur'an in German (p. 4), and the final woman, an ethnic German convert, asserts 'dass Allah kein Ausländer ist' (p. 56). Moreover, like their 'Kanak' / 'Kanaka' counterparts, they often define their identity in opposition to their parents' generation, underlining the fact that Islamic fundamentalism was not brought to Germany by the first wave of *Gastarbeiter*. For instance, the woman of the first monologue distinguishes herself from both her Westernized mother, whose nails she describes as gaudy red talons (p. 3), and her liberal father, who cannot grow accustomed to his daughter's headscarf (p. 4).

Just as Beck argues that, once separated from their territorial norms, 'European Muslims are turning to a new spirituality characterized by a process of searching, selecting and combining that is carried out under the aegis of individual faith,'⁴⁸ some of the black virgins also appear to be fashioning Gods of their own. For Beck, it is common for European Muslims to practise an individualized faith whilst not subscribing to the postmodern aspect of his theory that rejects all truth claims.⁴⁹ However, as I have argued, selecting the components of one's own supposedly immanent identity necessitates a separation from those who would pollute that identity. This leaves the inoperative community inaccessible and arguably makes people less likely to view outside influences as enrichment, as Beck would have them do – a situation presented in *Schwarze Jungfrauen*, as the play shows strong, often threatening, independent Muslim women who have taken their faith into their own hands, but who position themselves in (often violent) opposition to others. Thus, whereas the black virgins' self-confidence and attempts to construct their own faith have been viewed as progressive, I would argue that Zaimoglu turns Beck's discourse of a 'progressive' God of one's own on its head, implying that this modern outlook, characterized by the Enlightenment emphasis on the rational, autonomous individual, is in fact the root of their religious fundamentalism. Indeed, with regard to the play, Zaimoglu himself suggests, alongside its distance from tradition, that orthodoxy results from the standpoint of the autonomous individual: 'In diesem Leben hat religiöse Orthodoxie weniger mit unreflektierter Tradition zu tun als mit einer individuell gewählten Selbstbehauptungsstrategie.'⁵⁰ This ties in with Thomas Bauer's argument that it was after contact with Western modernism that Islam lost its tolerance of ambiguity and fossilized into an ideology.⁵¹

Some of the women, consistent with their self-perception as absolute individuals, think in terms of oppositional communal unities along the lines of religion and nationality, perpetuating Samuel Huntington's narrative of a 'clash of civilizations'.⁵² The woman of the first monologue, for instance, defines her faith against Judaism and Christianity, emphasizing her faith's superiority by using Nazi vocabulary to refer to the Pope:

Predige du nur, du Verräter im Vatikan, predige die Gottesspaltung, und die Idioten füllen die Plätze und rufen dir zu: Heil Papst! Denn der Verräter will den totalen Kreuzzug, und die Herde der Lämmer folgt ihm. (p. 5)

Likewise, the woman of the ninth monologue is unwilling to look beyond her closed community, suggesting a communal unity that would militate against her ontological interrelatedness: 'Ich bin kein Antisemit. Ich bin aber auch kein Schleimer, ich erklär die Juden nicht zu meinem Interessengebiet' (p. 51).

Alongside Germany, the US and Israel are also contrasted with Islam in the script, raising the issue of Palestine. The woman of the fifth monologue establishes an American/Muslim dichotomy, viewing the attack on the Twin Towers as a victory for Islam. For her, the 9/11 conspiracy theories emerged because the American 'Schweinefresser' did not want to believe that Muslims were capable of such an act (pp. 23–24). Moreover, she refers to her 'Schwestern in Glauben' (p. 24), just as the woman of the eighth monologue speaks of 'wir Dschihadmoslems' (p. 41), implying communal fusion. The eighth woman defines herself against so-called 'Betschwestern' (p. 41) who ignore or interpret differently the passages of the Qur'an that appear to incite holy war. These criticisms of people and organizations who claim to stand for the 'true' and tolerant Islam are continued in the ninth monologue. Rather than 'Betschwestern', here they are labelled 'Toleranzmoslems' (p. 49), and she similarly attacks the hypocrisy of universalists who regard French- and US-style constitutions as the cornerstone of a cosmopolitan and tolerant state:

Ein Humanist ist ein Spießer und ein Untermensch, er möchte nur andere Menschen auf sein Niveau herunterziehen, seine aggressive Liebe zwingt ihn manchmal zum Einsatz scheußlicher Waffen, aber jedes Mal weint er über den Gräbern der Toten, und daran kann man dann sehen, was für ein sensibler Humanist er ist. Alle amerikanischen Präsidenten waren Humanisten, deshalb sind sie ja auch mit den Indianern, den Schwarzen, und den Südamerikanern so freundlich umgesprungen. (p. 49)

This can be regarded as a criticism of the violence of universalist cosmopolitanism towards ideological enemies, which Beck acknowledges: 'Realistic cosmopolitans [...] must come to terms with the idea that, in making respect for the other the heart of their program, cosmopolitanism produces enemies who can be checked only by force.'⁵³ Similarly, the individualized yet ideological religiosity of these women is no barrier to identity conflict, whereas Nancy's non-foundational ontology, on the other hand, does not result in such divisions.

Zaimoglu's writing often equates amorous and religious intensities, positively evaluating openness towards others whilst implicitly criticizing the isolation of absolute individualism.⁵⁴ As so many of the black virgins are consumed with hate and are lacking in love, the play is arguably critical of them. Cheesman speaks of a 'Romantic love of fervour for the sake of fervour' in Zaimoglu's writing,⁵⁵ and the woman of the first monologue does appear to experience an intensity in her submission before God: 'Ich habe mich gesehnt nach Gott, und da ich mich Ihm unterworfen habe, sehne ich mich weiter, die Sehnsucht brennt sich ein in mein Herz' (p. 6). However, she remains closed off from much of the world, such as her parents, Christians, Jews, other 'heathens' and the West in general. She leaves her family home because of her mother's Spanish boyfriend,

perhaps indicating that she is jealous of the love her mother shares with him. Likewise, the woman of the third monologue, who lambasts promiscuous girls and homosexuals, drives away her lover by offering him a rule-restricted relationship and rushing him into marriage (p. 17). Her last statement expresses a desire to balance love and fundamentalism:

Mein Islam ist mir geblieben die Dschihadfront steht ich bin schwer für Dschihad aber mit der Liebe da denk ich mit der Liebe könnt es auch langsam klappen Dschihad und Liebe da wäre ich echt mal glücklich zum ersten Mal in meinem Leben. (p. 18)

Yet this appears an impossible task. In Zaimoglu's writing, drugs, alcohol and smoking often imply a need to compensate for an intensity of feeling that is lacking, and after her fiancé leaves, the woman of this monologue starts to smoke Aldi cigarettes (pp. 18–19), suggesting that, despite her enthusiasm for *jihad*, be this a bellicose or a spiritual interpretation of the concept, the religious 'Glutkern' is absent.

Other women's religiosity, although equally ambivalent, seems less prone to identity conflict and evokes the ambiguity between religious and profane experiences of the immanentist Sufi tradition. Like the party girl's monologue, the seventh monologue, from the perspective of a disabled Muslim woman who is paralysed from the neck down, similarly rejects orthodox Islam's moral code. She appears to lack any self-worth – describing herself as 'ein Islamistenzweig' in comparison to 'Vollkraftmenschen' (p. 34) – and conducts a sadomasochistic relationship with her carer. It could be argued that she is a hypocrite, which she herself wonders (p. 37). Yet after a process of quarrelling with God, she regards her relationship with the carer as inconsequential for her honour (p. 40), and even describes him in religious terminology as an 'unanständiger Engel' (p. 36) who creeps into her thoughts during prayer (p. 37). Here, Sufi imagery is employed in order to hint at a singularized religiosity that is questioning, compatible with sexual pleasure, and figures in the alterity of the world. According to Navid Kermani, a German author of Iranian background with academic expertise in Islamic Studies, the medieval mystic Attar of Nishapur portrays the relationship between God and Man as sexual sadomasochism based on mutual necessity and freedom in submission.⁵⁶ This is reflected in the woman's remark:

er ist der Sadist, dem einer abgeht, wenn er eine fast mongoloide Al Qaida-Krähe schändet; sie ist eine Masochistin, weil sie seinen Schwanz in den Mund nimmt, obwohl es ihr von Gott verboten ist. (p. 37)

This symbolism goes against current attempts to downplay God's terror, as the God-like carer arguably abuses the woman for whose wellbeing he is responsible. Yet, as Annemarie Schimmel states: 'Obedience, as the Sufis understood it, is complete surrender and acceptance of the will of the beloved whether it manifests itself in kindness or in wrath.'⁵⁷

Thus, whereas the woman of the sixth monologue regards God as a replacement for lovers, as Matthes mentions⁵⁸ – and this, I would argue, can be viewed as isolating and thus negative – the woman of the seventh has an embodied experience of

the divine through sex, which is, however, also glimpsed in the former life of the sixth woman, who describes losing her virginity as feeling like the gates of heaven opening (p. 28). The disabled woman's religiosity is, then, different from the other protagonists' individualized religiosity in that she both questions her belief and remains open to unexpected divine influences (here in the form of sexual pleasure), intimating a holiness beyond representation. Here, the relationship between orthodoxy and genuine religious intensity is complicated, but I would contend that her self-portrayal as an Islamist stems from a lack of self-esteem, rather than ideological conviction. Although she takes satisfaction in the 'unheimlich' appearance of the plastic nose-covering under her veil (p. 34), her attempts at distancing herself from others are ultimately undone by her relationship with the carer.

The second monologue, too, conveys a religiosity that is influenced by sceptical thinkers of the Sufi tradition who, despite the Qur'an's strict prohibition of doubting divine providence,⁵⁹ questioned God, shifting meaning away from a divine Other and towards the world. It is the story of a woman whose husband has died of cancer, prompting her to question God's fairness (p. 9). She expresses a will to live like an ascetic, begging for scraps of food and devoting the rest of her time to prayer, but acknowledges that her faith will not allow her to withdraw from life totally, implying both an openness and a worldliness to her religiosity. This is reminiscent of what 'Muhammad is reported to have told a man who boasted of fasting every day and praying at night[, namely] that he should follow the Prophet's own example, and moderate his devotions so that he could partake of normal human activities: food, sleep, and sex'.⁶⁰ As in Sufism, this monologue emphasizes God's love (p. 7) and, similar to Nancy, the woman views religiosity as a 'being-unto-God'. She declares: 'Mein Herr sendet Sein Licht, wem Er will. Und Er schließt sie aus vom Licht, die sich Ihm nicht ergeben' (p. 8), just as, according to Nancy: 'The god is not the freedom to *be-unto* in general. He is not projected-toward or destined-to. He simply comes, in radiance and in the withdrawal of radiance.'⁶¹ Thus the second monologue also constitutes a singularized religiosity that, unlike the other individualist women's attempts at absolute subjective autonomy, does not impede the believer's openness towards others.

Conclusion

Through its portrayal of a diverse selection of Muslim women, *Schwarze Jungfrauen* challenges notions of a homogeneous 'Muslim community'. The black virgins each have Gods of their own, many of them in Beck's individualized sense, but others arguably in the manner of a singularized openness towards the divine in the alterity of the world. Those women characterized by an individualized religiosity are more likely to be fundamentalist, defining themselves in opposition to other supposedly immanent groups/individuals through the perceived superiority of their own spiritual choices, and lacking in love. Yet their aggressive opposition to others nevertheless destabilizes their very status as absolute individuals; 'Even

closed societies,' as Devisch states, 'must have a relation to what they wish to shut themselves off from (the impure, the not-self).'⁶²

Similar to the disorientating narrative techniques of Zaimoglu's more recent novels,⁶³ Çelik's production also undermines our reception of the women as coherent subjects: although the women are isolated in separate boxes on stage, they are all dressed the same, they change position during blackouts, and the monologues are divided up and interspersed. These techniques play with the notion that, although Muslim women are often perceived to be all the same, they are in fact very different. As Sieg argues, alongside denying the audience an omniscience,⁶⁴ this staging also emphasizes the shared problems Muslim women face, such as sexism and xenophobia.⁶⁵ However, whereas Sieg views these theatrical techniques as an indication of the black virgins' status as individuals yet also as part of a collective group,⁶⁶ I regard this as incompatible with their conflicting religiosities and moral codes, which the order in which the monologues are pieced together by Çelik also serves to highlight. Rather, this performance echoes Nancy's understanding of alterity based on singular plurality, and not on the dichotomy of same/different, and I would therefore contend that if these women are part of a collectivity, it is either one they imagine themselves or one forced upon them by the audience, despite the confusing staging and the women's contradictory statements. Just as Nancy demands that we think of ourselves as an integral part of the world, as opposed to the subject of its representation who confers meaning upon it, Zaimoglu often denies us the position of outside viewer of his characters, weakening both their and our perceived immanent subjectivity. Thus, rather than locating the play's subversiveness in its reversal of the subject-object binary in favour of minority women, as Saniye Uysal Ünalán does,⁶⁷ I instead view its radical dissolution of such dualisms as subversive.

Although the black virgins are flawed, they are equally presented as not entirely to blame. Particularly through their comments on the US and Israeli regimes, they appear, in spite of their confidence, as victims of what the Turkish-German writer and intellectual Zafer Şenocak has labelled a Muslim 'psychosis':

Man fühlt sich dem Westen gegenüber unterlegen, gedemütigt und verraten. Doch die politischen Konsequenzen dieser Psychose sind verheerend. Sie spielen jenen Kräften in die Hände, die den Terror anfachen, um das Chaos in der islamischen Welt zu vergrößern.⁶⁸

For Şenocak:

[Der Terror] ist Handwerk des männerbündischen Islam, der mit aller Macht verhindern möchte, dass Frauen gleichberechtigt werden und ihre Jahrhunderte lange Unterjochung ein Ende findet.⁶⁹

Many of the black virgins have achieved a kind of equality, as Sieg argues:

Through the concept of virginity, Muslim girls are shown to negotiate autonomy and sexual self-determination vis-à-vis Europeans' stereotypical perceptions of victimhood *and* patriarchal command of respectability.⁷⁰

Yet they often make use of this equality to perpetuate the very same extremism and fundamentalist mindset that kept them oppressed.

Moreover, their animosity and inflexible belief, where present, are arguably a response to a society dominated by thinking in terms of absolute individuals and communal fusion that sees them as fundamentally Other. Despite this, Zaimoglu and Senkel's script (aided by Çelik's direction) serves to undermine thinking in terms of absolute individuals, both by demonstrating how the black virgins' faiths are determined by outside influences and also by hinting at a singularized, non-identitarian religiosity that is based on a sceptical openness towards the divine and others. Zaimoglu therefore challenges Western equations of Islam with terrorism not only by evoking Islam's mystical heritage, but also by highlighting the Enlightenment paradigms that have influenced Islamic fundamentalism. In this regard, *Schwarze Jungfrauen* implies that any hope of diminishing the universalizing religious fundamentalism of the early twenty-first century rests not in the perpetuation of similarly universalizing, identity-driven cosmopolitan theories, but rather in an abandonment of such thinking in favour of a singular-plural ontology, and a religiosity and cosmopolitanism beyond representation.

*School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
United Kingdom
joseph.twist@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk*

NOTES

¹ Tom Cheesman and Karin E. Yeşilada, "‘Ich bin nicht modern’ / ‘I’m not modern’: Interviews with Feridun Zaimoglu", in *Feridun Zaimoglu*, ed. by Tom Cheesman and Karin E. Yeşilada (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 39–69 (p. 50).

² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³ See Margaret Littler, 'Intimacies both Sacred and Profane: Islam in the Work of Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Zafer Şenocak, and Feridun Zaimoğlu', in *Encounters with Islam in German Literature and Culture*, ed. by James Hodkinson and Jeff Morrison (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), pp. 221–35.

⁴ I thank the Rowohlt Theater-Verlag for the script and the University of Manchester's Postgraduate Research Travel Fund for financing my trip to see the play directed by Çelik at the Maxim Gorki Theater in February 2014. I am also grateful to Prof. Margaret Littler and Dr Anastasia Valassopoulos for their insightful comments.

⁵ Reim Spielhaus, 'Religion and Identity: How Germany's Foreigners have Become Muslims', *Internationale Politik*, 8:2 (2006), 17–23 (p. 18).

⁶ Tom Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish-German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), pp. 75–76.

⁷ Tom Cheesman, 'Nathan without the Rings: Postmodern Religion in *Nathan Messias*', in *Feridun Zaimoglu*, ed. Cheesman and Yeşilada, pp. 117–44 (pp. 119–20).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Cheesman and Yeşilada, "‘Ich bin nicht modern’ / ‘I’m not modern’", pp. 54–56.

- ¹⁰ Margaret Littler, 'Between Romantic Love and War Machine: *Liebesbrand*', in Feridun Zaimoglu, ed. Cheesman and Yeşilada, pp. 219–38 (p. 220).
- ¹¹ Frauke Matthes, '“Authentic” Muslim Voices? Feridun Zaimoğlu's *Schwarze Jungfrauen*', in *Religion and Identity in Germany Today: Doubters, Believers, Seekers in Literature and Film*, ed. by Julian Preece, Frank Finlay and Sinead Crowe (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 199–210 (pp. 204–05).
- ¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor, trans. by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 19.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁴ Jane Hiddleston, *Reinventing Community: Identity and Difference in Late Twentieth-Century Philosophy and Literature in French* (Oxford: Legenda, 2005), p. 71.
- ¹⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 136.
- ¹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World; or, Globalization*, trans. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 40–41.
- ¹⁷ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 149.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- ¹⁹ Ulrich Beck, *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*, trans. by Rodney Livingston (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), p. 25.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ²⁴ Ignaas Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 60.
- ²⁵ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 146.
- ²⁶ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 138.
- ²⁷ Hiddleston, *Reinventing Community*, p. 79.
- ²⁸ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 131.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- ³² B. C. Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), p. 87.
- ³³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. by Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michal B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 69–70.
- ³⁴ Nancy, *The Creation of the World*, p. 70.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p. 10.
- ³⁷ Christina M. Smerick, 'No Other Place to Be: Globalization, Monotheism and *Salut* in Nancy', in *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense*, ed. by Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 27–41 (p. 36).
- ³⁸ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 11.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁴⁰ Beck, *A God of One's Own*, p. 55.
- ⁴¹ Katrin Sieg, 'Black Virgins: Sexuality and the Democratic Body in Europe', *New German Critique*, 37:1 (2010), 147–85 (pp. 151–52).
- ⁴² See Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (London: Routledge, 2001) for a discussion of Arab Muslim women who, to avoid punishment or accusations of Westernization, try to express their feminism within the constraints of orthodox Islam.

- ⁴³ Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel, *Schwarze Jungfrauen* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Theater Verlag, 2006), pp. 28–33; subsequent references are provided in the text.
- ⁴⁴ Ipek A. Celik, 'Performing Veiled Women as Marketable Commodities: Representations of Muslim Minority Women in Germany', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32:1 (2012), 116–29 (pp. 122–23).
- ⁴⁵ See, e.g.: Matthes, '“Authentic” Muslim Voices?', p. 203; Sieg, 'Black Virgins', p. 156; Celik, 'Performing Veiled Women as Marketable Commodities', p. 120; and Claudia Breger, *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theatre, Literature, and Film in Contemporary Germany* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 237.
- ⁴⁶ Celik, 'Performing Veiled Women as Marketable Commodities', p. 126.
- ⁴⁷ Beck, *A God of One's Own*, p. 33.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Eva Behrendt, 'Zumutung gegen Vermutung: Über Feridun Zaimoglus und Günter Senkel's semidokumentarische Monologe *Schwarze Jungfrauen* und ihre Uraufführung am HAU Berlin', *Theater heute*, 47:5 (2006), 40–42 (p. 41).
- ⁵¹ Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Insel, 2011), p. 52.
- ⁵² See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Free Press, 2002).
- ⁵³ Ulrich Beck, 'The Truth of Others: A Cosmopolitan Approach', *Common Knowledge*, 10:3 (2004), 430–49 (p. 431).
- ⁵⁴ Joseph Twist, '“The Crossing of Love”: The Inoperative Community and Romantic Love in Feridun Zaimoglu's “Fünf klopfende Herzen, wenn die Liebe springt” and *Hinterland*', *German Life and Letters*, 67:3 (2014), 399–417 (p. 403).
- ⁵⁵ Cheesman, 'Nathan', p. 142.
- ⁵⁶ Navid Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes: Attar, Hiob und die metaphysische Revolte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005), p. 205.
- ⁵⁷ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 135.
- ⁵⁸ Matthes, '“Authentic” Muslim Voices?', p. 205.
- ⁵⁹ Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes*, p. 165.
- ⁶⁰ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), p. 12.
- ⁶¹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 126.
- ⁶² Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, p. 41.
- ⁶³ See Littler, 'Between Romantic Love and War Machine', p. 228; and Twist, '“The Crossing of Love”', pp. 412–13.
- ⁶⁴ Sieg, 'Black Virgins', p. 185.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–54.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- ⁶⁷ Saniye Uysal Ünalán, *Interkulturelle Begegnungsräume: Neue Identitätskonstruktionen in der türkisch-deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), p. 125.
- ⁶⁸ Zafer Şenocak, 'Der Terror kommt aus dem Herzen des Islam', *DIE WELT*, 29 December 2007, <<http://www.welt.de/politik/article1500196/Der-Terror-kommt-aus-dem-Herzen-des-Islam.html>> [accessed 6 October 2014].
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ Sieg, 'Black Virgins', p. 185.