

World as *Heimat*: Ernst Bloch and the Future of a Contested Term¹

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This paper examines the interaction between Heimat as a social construct and the authentic longing for Heimat and security in Ernst Bloch's magnum opus The Principle of Hope. Echoing the language of globalization and hypermobility, the ideas of place-lessness and detachment from specific locations seem to be the fundamental characteristics of today's life. But behind this lies the human need to continuously establish new perceptions of Heimat and new practices of Heimat-making. Heimat, then, I argue, is not a romantic, fixed, and limited place to be protected. It is a pluralistic and conflict-ridden sphere of agency that can foster social exclusion, but which can also open up new connections and possibilities for human self-determination.

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What Makes the Talk of *Heimat* Explosive Again Today?

Heimat is a German term that became current in the 19th century. It played a prominent role in the Romantic period, not least in connection with the formation of a new German national consciousness in the wake of modern German history. It is associated, as can be seen in the rise of *Heimatkunde* and *Heimat* movements, with the discovery and, often, the glorification of one's own history

during the Romantic period. Originally, the word comes from the Germanic *Heim*, meaning house, landed property or inherited estate. In contemporary usage, *Heimat* is often identified with a person's place of birth, country of origin, or residence. This is shown by a survey conducted in Germany in 2017: according to this survey, *Heimat* means the place of residence for 16 percent of those surveyed, the place of birth for 15 percent, the family for 45 percent, friends for six percent and the country for 14 percent (Koch 169).² *Heimat*, it can be inferred, is therefore for most people where they are "at home" or where they feel "at home."

Home, however, has many meanings that resonate when the word is used in the sense of the German *Heimat*. It is a word loaded with emotion, and it is not meant to be easily rendered in literal translation. There are dozens of possibilities to translate the term into German, which not only point out the diversity and ambiguity of possible references, but also disclose how people from diverse cultural reference systems can conceptualize the term. Politicians often use the term strategically to serve voter interests or to stir up nationalist resentment. Similar things happen ipso facto in other languages. Max Frisch, a politically committed Swiss playwright and novelist, identified *Heimat* as follows:

MY COUNTRY extends and limits *Heimat* from the outset to a national territory, HOMELAND presupposes colonies, MOTHERLAND sounds more tender than Vaterland, which likes to demands things and protects less than it wants to be protected with life and limb, LA PATRIE, which immediately raises a flag – and I cannot say that the sight of a Swiss cross makes me feel at home immediately and under all circumstances.³ (Frisch 510)

Heimat has become an increasingly fluid and elusive concept which, contingent on the political circumstances, demands to be constantly reevaluated, redefined, and demarcated. This paper examines precisely this interaction between *Heimat* as a social construct and the ambivalent desire for *Heimat* and security in the contentious history of Germany in the twentieth century: What can previous conceptions in German thought tell us about the ambiguity of *Heimat*? What is

their unredeemed potential for the pluralistic and ever more polarized societies of today?

The so-called sixty-eighters, when they were about 20 years old, found their own attitude to *Heimat* expressed in a term that was truly relevant to Germans in the years after World War II: *Unbehaustheit* (state of homelessness).⁴ It was in 1968, when students from Germany, France, Italy, the United States, and even in the then conservative Switzerland thought: “We were rebelling against a world that was administered, against an unjust world in which people were starving, against the Vietnam War, against neo-colonialism, we were against oppressive states and exploitative systems that we held responsible for the predicament.”⁵ Much has changed since then, and it seemed as if this past had been overcome. But for some years now, violent nationalism and territorial expansionism has been resurfacing. The war in Ukraine makes it apparent that peace in Europe is not self-evident. After Donald Trump took office, presidential elections were underway in France, and there were fears of an election victory by Marine Le Pen, who proudly calls herself a populist and wants, as she says, to “give the French back their fatherland” (Dietschy 78). Similar right-wing populist or even fascist movements are growing strongly in many European countries, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark. They are even in government in Poland, Hungary, Turkey and, more recently, Italy. In Germany, the AfD (Alternative for Germany) has just managed to be represented in parliament in all federal states, reaching up to almost 30 percent of the votes, depending on the region.⁶

It is striking: the *Heimat* that is constructed in these discourses is always a *Heimat* against others, one that excludes others. Here, *Heimat* operates as an exclusion criterion that determines (non)belonging to a state and especially towards a German nation of culture (*Kulturnation*). Right-wing parties attempt to influence these finely ground mechanisms of affiliation and seek to mobilize the electorate by nurturing mono-ethnically motivated resentments that the concept of home may entail. It is about nothing other than the sacred promise of power and white privilege that meets with so much resonance among the “proud”

natives. One's "own" is to be defended against the "strangers," i.e., against refugees who seek asylum, but also against "foreigners" already living in the country, whose parents immigrated or fled. Switzerland has even played a pioneering role in Europe in this regard. As early as 1970, there was a right-wing populist mass movement that wanted to fight the so-called "over-foreignization" (*Überfremdung*) of the country by Italian or Spanish guest workers with a constitutional initiative.⁷

The Nietzschean notion of *ressentiment* helps us understand the inherent psychological effects triggered by resentments towards foreigners in Europe. Nietzschean *ressentiment* appears in the *Genealogy of Morals* (GM) as a "slave revolt in morality," being understood as fundamentally negative as well as reactive, rooted in the disavowal of whatever is different from it (GM I 10). In contrast to master morality, it is facing outward and saying "no" to the antagonistic external forces that oppose and suppress it. It is, according to Nietzsche scholar Guy Elgat, "an affectively charged desire for revenge that involves the belief that someone or other is responsible for the suffering that causes it" (46). This substitution of despising for hatred, the replacement of straightforward antagonism through insidious envy, "the most dangerous of all explosives," the transfer of the pain associated with one's own failure to an external scapegoat is what Nietzsche has called a *ressentiment* (GM III 15). One creates an enemy that can be blamed for one's own inferiority or failure. This recalls to me Aristotle's definition of anger as "an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends" (Rhetoric II 2 1378b), the belittlement not having been deserved. For Aristotle, anger is targeted at a specific individual, not at a group or a particular type of person. Anger engenders joy in anticipation of vengeance for perceived wrongdoing. Anger is the distinctive emotional state of the Homeric hero, an emotion of strength, one might think, culminating most typically in straightforward, sincere outbursts. But Nietzschean *ressentiment* is certainly an emotion of weakness, manifesting itself typically sneakily and insidiously (though

not necessarily), usually not erupting immediately, but seething, stewing, and fermenting. This is exactly the form of resentment that we can draw upon in Europe and from which the mechanisms of exclusion are fueled. Nietzsche metaphorically explains to us the disgust and rage, the deeply rooted hatred that constantly triggers violence and the desire for revenge, resulting from the fear of the unknown and unfamiliar – the foreign(er). The fear that often discharges itself in violence, these inexorable and insoluble resentments inevitably lead to an alienation from one's *Heimat*, and to xenophobia, which the parties of the extreme right exploit so skillfully that they gain sympathy and votes.

Therefore, what worries me most is the politically successfully induced xenophobia that is rampant in many European countries today. It is no coincidence that this has become the core theme of the new nationalist movements.⁸ Zygmunt Bauman pointed out years ago that xenophobia is based on experiences of foreignness or alienation (*Moderne und Ambivalenz* 83). What he means by this is that we experience in foreigners that we ourselves are foreigners. We can blame them for this because they emerge in our country, as refugees, as migrants, and make us experience a foreignness that frightens us by reminding us of our own fears.

Bauman's observations concur not only with Nietzsche's idea of *ressentiment* and give further evidence that xenophobia is an act of revenge against "the" unknown and therefore feared foreign(er) who, after being essentialized, disturbs or contaminates the air. The Nietzschean metaphor of "bad air" represents humanity's regression and decline in modern Europe: "What is it that I especially find utterly unendurable? That I cannot cope with, that makes me choke and faint? Bad air! Bad air! The approach of some ill-constituted thing; that I must smell the entrails of some ill-constituted soul" (GM I 12)! Nietzsche uses this metaphor because he assumes that the predominant moral code in Europe portrays aggression and the desire for power as evil. However, he sees these negative aspects as part of human nature that has been inherited from ancient ancestors who instinctively derived satisfaction from hunting and killing. He believes that European culture compels people to

suppress their aggressive instincts, which leads them to endure suffering, and that this suffering prevents them from thriving and experiencing life with joy and causes humanity to atrophy. He symbolizes this atrophy by imagining that Europe is not full of healthy, happy people actively living as fully realized human beings. Instead, it is full of people who are forced to hold back a part of themselves, that they do not really live, but suffer and die, and their corpses exude “bad air.” It is precisely this atrophy of humanity that leads vulnerable people, even in the present, to join right-wing extremist ideas. These people find their salvation in membership in these dangerous groups. Here they do not have to hold back but can indulge in their obsession.

A Brief Look Back at National Socialism

Heimat understood as the space for indulging one’s own *ressentiment* is appealing to many. It promises a sense of roots for the uprooted. In the 1920s this was a message that appealed to many who had lost their footing during or after the war. A quotation from a 1923 publication with the innocuous title “Der Bildungswert der Heimatkunde” (The educational value of local history) may display how a new mythology could develop around land and soil: “*Heimat* is total connection with the soil that can be experienced and lived. ... *Heimat* is spiritual root feeling” (qtd. in Koch 170). This was written by the philosopher and educator Eduard Spranger, who was committed to humanistic educational ideals. Ten years later, in April 1933, he expressed the view that the will to become a people which has become a force out of the war experiences, and which constitutes the great positive core of the National Socialist movement, was to be found in the nobility of blood and consanguinity. He emphasized, thus, the commonality of German blood (“Sinn für die Gemeinsamkeit des Blutes”) and down-to-earth loyalty to the *Heimat* (“bodenständige Heimattreue”) (“März 1933” 403).

“Blood and soil” were central elements of National Socialist propaganda. Their worldview posited a Germanic people that was distinguished from other, inferior races by its origin and its blood. It categorically rejected racial mixing. The soil, the territory should belong to the Aryan race alone. But because “non-

Aryans” had always lived on the so-called German soil, the Nazis created the Volk-without-space myth. This meant: the German people does not have enough space; it must be able to expand. Expulsion and extermination of non-Aryans, especially Jews, and conquest of territories in Eastern Europe during the war were the result. The National Socialists’ racial theories and aggressive nationalism – as expressed in the talk of the Third Reich or the Thousand-Year Reich – were criticized by both bourgeois and left-wing anti-fascists as an inhuman ideology. Nevertheless, Hitler was able to inspire masses with his myths.

How could he be successfully fought then? This was the question Ernst Bloch asked himself. Criticism and enlightenment alone were obviously not enough. This only reached intellectuals, but not the masses. Therefore, he tried to dispute the National Socialists’ use of terms like *Leben* and *Seele*, *Unbewusstes*, *Nation*, or even *Reich* in numerous newspaper articles and then in the book *Heritage of Our Times* [Erbschaft dieser Zeit] (18). Bloch’s book, however, was not published until 1935 in Zurich in Bloch’s Swiss exile.⁹ He called National Socialism a fraudulent copy of socialism, which used an apparent “anti-capitalism” to save capitalism. A main target of his criticism was the left, namely the communist left, which had failed to deal with the ambivalent emotional states of people suffering under the prevailing rationality that was destroying their lives. They have had enough, he wrote, of hearing about economic figures and seeing how they can no longer buy the necessities of life due to hyperinflation (*EdZ* 152).

An episode that Bloch told a few times illustrates this: it is about a major event in the Berlin Sports Palace in which a communist and a Nazi speaker clashed. After the communist had talked for hours about the basic contradictions, about capital and the average rate of profit in Karl Marx’ *Capital*, the Nazi “thanked” him and turned to the public with the remarks: “What have you heard now: numbers, numbers, and numbers again. What do you do all day when you sit in the office as a little accountant? Writing numbers. That shows that communism and capitalism are just the flip sides of the same coin.” He

continued, "But I speak to you on a higher mission!" With the "mission" he refers to none other than Hitler. (Traub and Wieser 198). Bloch's provocative conclusion to this is: "The Nazis speak deceitfully, but to people, the communists [speak] completely true, but only of things" (*EdZ* 153). They do not appeal to people in this way. On the contrary, because "the capitalist enterprise dams up 'soul,' and it wants to flow off, indeed, to explode against the bleakness and dehumanization" (58).

However, Bloch does not merely analyze the formulas for success of Nazi propaganda. Rather, he examines what could be saved from the images of hope that contribute to the irrational "flicker or intoxication of fascism" (*EdZ* 16): life, soul, *Heimat*, and earth, even *Volksgemeinschaft* and Third Reich are among them. For Bloch there is no question that such symbolic terms are not to be left to National Socialism without a battle. His purpose is not merely the unmasking of the ideological appearance but the recovery of the possible remains of German national culture, for they contain unredeemed promises of a better, more beautiful life (18). Bloch thus criticizes the abstract rationalism of the left. He drafts a kind of rationalism of the irrational. In fact, he develops a philosophy in which hopes, desires and longings play a vital role. He also establishes a concept of *Heimat* that is quite different from the traditional understanding – and yet takes up and transforms elements of it. In Walter Benjamin's description, Bloch has rejected the political significance of theocracy and instead rather puts the order of the profane at the center of his discussion (329). Just like Adorno, Bloch combines romantic, messianic, utopian, idealistic and materialist temporalities in a critique of the modern progress narrative, which "inscribes historicity in the mere next-ness of each now" (Moir 17). However, the continued oppression, exploitation, and alienation of human beings under conditions of capitalism falsifies this assumption. Refraining from the simplistic teleology with which materialist theories of history have so often been construed, the Blochian utopia as *Heimat* posits a complex matrix between space and time which envisages the present as the location in which the possibility of transformative conceptions continues to exist, and utopia becomes the locus of our *Heimat*.¹⁰

Ernst Bloch's and Heinrich Böll's Future-Oriented Understanding of *Heimat*

Bloch initiated the idea of the utopian *Heimat* because he himself was no stranger to the romantic search for *Heimat*. As a reaction to industrialization and early capitalism, Romanticism had already made the simple and natural life in the countryside its place of longing in the 19th century. In Marxism, this was usually branded as an escape from ugly reality. Bloch never shared this criticism. On the contrary, he was interested in what lives on in the collective consciousness in fairy tales or mythical ideas of rescue or liberation fantasies. The song of the buccaneer Jenny in the *Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill belonged for him to such liberation myths, which express the real feelings of the oppressed. He collected such material in his book *Traces* [Spuren]. These include memories of his own experience, such as that rare momentary experience of a harmony of inside and outside which takes place out in the countryside. However, this is not just a landscape environment, it is, in a sense, inhabited, and he spends time there together with a friend:

I had supper once with this man. The plates were cleared, the farm girl who was his beloved went into the kitchen. We friends sat silently and smoked our pipes; the tobacco smoke smelled as one follows behind lumberjacks, so strong and rich with cinnamon; outside the broad Bavarian landscape with cumuli motionless in the sky ... Listen, said my friends, how well the house is in operation. And we heard the silence, the proper installation, the familiar comradeship with things that every healthy person senses, the aura around them, the world of the Tao. So immediately, and outside the lived moment, so personally at home in it we enjoy the 'land' ... We were of course under a spell, but it seemed a good one – naturally, a human house was part of it. (Bloch, *Traces* 126-27)¹¹

Such texts invite us to engage with them, to go in pursuit of traces, as they were. Often this path leads to the memory spaces of the childhood and youth of the philosopher Ernst Bloch. Fleeting incidents and casual encounters are

imagined and always linked to larger questions of meaning. In *Traces*, moreover, it is curious, irrational, and unexpected situations out of which Bloch formulates philosophical thoughts that have a meditative rather than a subversive character, despite the author's Marxist leanings. The texts also are influenced by the artistic avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, that is, by Surrealism, as well as by psychoanalysis. But taking this text as an encapsulation of Ernst Bloch's understanding of *Heimat* would be misguided. The reader could easily misunderstand it as a backward-looking "romantic" idealization of past times. For Bloch, however, it is not something that is already there, nor even that which once was. For him, *Heimat* is not connected with origins and the past, but with the future, his whole human condition is one of 'not-yet' (*noch nicht*), a signifier relating it to the inherent directedness of the world and its inchoate nature (Brown). In this sense, one could say that *Heimat* is not yet to be found on any map.

Bloch's understanding of *Heimat* is thus different from the one we may be used to. He refers to it as something wherein "no one has yet been" ("worin noch niemand war"). *Heimat* is congruent with utopia, a future-oriented memory narrative that evolves from and is established by likeminded individuals who help to cultivate a political system that will become a reality in a particular physical place. He prioritizes the actions of human beings over the aura of places. In the concluding sentences of *The Principle of Hope* [Das Prinzip Hoffnung], he elaborates his concept: "But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and established what is his [own domain], without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland" (3: 1375-76). Influenced by Hegel and Marx, Bloch unfolds an extensive philosophy of utopia in art, literature, and other cultural expressions. Thus, *Heimat* presents itself as a hybrid of both ultimate inclusivity and self-realization, the consoling sense of which is glimpsed in childhood, but the deliberate realization remains to be achieved through the political and philosophical work of the human being. Bloch's

Heimat shines like the sun and emerges enigmatically in the world, and yet it has an underlying attachment to a real, physical place. Bloch's *Heimat* is intrinsically utopian, but it could be seized by ordinary people and turned into reality. In the German preface of the three-volume work he maintains: "the basic theme of philosophy, which remains and is by becoming, is the still unrealized, still unfulfilled *Heimat*" (1: 8). When likewise, on the last page and in the last sentence, even after a colon, *Heimat*, in the English edition translated as homeland, appears as the last word, this underlines Bloch's relationship of the idea of *Heimat* to something that will come, the metaphysics of hope.

How does he arrive at it? Are we dealing with a Romantic idea, in the sense of Novalis, who answered in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* the question, "Where are we going?" with, "Always home" (164)? But if this is related to a longing to return, Bloch just reverses it: his longing refers decidedly to something that does not yet exist, not to a rootedness that has been or still exists. Heinrich Böll is supposed to have once explained that "a religious person can be recognized by the fact that he never feels completely at home in this world – he has the awareness that everything positive that he associates with being at home is not yet given but will come" (Böll qtd. in Vidal 3). Similar to Böll, Bloch also conceives the future as an open process. The imagination, which influences the utopian function in humanity, holds reality together by understanding it as totality.

Böll's understanding of *Heimat* may be traced to his own past as a member of the Gruppe 47.¹² The authors of the group understood themselves as a "utopian democratic community" which sought to produce inspiring and enlightening ideas within West Germany's intellectual landscape after World War II. They aimed to incorporate both a utopian ideal and the very real hope that by fashioning themselves into a point of origin after the war, might be able to entrench a certain concept of culture that their readers "come to a conscious and politically responsible realization of themselves" and their historical legacy (Braun 48). However, the Gruppe 47 is not the embodiment of waiting for what is to come. Their aim is to use their literature to examine and work through the German past and its numerous traumas of the Second World War to recreate a

fundamentally renewed German nation. If we read the passage of Bloch's masterpiece more closely, we see that he does not simply expect from the future what is merely not yet there in the present according to a linear sequence of time. Rather, he expresses hope for a new recreated self-image in the future that is based on his understanding of utopia. Therefore, three aspects seem to me essential for Bloch's understanding of *Heimat* in his magnum opus.

Bloch's Heimat: Social Change, Response to Alienation and Advance to Better Natural Conditions

First, *Heimat* is a product of the practice of social change. It is striking that there is a reference here to creation and work: "The root of history is the working man" (190). One could understand this as a homage to the workers' movement, even to the proletarian cult of Soviet Marxism. But this formulation actually comes from the pamphlet "Freedom and Order" (1947) published in the U.S. In the East German edition of *The Principle of Hope* he then adds the sentence, not without a dig at the rulers: The root of history, however, is the working, creating human being, who transforms and outstrips realities (1: 489). Transforming and transcending the given situation is thus what is being emphasized, not just working.

It is also revealing how Bloch uses the term root. He speaks precisely not of *Heimat* as being rooted, that is, in the sense of descent, but of being radical¹³: "When society and existence (*Dasein*) become radical, i.e., grasp their roots," he claims (3: 1375). Thereby he alludes to the well-known Marx sentence in the introduction of the "Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie": "To be radical is to grasp the thing at its root. But the root for the man is the man himself" (MEW 1: 385). When Bloch speaks of man creating, transforming the given, he means human productivity, labor capacity, collective history – forming creativity in the process of social production. He aims at the human being who – instead of a divine creator – seeks to bring forth and bring out himself, rather than relying on a divine creator. For Bloch, man is "a home-creating being, a self-creating performative being" (Koch 168 and 178).

Secondly, *Heimat* can be conceived as a response to alienation. Renate Künast of the Green Party once said in a speech: “*Heimat* is where I myself am the cause and am not exposed to the effects of distant, anonymous forces” (qtd. in Koch 171). This, however, points to what the philosophical concept of *Heimat* is opposed to: It is a concept of struggle against alienation, a quasi-liberation from external forces that one cannot easily control. It relates—as in Romanticism—to alienation from the natural, but also to the engineered technical environment, to alienation from fellow human beings to one’s own activity and its product, and finally to alienation from oneself. This is indeed a subject that Marx explored extensively. He elaborated that under the conditions of capitalist commodity production, people face their own social relations as relations of things. Georg Lukács, extending Marx’ analysis, was not opposed to the objective reality of things. He was not even skeptical of the reality of stable social institutions. Rather, what concerned him was the fragmentation of human experience, the emergence of a social world that resembled a second nature to which people passively adapt. It is the specific form of reification that is in question, a form of thinghood that situates the subject in a technical relation to a law-governed world of things. The dominance of the commodity form creates a paradigm of reification because the properties of objects, subjects and social relations become thing-like in a specific way. Individuals’ social relations, the relationships to themselves and to the whole society may become atomized and isolated. They turn into objects to the extent that they feel alienated from their own state of mind and thus eventually lose their mental home (*mentales Zuhause*):

It [the commodity form] stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality; they are things which he can “own” or “dispose of” like the various objects of the external world. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic “qualities” into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process. (Lukács 100)

We also experience this reification in language: for example, it is very often said that “financial markets react positively or negatively to this or that decision” – as if they were persons. What has become historical, made by people, confronts them as an alien, untamable materialized power. Language, as Bryan Palmer explains, extends well beyond mere words to include the symbols and structures of all ways of communicating—from the articulated to the subliminal. The meaning of language is found in the reification of words in which social life is embedded. Language, then, structures being. It arranges relations of class and gender and is always predicated on specific hierarchies. In other words, it is the arena in which consciousness makes its historical appearance and politics is written (3-47).

The sociologist Hartmut Rosa has described reification in his recent book *Resonanz* as the loss of the “resonance” between ego and world (10). Rosa’s thesis is: “Pre-modern man, as far as he lived in each social form experienced as part of a cosmological order, occupied, as it were, a ... fixed place, defined at birth, in a ‘great order of Dasein.’ With modernity, this immovable attachment of the subject to space, things and people dissolves: Find your own place in the world! becomes the basic task of the modern (bourgeois) subject” (“Heimat im Zeitalter der Globalisierung” 15). Post-modern conditions accelerate this process. Places of residence, occupational positions, life stage partners, religious and political convictions: nothing is lifelong anymore. According to Rosa, the fast pace of social life in post-modernity intensifies alienation. It leads to the alienation of space, of things and places, of people and relationships, “because nothing congeals into a *Heimat* in the sense that it acquires identity-forming significance” (18). Against this background of reification and alienation, it becomes more understandable why Bloch insists so much on the place-lessness (utopia) of *Heimat*: wanting to search for it through identification with something that is there, that locates and territorializes it. Thus, one then easily ends up in an apotheosis of the given, be it in socialism believed to be real or in the identification with one’s own homeland, people, or leader.

Such patriotism can give people courage and hope, but it can also cause cultural unease, in the sense that people become the pawns of identity politics

and political agitation of the right. Previously suitable patterns or narrative templates for personal and collective identity formation are losing their fit. It is increasingly difficult to (re)negotiate, regulate, and control, especially in view of intensifying catastrophes and crises, such as the Russian war of aggression in the Ukraine, or global warming, both of which are causing a permanently growing number of refugees. Living with difference means saying farewell to ideas that suggest pure and fixed identities, whether understood individually or collectively, that would turn the perception of differences into a discourse around exclusion and distinction. It is about overcoming identity constraints and recognizing the possibility of creating one's own open-ended and authentic identity construction in normatively non-predefined identity spaces. Differences are not blurred in the process, but neither are they misused as political weapons. Zygmunt Bauman already explained in 1997 that "identity can only exist as a problem, it was a 'problem' from birth, was born as a problem. ... One thinks of identity when one is not sure where one belongs. ... Identity is a name for the escape route sought from this uncertainty" (Bauman, *Flaneure* 134).

With reference to Marx, Bloch explains in *The Principle of Hope* immediately before his critical final quotation: "Man ... is still living in prehistory, indeed all and everything still stands before the creation of the world, of a right world. *True genesis is not at the beginning but at the end*, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical, i.e., grasp their roots" (3: 1375). But this means anything but waiting for the future. For Bloch, the utopian becomes concrete only in human practice – in democracy turning into reality. Once human beings understand their own being without drifting apart and alienation in real democracy, then *Heimat* can fully develop and resist the uprooting of one's own and merge into the community. The individual can naturally develop in nature without being objectified. From this hypothesis one could deduce: If democracy concerns the shaping of relationships between people and between people and nature, then the emergence of *Heimat* can be judged by whether and how this succeeds. *Heimat* is then not a place or a country on a map, but democracy in action. It is not simply given but can be

produced; it is the result of processes in which democracy is realized. It lies in the perspective of a new social form of organization of work and social relations, which can be described as peaceful coexistence. *Heimat* means peace, which means much more than the absence of war.

Bloch does not paint a picture of *Heimat* to which we can adhere. But what *Heimat* could be, becomes visible in every struggle for real democracy, even the failed one. In the face of Hitler's regime, which considered the Third Reich the realized *Volksgemeinschaft*, Bloch insisted in *Heritage of Our Times*: "The fatherland is born only through the removal of its beneficiaries, through the real abolition of classes, through the transfer of land and property, of all means of production and cultural assets into the possession of the nation" (99). Here, Bloch relies on a form of nation that can only be achieved through revolutionary transformation and – in contrast to concepts of socialism in one country – only internationally: "Only the international allows the national to dominate, turns narrow-minded and ideological national souls into human bodies of closeness" (99).

Thirdly, *Heimat* can be conceived as an advance to better natural conditions. We can therefore say: "prehistory" ends only when relations of domination and exploitation disappear, including those towards the earth. Ernst Bloch is one of the few philosophers who developed a philosophy of nature in the 20th century. He insisted in *The Principle of Hope* that only in alliance with nature, not against it, the experiment of the human world has a future. He therefore also pleaded for a different technology, an "alliance technology" (1: 787). Subsequently, the late bourgeois curbing of technology is discussed. This is caused by the transformation of all exchange goods into commodities, by commodity thinking, by reification, by the fact that the means of production are not adequately used, and the world is only perceived quantitatively. With this restrictive understanding of nature, bourgeois science and therefore also technology can only be developed to a limited extent. For nature in this form could only be outwitted or exploited. But it would not be perceived that nature, as Averroës claims, is a creative matter. Only the subject "that is socially mediated

with itself, that increasingly mediates with the problem of the subject of nature” (1: 787), can prevent that the process of bourgeois reification will continue. This means that people understand themselves as value-creating and nature as creative and perceive themselves together as an alliance. Both together suggest the concrete utopia of technology as it joins and is linked to the concrete utopia of society (1: 787-88).

In view of the consequences of man-made global warming and the excessive use of natural resources, this aspect of his thinking is truly relevant, even if we still must go much further today with the rethinking and reorientation of our economy than Bloch could have foreseen. He already pointed out the “future problem in the bearing, comprehensive *space* of the *Heimat*: nature” (*PH* 1: 16). That is why, on the final page of his book of “hope,” he invokes Marx once again, by inserting the following statement, missing in the earlier version of these closing sentences: “Marx describes as his final concern ‘the development of the wealth of human nature’; this *human* wealth, as well as that of *nature* as a whole lies solely in the tendency-latency in which the world finds itself – vis- à-vis de tout” (3: 1375). One can hardly deny that this must be considered in the transformation of social as well as natural relations for “human freedom and nature as its concrete environment (*Heimat*) are mutually dependent” (3: 1080). The realization of *Heimat* can only be expected when the short-sighted self-serving anthropocentrism or human nationalism (“Humans first”) towards nature will have disappeared and another more human- and nature-friendly attitude, a cosmopolitan one, will have taken its place.

Instead of a Conclusion: Bloch’s Lessons

The loss of *Heimat* should not be seen so exclusively as the predicament of those who must depart in politically threatening circumstances, or of those who have been displaced from their community. *Heimat* is not a region, a state, or one’s native land. *Heimat* must be internalized with and through the verbalization of the tools of our mother tongue. Thus, we all venture out of the realm of the

familiar whenever we run into a language that perplexes us and we then need to reach out for a new understanding.

For Ernst Bloch, *Heimat* was something “which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been” (3: 1376). When he wrote this, he was already living in exile in the United States, working as an unskilled laborer by day and sitting over the manuscript of his three-volume principal work by night. He conceived *Heimat* as a childhood dream, as a lifelong longing, as a U-topos (non-place), as an appearance as well as a promise. Bloch’s concept of *Heimat* can only be understood in its precise sense if it is viewed in the context of Hegelian and Marxian philosophy. For him, *Heimat* is not something that one has or that one remembers because one no longer has it. *Heimat* is for him something that is yet to come to us, that wants to become and is to become in the historical process. *Heimat* is the counterpart to the Marxist concept of “alienation,” it is the utopian point of escape and destination in which all strangeness, all the contradictoriness of life dissolves and people are completely with themselves and live reconciled with one another. The question is, however, whether such a degree of agreement and lack of contradiction, whether such a “conversion of the world into a *Heimat*” (*PH* 1: 334), as Bloch also calls it, is meaningful and desirable. Wouldn’t the abolition of all alienation also mean the end of life itself?

There is something in the concept of *Heimat* that can bring it into conflict with life, which can mean confrontation and change. Whoever wants to live cannot expect, cannot even wish, that everything will remain as it is. Whoever wants to live in a self-determined way must shake off *Heimat*, which, I think, can also become a fetter, at least temporarily, and must break with it to get into the open. It is necessary to do away with it to be able to return purified and sharpened by the experience of the foreign, even if it is only in memory. Only those who have broken with or lost their *Heimat* know what they had in it when they were in it. This is another reason why *Heimat*, as Friedrich Nietzsche writes in his poem, is mostly a product of memory, hardly separable from the nostalgic feeling of losing one’s *Heimat*:

The crows caw

And move in whirring flight to the city:

Soon it will snow,

Woe betide he who has no home!

(Friedrich Nietzsche, "Farewell," 1884)¹⁴

¹ All translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² See the statistics on the meaning of home for Germans, published by Statista Research Department, March 2017. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/222338/umfrage/bedeutung-des-begriffs-heimat-in-deutschland/>. The statistics represent the results of a survey in Germany on the meaning of Heimat. In 2017, around 15 percent of respondents said they associated the concept of home primarily with their place of birth. Accessed 1 February 2023.

³ The original reference from Max Frisch in German is: "MY COUNTRY erweitert und limitiert Heimat von vornherein auf ein Staatsgebiet, HOMELAND setzt Kolonien voraus, MOTHERLAND tönt zärtlicher als Vaterland, das mit Vorliebe etwas fordert und weniger beschützt als mit Leib und Leben geschützt werden will, LA PATRIE, das hisst sofort eine Flagge – und ich kann nicht sagen, daß mir beim Anblick eines Schweizerkreuzes sofort und unter allen Umständen heimatlich zumute wird" (510).

⁴ The idea of rejecting the reality one encounters was also prevalent in post-unification East Germany in the 1990s when everyone was looking for their own narrative to embark on a "new" life. I shared that with many other people of the same age. In this respect, the situation was comparable to that of the 1968 generation.

⁵ I took this quote from a conversation with Prof. Alexander Thumfart, University of Erfurt, who, when he lived in Zurich, participated in the late-68 movement, and became involved in the politics of this social movement, which tried to imagine and live according to a utopia of a radical democratic and social(istic) political Heimat in the then conservative FRG. He shared his memories via e-mail with me (July 18, 2022) before he passed away.

⁶ The AfD recently achieved the following vote proportions in the parliaments of the eastern German states (as of July 2022): Brandenburg: 23.5%, Saxony: 27.5%, Saxony-Anhalt: 20.8%, Thuringia: 23.4%, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania: 16.7%.

⁷ I am thankful to the online conversation with Christina Gehres (20 July 2022), who provided crucial information on multiculturalism in Switzerland. She is currently living in Switzerland and employee at the University of Zurich.

⁸ 45 percent of people in Germany have already witnessed racist incidents, according to a recently published study by the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM). More than one-fifth of the population (around 22 percent) say they have already been affected by racism themselves. See Marc Röhlig, "Jeder Fünfte in Deutschland ist von Rassismus betroffen." *Spiegel Online*, 5 May 2022, www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/deutschland-jeder-fuenfte-ist-von-rassismus-betroffen-a-5f95bd00-f7d6-4537-b4e4-6ff924c19bf8. Accessed 16 August 2022.

9 In fact, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (EdZ) was delivered as early as October/ November 1934. It took some efforts until the Zurich publisher Emil Oprecht, a Social Democrat, apparently succeeded in finding a sponsor and arranging for the book to be published. See Ernst Bloch's letter to Klaus Mann, 13.6.1934, Ernst Bloch, *Briefe 1903–1975*, edited by Karola Bloch et al., vol. 2, Suhrkamp, 1985, 629. Bloch states in the preface that he wrote the book while still in Germany and that it was ready by the fall of 1932. Some additions were made in the spring of 1933, and at least one section was rewritten. However, the most important texts were written in the late 1920s and around 1932, and some of them were published in newspapers (Cf. EdZ 18). Thus, the book's question essentially relates to the years leading up to Hitler's seizure of power in January 1933, examining the social reality and intellectual development in the late Weimar Republic as the environment and breeding ground for the rapid rise of Hitler's fascist movement. Bloch, who was already a renowned philosopher and left-wing intellectual, publicly professed Marxism in its communist and revolutionary variants for the first time. With Bloch's work, which was lost for a long time, a major work from the 1920s and 30s was only reissued by Suhrkamp Publishers in 1962. The essays remained inaccessible to Germans for a long time and unfortunately could not unfold their potential as a warning message to the German people.

¹⁰ A utopia (old Greek "ou": "not" and "tópos": "place," i.e., "non-place") is a possible, desired, or dreamed-of way of life, worldview or social order that unfolds in another place, in the future or in fiction. When one speaks of a "utopia" in politics, one usually imagines a state or a community in which a better human coexistence is possible. In his essay *Utopia*, the English author Thomas More (1478-1535) described such a perfect state.

¹¹ This excerpt was translated by Anthony A. Nassar and is taken from the English translation published by Stanford University Press in 2006.

¹² The "Gruppe 47" was the best-known association of authors in Germany after World War 2, which emerged from a small editorial team of the political magazine *Der Ruf* in Munich. The magazine, founded in 1946, under the editorship of Hans Werner Richter and Alfred Andersch, was suspended in 1947 by the American military administration. In the fall of 1947, the previous editors met with other writers to discuss contributions to a new literary magazine that was to be founded (but did not materialize). This resulted in regular meetings of a group that then gave itself the name "Gruppe 47." See Helmut Böttiger's *Die Gruppe 47: als die deutsche Literatur Geschichte schrieb*, especially the chapter on Richter, Andersch and the networkings in the media, for an insightful historical examination of this literary association.

¹³ The stem of "radical" is lat. radix, root.

¹⁴ The poem is part of Nietzsche's literary legacy. The last stanza of the poem in German is as follows: „Die Krähen schrei'n/ Und ziehen schwirren Flugs zur Stadt:/ Bald wird es schnei'n,/ Weh dem, der keine Heimat hat!“ (Friedrich Nietzsche, „Abschied,“ 1884). The first part of the poem „Abschied“ (Farewell) was first published under the title „Vereinsamt“ (Loneliness) in „Ungedruckte Gedichte von Friedrich Nietzsche.“ In: Das Magazin für Litteratur, vol. 63, no. 45, 1894, 1430-1431. In 1895, the title „Vereinsamt“ was again used in his collected works: Friedrich Nietzsche, Nietzsche's Werke. Erste Abtheilung. Band VIII. [...] Gedichte. Leipzig: Naumann, 1895, 358. It was published under that title until it was corrected by the editors of the collected works (KGW). The second part of the poem "Antwort" (Reply) was first published in 1895 as a separate poem until being corrected as part of "Der Freigeist." See for more information on the following blog specializing in Nietzsche: *The Nietzsche Channel*: <http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/poetry/poetry-dual.htm#ohneheimath>. Accessed 11 February 2023.

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