Of Wolf, Woman and Migrant.
Place Making in a Contemporary Narrative from Switzerland

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"No man is an island",[1] nor is any woman. Swiss author Gianna Molinari's highly-acclaimed debut novel *Everything is still possible here / Hier ist noch alles möglich* (2018) thematizes environments being gradually altered by human and non-human creatures: women, migrants and the wolf. Molinari depicts a strong female character pursuing alternative forms of co-existence. Her encounters with male co-workers, illegal migrants and the wolf allow the protagonist to reflect on home, in both a spatial and psychological sense. The constant movement of peoples and animals force, as much as entice, her to constantly make and remake her home, showing that no place is truly an island. I will draw on ecofeminist insights to analyse the interaction between the unnamed protagonist and everything society subsumes under "the wolf", an interaction the woman (re)imagines as based on equal relation- and companionship.

The Wolf

Both in the novel and in real life, the wolf suffers from having too much in common with humans: "As biological opportunists, wolves are adaptable. They do not necessarily need an untouched wilderness to survive. Man-made landscapes and military training areas are just as suitable" (Brake 2019: 31), so is an abandoned factory, the location of Molinari's plot. The female narrator reflects on common prejudices as well as adoration in relation to the wolf: "There are reasons why the wolf has already been killed off in these areas before [...]. The wolf is an aggressive animal, a predator, often suffering from rabies" (Molinari 2018: 94). However, there are also wolf enthusiasts, and the narrator becomes one of them.

Respect for and fear of the animal have a long tradition in world literature. Romulus and Remus' suckling by a she-wolf, as well as depictions of the animal in Germanic and Norse mythology, show reverence for this mighty force of nature, while the writings of Aesop and Phaedrus, the Bible and fairy tales, express a troubled relationship, particularly between wolf and sheep. In these educational tales, "Wolves have long been constructed in the popular imagination as symbolizing danger", as an "evildoer [...] devouring Grandmother and attempting to eat Little Red Riding Hood" (Anahita & Mix 2006: 348). Thereby, wolves have "functioned as scapegoats" as "mythically guilty" (Anahita & Mix 2006: 336) and have thus "been attributed to the lowest status possible for animals, that of vermin, and killing vermin is considered socially acceptable, even desirable" (Anahita & Mix 2006: 348; cf. Flynn 1999). In some countries, such as "…in the US and Canada, wolves were often conflated with Indigenous peoples and both were constructed as obstacles to colonial progress." (Rutherford, 2020: 60) Ironically, their (re)-emergence has been likened to the unwelcome appearance of migrants. Indeed, again and again throughout history, "right-wing populists extended their fight against migration to include the four-legged immigrant" (Brake 2019: 31).

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[1] No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is [...] a part of the *maine*; [...]; any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*." (John Donne, *Devotions*, 17th century).
[2] Hitler's fascination with the animal is apparent in the leitmotif and code name 'the wolf'. He sometimes went by the nicknames 'little wolf' and 'uncle wolf', while his various headquarters were referred to as 'Werewolf' [Wehrwolf], 'Wolf's Gulch' [Wolfsschlucht], and 'Wolf's Lair' [Wolfschanze]. He referred to the SS as 'a pack of wolves'." (Sax 2000; 75-76). "[T]he Nazis were constantly invoking dogs and

In a further complication, the wolf has traditionally also been popular as a figure of identification, "a potent symbol of the wild, the free, the uncommodifiable" (Emel 1995: 709), especially for Nazis and white supremacists,2 whereby the animals' unbridled wildness has come to serve as "ambiguous ciphers [...] for violent narratives about masculinity, alternative nationalism and white identity." (Rutherford 2020: 60) Such deeply-rooted cultural perceptions of the wolf prevent many from seeing the animal behind the myths.

This fabled animal is the 'hero' of Gianna Molinari's novel. She uses a post-industrial, late capitalist Western society as her setting for the encounter between species, juxtaposing humans and animals as they converge at a time of epochal changes. The collision of the narrator's world with "a wolf" parallels her own migrations, and those of refugees, in particular of one African who falls from the sky after hiding in the undercarriage of a passenger plane.

The novel intertwines cause and effect of human migration, and associated "disturbance and disruption, practices of othering, and exclusion"(Ahrens & Fliethmann, 2020), with that of the wolf, as both are affected by displacement and forced to leave their birth places in search for new habitats to stay alive, to find food, protection and a new home.

Molinari's protagonist – as part of her work contract – reluctantly has to set traps and dig a hole designed to catch the wolf, but inwardly, she sympathizes and identifies with the hunted prey. The novel fuses entries from encyclopedias and scientific reports, and combines stream of consciousness, sketches, photos, news clippings and Ancient myths to bridge a gap between the arts and sciences. In its "important reflection on European perceptions of the ongoing refugee crisis" (Blower 2018), it also shows how inhumanely humans conduct themselves in the main, and that nature ultimately holds sway over culture, increasing our understanding of wolf culture as well as human nature.

The Migrant

The novel opens as follows: "The wolf came from the mountains, and brought with him other wolves, descending onto the plain. Invading territories where they had never been seen before. [...] They [the wolves] move at night. I too move at night [...]. I too have invaded territories." (Molinari 2018: 5) This aptly defines the narrative's main theme: migration streams of people and animals, in search for a new home. The themes are woven together with the help of the ideas of islands. Like a leitmotif "islands" feature throughout the text as biotopes, diversity hotspots, nature's hotbeds, lost paradises and tragic settings, each introduced in small vignettes, visually and verbally. Only then begins the actual story with the female first-person narrator applying for a job as a night shift security officer in a remote factory. She deems it the ideal job for herself, as she is "often awake at night" and seeks a degree of solitude. She comes to live on the grounds of the company, in one of the former production halls. "When I am lying in bed at night and look up at the ceiling, I sometimes think I'm in the belly of a whale." (Molinari 2018: 11) She finds this idea of a pseudo-union with nature very reassuring. Here she hopes to find the mental space "to distinguish the unimportant from the important" (Molinari 2018: 11). That is also why she left her old job as a librarian, shut down her apartment and bank accounts, and opened herself up to new opportunities, a new beginning: "Here lies a new environment to explore. Anything is still possible here." (Molinari 2018: 12)

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wolves as models for the qualities they wanted to cultivate: loyalty, hierarchy, fierceness, courage, obedience, and sometimes even cruelty" (Sax 2000; 75).

But this statement of hope, which is also the novel's title, is immediately juxtaposed with concerns, because "The people on the factory site are afraid of the wolf." (Molinari 2018: 12) Wolves and unauthorised persons who enter the area fenced off with wire mesh must be reported, even if the factory is about to be closed down and there is nothing of value left.

The decline of the place can be seen in the holes of its fence, however, the lines of demarcation remain important. "The visible borders include […] the walls of my hall and the perimeter fences of the factory. These borders are easy to see. Others not so much." (Molinari 2018: 13) She professes her motivation and sympathy in her straightforward, staccato style: "I don't really care what happens to the factory. But I do care about the wolf" (Molinari 2018: 15), the wild animal, the "beast", that her co-workers aim to kill with a multitude of leghold traps, snares and a wolf pit, hoping he will fall into a huge hole. This hole symbolizes the great void in human knowledge and lack of empathy.

Her boss and male co-workers see the wolf – just like illegal migrants – as a threat and the tip of an iceberg. The boss: "A wolf is known to come in packs," to which the night shift security officer replies: "He will have his reasons, [...] he wouldn't be coming to this area willingly" (Molinari 2018: 28). Here, the narrator sees parallels to her own escape from her previous humdrum life: "I may not have killed a titmouse, but I, too, have left my home. I doubt that the security I live in corresponds to reality. I long for uncertainty, for more authenticity perhaps, for reality." (Molinari 2018: 29) In this desire for authenticity, her comparisons with the wolf morph from fascination into empathy, symbiosis and identification.

She begins to read about wolves just as she researches the fate of a man who was found dead near the factory. This "man who fell from the sky" (Molinari 2018: 62) slowly transforms in her mind from the unknown man from a number in a statistic into an individual with a tragic story. Like a detective, she approaches his fate, starting with the clues:

> "No papers were found on the deceased. [...] He was carrying a banknote issued by the Central African Reserve Bank, and his T-shirt also featured the logo of a company allegedly based in Cameroon. All this, along with his dark skin colour, led to the assumption that he could have come from Cameroon." (Molinari 2018: 64)

In the end, her desire to picture the place and circumstances of his death entices her to climb into the landing gear of a passenger plane, in an effort to imagine the last moments of his life.

The Environment

The picture of civilization that emerges in Molinari's novel is that of a post-industrial society on its way to a post-capitalist world: industrialization has progressed so far that even the production of packaging materials, "Special packaging for perfume bottles, chocolates, watches" (Molinari 2018: 178), luxury goods of consumer society, is no longer needed. Everything is focused on post-consumption.

The protagonist herself has hardly any possessions, "only a few clothes, my camera and my universal general encyclopaedia [...] which is of great importance. I am constantly adding new entries or supplementing what I have already written." (Molinari 2018: 16) In her world everything seems to be in flux, nothing has a fixed value. In her fascination with what is possible, she edits the encyclopaedia with hand-written annotations thus writing her fluid version of the physical and metaphysical world into existence. She thus constructs mentally spaces, where one can meet wolves and other humans/migrants, that is, encounter both strangers and the unknown in a truly humane way.

> "The world is bigger than expected; it is much more mobile and looser than previously thought [...]. People fall from the sky, wolves are hunted, pits collapse, factories [...] explode, [...] boats sink, pollution renders large areas uninhabitable, entire villages are

resettled, towns are flooded, islands sink, borders are erected, so cracks appear." (Molinari 2018: 144-5)

In this time of transition and disintegration, the narrator and another night shift security officer, Clemens, pointlessly dig an oversized wolf pit. The mission of digging a trap almost seems therapeutic as a way of maintaining their relationship with each other. They only find each other through a common purpose. "I [...] imagine that Clemens and I keep on digging. [....] Even after the factory has been shut down. That we are creating a system of caves under the factory grounds, like the cave system of foxes or badgers, only larger. I picture us digging deep and [...] being closer than we are now." (Molinari 2018: 186-7) She also hopes the cave system with its non-linear paths will never be finished. She wants to stay in this place herself, to listen into the earth, to smell and feel the soil, to penetrate deeper and deeper, and leave the old version of the world behind. But she is part of the system; knows that she has set up and dug traps that will affect human and non-human creatures. Although the last words of the novel show that everything is still possible, the writing on the wall proclaims something seemingly inevitable: "The trap has been set." (Molinari 2018: 190)

Nevertheless, the text speaks of hope, not least as it is peppered with subjunctive possibilities, speculations and statements rich with promise: "A wolf is possible" (p.18), "Maybe the wolf will give importance to what I do" (p.18). Wordings such as "probably", "perhaps", "apparently" and "indeed possible that" are woven into the text like leitmotifs. Repeatedly, the term "a good place" is mentioned, where "everything is still possible" (p.20), as for example in this dying factory, while also everyday life leaves room for interpretation and speculation – are intermingled in the narrative stream.

When the situation forces her to decide in favour of or against the wolf, to betray him or to keep his whereabouts a secret, she sides with the wolf. She does not want him to get caught, let alone see him killed. While her relationship with the wolf becomes increasingly closer, the utilitarian human relationships disintegrate more and more. With the dissolution of the employment contracts, the bonds between the former employees also become looser. Where there was once an amicable coexistence, social envy and mistrust soon prevail, and interpersonal connections are rapidly diminishing. She, too, is moving closer to the wolves, physically and psychologically, away from human nature and closer to animal culture, while asserting her agency. The binary logic of early ecofeminism relating to patriarchal oppression of women and nature is overcome in favour of understanding women as much as agents and culprits and as much a part of the problem as of the solution as anyone else.

Just as the protagonist is seen as problematic, so is the environment. Morton's *Ecology without Nature* (2007) warned against glorification and critiqued artists and others for fantasies about nature that block the view of reality: "Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of the Woman." (p.5) For, as the argument continues with Clark's reading: "there is no proper, correct or authentic nature in the first place: models of ecological balance and stability are romantic and unrealistic, particularly when it comes to where humans fit. Human history, but also nature, is essentially about disturbance and change." (Clark 2011: 71). Gianna Molinari's focus is on consumption, change and migration, enabling and necessitating a constant effort to re-create Heimat, whereby the wolf for the protagonist as much as the migrant serve as reminders of fragile co-existence.

Ecofeminism

In the novel, as in real life, illegal migrants and wolves are perceived as an economic threat, which the novel alludes to in the attitude of the men working in the factory. Wolves are competitors for food, they hunt the same animals as humans – or just help themselves to

their cattle/pets/possessions as well as rubbish. By equating wolves and migrants, the novel shows how men turn into wolves by showing how they treat their fellow men. While unsatisfied and insecure humans could channel some of their aggression and frustration, as well as lack of trust in others, into their persecution of the wolf, Molinari's protagonist seeks to achieve a peaceful cohabitation, whereby the wolf becomes a litmus test for humanity and tolerance.

The protagonist's empathy for the wolf exemplifies what Josephine Donovan asserts for ecofeminism: "We are emotionally and ethically engaged with [another] creature by dint of belonging to the same communicative mental medium. As we feel their pain, ethical awareness emerges – in a sense it becomes our pain – and through that connected feeling we are thereby moved to ethical action." (Donovan 2014: 86). Embracing a life guided by love, care, trust and reciprocity enables an ecofeminist inspired "dialogical interspecies ethics" (Plumwod 2002), bringing an understanding of more species into the "similar to human" category in terms of rights and respect extended to them. Understanding her surrounds in accordance with environmental humanities and feminist thoughts as "dynamically composed of a multitude of lively actors, from plants to microbes to animals and technologies" (Giraud et al. 2018: 62) in which she is entangled, her understanding cuts across the nature/culture distinction.

Molinari's protagonist understands herself as part of a whole, embedded into imperfect environments that she can share, accepting her own animality in a non-hierarchical openness. She is attentive to the parallel plights, her own and that of wolf and migrant, negotiating shared spaces, recognizing others' intelligence, worth and needs by caring, sharing and relating without judgement, building new relationships across diversity and alterity, and understanding of her ethical obligations (Dürbeck 2018) through her *entanglement* (Horn und Bergthaller 2019: 127). This overcomes the binary perception of man vs nature or civilised vs wild, woman vs wolf, which encourages one to see the other as alienated from one's own environment, weakens empathy, even fuels fear and a wish to dominate or eradicate.

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