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'Our city of love and of slaughter': Berlin klezmer and the politics of place

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ABSTRACT

Although it claims little historical connection to klezmer music or Yiddish culture, the city of Berlin has hosted one of the most dynamic klezmer scenes of the past 20 years. This article analyses ways that place has been made to function as a meaningful unit in the music and lyrics of several artists living and working in Berlin, localising the transnational klezmer revival discourse by rooting the city in their music. Building on Adam Krims' theory of 'urban ethos', I explore how the contemporary city is emplaced in its klezmer music, arguing that these processes of signification allow us to hear contrasting articulations of Berlin. The native Berliners ?Shmaltz! frame their city as an escapist gateway, the American songwriter Daniel Kahn sees a site of painfully unresolved history and the internationalist Knoblauch Klezmer band locate Berlin as an embodiment of playfully multilingual performativity.

Introduction

You know we had this klezmer revival about 20 years ago and that was quite traditional. It was usually instrumental, Eastern European, the same fifteen tunes played all over again. Violin, clarinet, some accordion maybe. Then Yiddish vocals came into it, Karsten Troyke for instance. That was new. You also had some Eastern European immigrants singing in Russian or Ukrainian. Some klezmer tunes. Then you had Daniel Kahn coming over, singing in English, and also trying Yiddish and German, and putting the political point into it, which was very new, because up to that it was all, you know, sad, romantic, melancholy, whatever, all *freylekhs* dancing joy. And Daniel put this Trotsky, Marxist and, you know, 'you have killed the Jews, I'm here now in Germany and I like you, but I don't like you' thing into it. So that was new, yeah! (Armin Siebert, interview, Eastbloc Musik)[1,2]

In the last few decades, Berlin's klezmer music has often found itself defined by absence: of meaningful content (Ottens and Rubin 2004), of credible heritage (Bohlman 2008), and of Jews (Gruber 2002). This article argues for a counterbalance, a focus on musical processes that have at times been hard to hear over the ideological noise accompanying the revival of Eastern European Jewish wedding music in the city of its planned destruction. What

follows steps away from these debates towards a deeper understanding of how a city can be heard through its music. I will argue that Berlin, in the absence of a klezmer 'past', offers compelling alternatives of emplacement upon which to draw—musically and linguistically embedded narratives that engage with both the city's troubled Jewish history and its cheerful contemporary pluralism. As a means of imagining and re-presenting the politics of place, music becomes a site of cultural dialogue where historical and contemporary geographies can be articulated, negotiated and reframed (Hall 1998: 453). Hearing Berlin in this way does more than simply open up new analytical pathways. It offers a lived address to the complexities and contradictions of the urban—especially pertinent in a city subject to multiple internal and external identities since the early twentieth century. Furthermore, it is a critical route forward from the philosophical ambiguities, over-optimistic hopes and occasional hysteria that have too often accompanied the reunified city's klezmer scene.

The historical places of klezmer

Klezmer is a genre beset with problems of definition, right down to the word itself (Rubin 2001: 22–5). As the deliberately broad sweep of this article indicates, musicians who are well-schooled in klezmer's formal structures and performance vocabularies will often create material that moves well beyond these frames. Unlike pre-war klezmer's Eastern European dynastic, caste structure (Feldman 2016), its modern practitioners span a range of backgrounds, experience, affiliation and politics. For many, therefore—including all of the musicians discussed here—'klezmer' often works in tandem with other musics in the construction of an engagingly fluid soundworld that is intentionally hard to pin down. Yet despite its slippery modern internationalism and porous boundaries, klezmer retains an implicit sense of geography, linked as it is to a certain part of Jewish history. From 1796 onwards, following the partitioning of Poland, Russian and Polish Jews began to be confined to the Pale of Settlement, a large rectangle of territory from the Baltic States in the north to the Black Sea in the south that persisted in modified form until the 1917 Revolution. Although professional Ashkenazi Jewish musicians had been in evidence since the mid-sixteenth century (ibid.), it was the concentration of Jewish life in the cities and *shtetls* [market towns] of the Pale and neighbouring Austro-Hungarian territories that gave rise to klezmer music as we now understand it. In these areas of high Jewish population, dynastic klezmer ensembles known as *kapelyes* structured week-long Jewish weddings, played for the balls of wealthy Polish landowners and sustained an ongoing interaction with Roma *lautari* [professional musicians]. These buried geographies are understood as the historical heartland of klezmer, rooting a functional musical and social connection to place. And even as their twentieth-century destruction is similarly conceived as signalling the almost total demise of the professional *klezmorim* tradition in eastern Europe—or perhaps because of this destruction—the image remains hard to shake from the music itself.

Escaping violent pogroms and economic hardship, large numbers of Eastern European Jews migrated westwards from the early 1880s onwards, most significantly to the United States, where much of the traditional wedding repertoire now found itself increasingly irrelevant to the new needs of cramped, heterogeneous immigrant life in New York, Philadelphia and other cities. At the same time, co-territorial American jazz promoted developments in repertoire and instrumentation, further distancing the old world from the new. Klezmer had found a new geography, but one that would see it move further and further to the

sidelines of mid-century American Jewish identity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002). Energised by a combination of 1960s identity politics and a popular music scene increasingly open to influences beyond rock 'n' roll, second and third-generation Jewish Americans coming of artistic age in the 1970s responded vigorously to klezmer's threatened cultural submergence. This American klezmer revival of the 1970s enacted a renewed geographical significance, connecting American Jews back to their European Ashkenazi roots. Klezmer revivalists reimbued the increasingly neglected music of earlier generations with a newly muscular aesthetic sensibility, frequently allied to a radicalised politics that reinstated Yiddish language and culture as contemporary and vital (Svigals 2002). Spaces of music had largely moved to the concert stage, but a conception of *place* remained important: an ideological connection to immigrant forebears became a fundamental part of revival philosophy and practice. This was still American Jewish music (Slobin 1984), even as the perceptions of American Jews had changed around it. Many of the musicians at the head these developments, such as Michael Alpert, Hankus Netsky, Henry Sapoznik and Joel Rubin, remain central hubs of klezmer activity and important influences upon today's younger musicians.

Unlike New York or the Pale of Settlement, the fact that Berlin's pre-war Jewish population was largely assimilated and westward looking means that the city offers little klezmer pre-history to uncover, and hence a less explicit and neat relationship between contemporary music and historical geography. In East Germany from the late 1940s onwards, the widespread concertising of Dutch-born Auschwitz survivor Lin Jaldati and her husband Eberhard Rebling offered a compelling narrative of Yiddish song as resistance, which the socialist state could paradoxically neither endorse (as Jewish life) nor condemn because of its anti-fascist identity (Shneer 2015: 13).[3] Across the border, the West Berlin band Kasbek began to include klezmer music from the 1960s onwards as part of a broader East European offering, pitting themselves explicitly against the tide of American and English pop music and implicitly against the partition of their city. At the same time, Peter Rohland and later Zupfgeigenhansel popularised 'Germanised' versions of Yiddish songs (Wurbs 2010) within a wider folksinger aesthetic, simultaneously mounting a challenge to Holocaust silence (Holler 2007: 102). And in the early 1980s came the country's first post-war Yiddish and klezmer musicians to actively mould their performance practice on what could be learnt from the past: singers such as Karsten Troyke and bands like Aufwind, both still prominent members of the Berlin scene.

From the 1980s onwards, Germany began to see visits from American Jewish klezmer bands—Kapelye, the Epstein Brothers Orchestra and the Klezmer Conservatory Band among them.[4] Following reunification, bands such as Brave Old World, the Argentinian-Israeli clarinettist Giora Feidman and a number of German and Germany-based artists became instrumental in driving the growth of a klezmer 'boom' in the new Germany—albeit through very different narratives (Eckstaedt 2010: 42; Gruber 2002: 212–30). A rapid increase in bands, performance spaces and workshops initiated a musical trajectory that has seen post-reunification Berlin play host to the most enthusiastic

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[3]Historically, klezmer and Yiddish song occupied two distinct social and cultural spaces. However, since the 1970s revival they increasingly overlap in performance, repertoire and personnel. I therefore treat the two as closely related parts of a larger scene. See Wood (2013: 83–8).

[4]Perhaps inevitably, some of these trips provoked uncomfortable internal dialogues. See comments by Kapelye's Henry Sapoznik (Wood 2013: 109–11) and the Klezmer Conservatory Band's Judy Bressler (Slobin 2000: 57).

klezmer scene[5] outside North America—although, as in most 'revival' centres, numbers have contracted over the past decade (Waligórska 2013). As well as its inclusion within the official civic spaces of Jewish Culture Days, Holocaust commemoration and centrally organised tours to smaller Jewish communities, klezmer has skilfully integrated itself into the capital's vibrant street culture. Klezmer bands perform regularly at urban festivals and funky clubs, or busk on street corners and at Mauerpark's weekly mini-festival. And although one of the hubs of the recent scene, the Hackesches Hoftheater, closed its doors over a decade ago, the past five years have seen the birth of a renewed, ground-level complex of Yiddish cultural activities—including a new dynamic jam session in Neu-kölln (Alexander 2016), a klezmer dance night, klezmer picnics and a winter workshop series.[6] An established feature of the German musical landscape, klezmer has become a readily available resource through which to speak the contemporary city.

These continually developing spaces have given rise to a corresponding need to address an idea of place in the music. Here, Berlin's socio-political past offers a rich constellation of contemporary, city-specific, connections from which several artists have recently begun to draw in order to convincingly manifest the city within their music. It is this symbolic inser-tion, this twin process of meaning-making from the materials of Eastern European Jewish wedding music and the city of Berlin, which forms the basis of my discussion. In spite of—or perhaps because of—the lack of a distinctive Yiddish musical cultural history, a local tone of voice has developed that positions Berlin as a meaningful socio-cultural context and also lends it a characteristic historical point of view. I will argue that this has promoted a musical dialogue, a creative channel through which Berlin can be understood and re-pre-sented—as a site of ideological struggle, place of escape or nagging reminder of insur-mountable history. Berlin's liminality, its historical and contemporary existence as a site of mobility and immigration, of borders and their transgression, is fundamental to this narrative of emplacement.[7]

Klezmer, vu bistu *[Yiddish: where are you]*?

Whilst the direct linking of social geography to cultural production promises a tantalisingly intact and coherent circle of meaning, it inevitably leans on assumptions of a manageably homogeneous social identity, or at least an agreed set of relationships. The multiple inter-actions and criss-crossing networks of a city (Stock 2008: 201) and the complex web of cul-tural meshing (or lack of it) problematise this search. This is significant in our case: contemporary klezmer is an urban phenomenon, revived and recreated in almost all its manifestations. If, however, we take such heterogeneity as a starting point, what presents itself is a chance to explore musical production less as a force for social cohesion, and more as a response to the clashes and contradictions of the idea of the urban. A city, as

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[5]The ideological twists of this movement are not my focus. They have been well documented and exhaustively discussed, by Gruber (2002), Ottens and Rubin (2004) and many others.

[6]See http://www.shtetlneukoelln.org (accessed 12 March 2018). Also important are long-running venues such as the friendly yet formal dance night 'Tants in Gartn Eydn', the warm, noisy and ultimately bounded narrative of Jewish cel-ebration at Charlottenberg's kosher Café Bleibergs, and more unofficial, fluid spaces such as the faded alt-Berliner chic of Mitte's Kaffee Burger and the open performance zone of Gorki Theater Studio Я. The official and unofficial spaces of Berlin klezmer are discussed extensively in Alexander (2016: 115–165).

[7]Klezmer musicians also engage directly with contemporary issues of transmigration in Berlin, through participation in benefit concerts and performances that probe narratives of urban multiculturalism, such as Gorki Theater's 2014 Voicing Resistance Festival.

the material environment of musical experience, can also signify—within music itself—the 'mutant, undisciplined creativity' (Amin and Thrift 2002: 94–5) of its everyday life.

For klezmer, these dialogues of sound and city are multiple and clouded: by early-twentieth-century migration; by the gaping cultural, personal and epistemological hole of Stalinism and the Holocaust's devastation of the Eastern European centres of Yiddish life; and by a historiography occasionally subject to revision, omission and cliché (Slobin 2000: 23).[8] But this murkiness also opens creative pathways. In the same way that Yiddish has developed what Shandler (2006) calls a 'postvernacular' identity—a diminishing primary communicative role in favour of an increased symbolic value—today's separation of klezmer music from its historical particularities of origin and function offers up alternative possibilities, what we might (semi-ironically) term a 'post-*shtetl*' identity. Although this often means little more than residual (Williams 1977: 122) *Fiddler on the Roof* kitsch[9] or a historically dubious image of the liminally 'wandering' *kapelye* (Rubin and Ottens 2004: 296), internationalised performer networks have also in recent decades created a collective sense of contemporary transnational 'Yiddish-lands'—articulated through workshops, festivals and band projects (Rubin 2014). But klezmer can also function more locally: a site for places to imagine themselves and explore the contradictions and ambiguities of their own place-ness. This is one reason, perhaps, for the proliferation of actual locations (frequently a band's hometown) in ensemble names: Budapester Klezmer Band, Kharkov Klezmer Band, Kroke (Yiddish for Krakow), Kasbek Ensemble, Veretski Pass, Maxwell St Klezmer Band, Alaska Klezmer Band, Shtetl Band Amsterdam, London Klezmer Quartet… Klezmer's contemporary cultural homelessness makes it nominally up for grabs—anyone, anywhere, can 'have' a klezmer band, through the qualifier of a known place, or perhaps an (often jokey) Jewish-sounding name.[10]

Historically ruptured geography and present-day fluidity therefore require that klezmer find other means of making place significant: the city itself must be emplaced within the music. What follows analyses different articulations of Berlin as a meaningful musical unit in the work of several bands—different ways in which music narrates and interpellates the city. The central plank of theory from which I have drawn is Adam Krims' concept of urban ethos, a complex and robust idea encompassing the range of ways the city is imagined through and in dialogue with expressive culture:

> It is the scope of that range of urban representations and their possible modalities, in any given time span, that I call the *urban ethos*. The urban ethos is thus not a particular representation but rather a distribution of possibilities […] It is not a picture of how life is in any particular city. Instead, it distills publicly disseminated notions of how cities are generally. (Krims 2007: 7; original emphasis)

Krims' scope is broad. I will narrow it to particular elements found within this one small corner of Berlin musical production. The widespread presence of klezmer music itself in Berlin has much to say about the city's changing urban ethos over the past 25 years, but my

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[8]In his classic 492-page study, Idelsohn (1944: 455–60) devotes just six pages to klezmer, the thrust of which is to show how it has informed subsequent developments in western art music.

[9]*Fiddler on the Roof* stands in a curious relationship to the Yiddish imaginary. An acknowledged invention (in the tales of Sholem Aleichem and subsequently Bock and Harnick's musical), it is nevertheless an archly knowing source of folk memory for UK and American Jews. See Solomon (2011).

[10]The panoply of punning band names is broad, at times inventive and occasionally excruciating. It encompasses the witty (Isle of Klezbos), the political (Klezgoyim), the vernacular (Klezmer Local 42), the extra-terrestrial (KlingonKlez) and frequently the gastronomic (Hot Pstromi, Mames Babegenush, Monsieur Camembert), amongst many others.

focus is on several specific responses in the work of three bands. Although all three share friends, venues and the continuum of a scene, their work and its framing of the city is remarkably different. One group locates the urban as a site of fantastic escape; another sees a Berlin that cannot avoid the dark shadows of history; while the third engages playfully with the city's multilingual persona.

Certain themes coalesce here around an idea of 'Berlin', semiotic resources that can be contained within a conceptual umbrella of dual identity, of looking two ways at once—manifested through ideas of elsewhere, of below-surface histories (literal and metaphorical) and linguistic ambiguity. Such liminality as a fundamental aspect of Berlin's urban ethos is perhaps not so surprising. Even before the city's physical 30-year split (the starkest embodiment of two simultaneous worlds), it had long straddled a cultural and geographical fault-line (Ward 2011). In the Cold War East, subterfuge and concealment became a way of life for both official and unofficial relationships (Funder 2003), while West Berlin's bubble of subsidised freedom also represented a world where everything might not have been quite as it seemed—seen, for example in the manifest parallel worlds of Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (1987). Post-reunification, the city's ongoing debate with history continues to produce a multiplicity of conflicting demands, expectations and revelations, 'ghosts' that Ladd (1997: 234) uncovers in the city's very landscape. This simultaneous sense of borders and their porosity is not confined to the spatial: the multiple temporalities at play in the city allow klezmer to enact a parallel chronological back and forth between different Berlin histories (Till 2005: 196).

As with history, so with language. From the beginnings of its German revival, klezmer and Yiddish music has often spoken with an international accent. In the 1980s and 1990s, American Jewish bands held workshops around the country, an influence still felt in the annual month-long Yiddish Summer Weimar festival curated by Alan Bern (Wood 2013: 150–7). Since then, traffic has increasingly flowed both ways—Berlin's renewed internationalism making itself felt in its musical networks. To find a multinational group of artists in a large capital city is of course not unusual, but this particular diversity has begun to promote a distinctive poly-linguality within the city's klezmer and Yiddish music scene, lending Berlin's internationalist discourse sonic presence and substance.[11] Drawing on the blankness of the city's historical klezmer canvas, contemporary practitioners are demonstrably free to (re)create their tradition from multiple musical perspectives—bricolaging language, style and sonority. As we shall see, whilst such light-footed artistry is often revealed as a meaningful and grounded response to the geographies of European cosmopolitanism, it also occasionally throws up some uncomfortably thorny questions around history, identity and ideology.

Berlin as gateway: ?Shmaltz!'s Malwonia

?Shmaltz! are a Berlin band led by two Berliners: Detlef Pegelow raised in the underground East Berlin art rock scene, Carsten Wegener in the Americana of the West.[12]

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[11]This internationalism ironically has a parallel homogenising effect: amidst the profusion of performance/performer languages, the lingua franca of communication, rehearsals, etc. amongst klezmer networks in the city is largely English.

[12]Bassist Carsten Wegener explained the band name's curious punctuation as representing a question followed by an emphatic answer ('What is Shmaltz? *This* is Shmaltz!'). Interestingly, he was unaware of the word's Yiddish meaning (chicken fat).

Both are relentless instrument collectors and builders; both have played central roles in Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music since the early 1990s, with bands like Tants in Gartn Eydn and Grinstein's Mischpoche, and both—like their fellow band members—are centrally located in the klezmer and Yiddish educative network that has grown up across Germany over the last 20 years. Wegener was also a long-term member of Berlin's joyfully freewheeling 17 Hippies, whose loose multilingual folk/jazz/palm court mix he has carried across into this project. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given this pedigree, ?Shmaltz!'s musical resources are broad and often lie some distance from klezmer vocabulary, as the following examples show. This, however, should be understood with reference to the Berlin scene as a whole, where generic fluidity is more the norm than the exception. Notwithstanding their eclecticism, ?Shmaltz! move in and out of klezmer repertoire and idioms with ease. Their own compositions make good use of klezmer modes, rhythms and 'breaks', heard especially in the playing of accordionist Paula Sell, and their set includes Yiddish vocal material from, for example, the repertoire of Ukrainian-born singer Bronya Sakina (Yiddish is one language among several between which they slip easily). The pieces discussed here thus exist comfortably alongside the band's malleable klezmer influences, even whilst they evidence a self-consciously diverse artistic imagination.

Set against this background, ?Shmaltz!'s music is an acknowledged yet coherent invention, rooted in a loosely imagined central European soundworld, as outlined here by bassist and singer Carsten Wegener:

> It has to be a link to the modern times, because I'm living in this century, not another […] one of my favourite songs is 'Yolanda', which starts with a slide guitar for the ocean—it's a song about a female pirate—and then comes a klezmer Greek theme, but with a more laid-back beat, it's not traditional, and then comes the words, which sounds like Brecht/Weill. But I hope and I think it's not only here [touches his head]. It becomes something organic, which is a must for me—I don't want to construct things.[13]

There are several strategies that ?Shmaltz! use to embed the city in their music. Perhaps most noticeably, they often sing in Berlinerisch, Berlin's clipped, edgier-sounding dialect, where 'Wass ist das?' becomes 'Wat iss'n dit?' and 'eine kleine Klavier' is sharpened to "'ne kleenet Klavier'. But this is employed selectively, an artistic choice that roots a certain part of their sound in a good-timey, Weimar-era, anything-goes version of Berlin (Jelavich 1993). This particular Berlin is also located by instrumentation—an artful combination of medium-sized cabaret ensemble and steampunk imaginary in the form of musical saws, toy pianos ['kleenet Klavier'], horn-violins and more than a nod to the circus. Stylistically, the band glides between polka, waltz and torch song, incorporating elements of klezmer, cumbia, Balkan and Turkish music en route. Detlef's guttural ringmaster growl, Carsten's laid-back drawl and accordionist Paula's clear unadorned delivery again reference a particular pre-war Berlin soundworld, a music of winks and gestures delivered in an exaggeratedly un-prettified style.[14] The following are the opening lines of 'Gran Bufet', from their 2011 album of the same name, along with a transcription of the accordion's descending circus-like opening theme (Figure 1):

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[13]All Wegener's quotes come from a personal interview, Berlin Friedrichshain, 2 May 2014.
[14]See, for example, Jelavich on early-twentieth-century cabaret singer Claire Waldoff and her 'harsh, guttural voice' (1993: 102–3).

Figure 1. 'Gran Bufet' opening theme, accordion. Source: ?Shmaltz! (2011).

Komm, schnapp dir 'ne Limonade	Come on, grab a lemonade
'n Hurki Purki oder 'n Bier,	a Hurki Purki or a beer,
Manche fragen, wat iss'n dit?	Someone asks, wassat?
Dit is so'n kleenet Klavier.	It's a toy piano.
Klingt doch knorke und macht och jut' Laune,	Sounds cool and makes you feel good,
und allet schwoft gleich ran.	and everyone's getting down.
Rosi schiebt ihr'n Menne hin,	Rosi shoves her fella in,
wo man richtich jut essen kann.[15]	where you can eat real good.

These examples set out the band's store well. A knowingly comic, well-constructed musical line, a self-confessed delight in the playful and the sensory, framed by a Berlinerisch tone of voice and a selectively eclectic soundworld. Thus far, ?Shmaltz! might best be understood as a retro cabaret outfit. A party band, perhaps, of fedoras and feather boas, post-modernly mining a modernist seam and not uncommon in Berlin. What marks ?Shmaltz! out, however, is the part of the music that is *not* Berlin, although it relies upon an implicit relationship to the city. The appealing *mise en scène* of Berlin itself is also a gateway, a launchpad for a fabricated yet strangely coherent parallel world, the imaginary land of Malwonia—enacted through song titles and lyrics, album graphics, website mythology and a cast of fairy-tale extras. A richly imaginative creation of Carsten and Detlef, Malwonia is the fantasy alternative locus of their musical visions and aspirations. Set against the exaggerated reality of Berlin, Malwonia is a country of pirate brides and weeping angels, where taxi drivers sing love songs to donkeys. The band have created a language (Malwonian)[16] and an implied, if playfully ambiguous, geography. An early ?Shmaltz! song, 'Yorgi Ba', describes—in Malwonian—the journey of taxi driver Yorgi, who leaves Greece for unknown reasons and heads north. Along the way he picks up an elderly lady with a basket of chickens and a large bearded man. Further along, the chickens escape and one of the tyres bursts. Yorgi gets out and finds himself in the land of Malwonia, where his adventure begins. But while the absence of 'native' speakers is part of the point (and the joke), for Carsten Wegener Malwonia's creation also plays out a musical philosophy:

> The idea came that what we're doing is exactly what klezmer musicians were doing. They have their own point of view, and then they collect music—wherever they are, they put

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[15]German lyrics from liner notes (AYCE02, 2011), my translation.
[16]Here are some of the band's instruments, given in Malwonian in their liner notes: *Vajolena* [violin], *Bradzbudjamon* [accordion], *Bubosh* [bass], *Quitosh Bum* [banjo] and *Dubobat* [trombone].

this view on the tunes. In a way, Malwonia is trying to define a tradition and place, our own. And the tradition is a mixture of all the influences that I've collected. The way we are working is like the Yiddish language. It's creole, it mixes words from its own particular language and from the environment. And the music as well. So we thought, 'why don't we develop our own language, our own *shtetl*, our own world?'

Berlin, then, is the starting point. It is where the band members grew up, where they accumulated their influences, where they live. But Berlin is also the anchor for a dialectical relationship with the open-ended imaginary space of Malwonia. Without the symbolic 'leaving' of Berlin, Malwonia would itself be rootless—a spatial refiguring whose ideological implications will be discussed later. And without the creatively subversive presence of Malwonia, the band's relationship to Berlin would be far less dynamic and fluid. Through musical gesture and linguistic slippage, the band create a historical narrative loop running between old Berlin and new Malwonia—a connection reinforced by album and website graphics that offer Berlin and Malwonia as linked destinations on an imaginary train journey. The dialectic is brought to life in another *Gran Bufet* song, 'Viva la Malwonia' (Figure 2), which Wegener describes as a Malwonian *Schlager*, a particularly German genre of light pop song. In ?Shmaltz!'s case, however, a quasi-Symbolist dream-like text implores us:

Vergiss die welken Rosen,	Forget the dying roses,
die Zeit ist reif für Neues.	time is ripe for the new.
Bald sind wieder Blüten da.	Soon blooms will return.
Und selbst im tiefsten Winter,	And even in deepest winter,
schläft die Saat im Boden,	seeds sleep in the ground,
Viva la Malwonia!	Viva la Malwonia!

Part anthem to freedom, part love song, set within a consciously Germanic polka-esque aesthetic (exoticised with occasional flattened second and sixth), the song is an ode to an imagined land, heard through a familiar Berlin soundworld. ?Shmaltz!'s parallel worlds are united here through lyrics, musical style, instrumentation and *Schlager* melody. Again, the rootedness of Berlin mitigates Malwonia's historical and cultural obscurantism (of which more later). In other words, ?Shmaltz! remain a Berlin band, despite—or perhaps as a result of—their other-world craziness.

'My lover, my murderer's daughter': Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird

Daniel Kahn is a Michigan-born singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist who has been based in Berlin since 2005. In that time he has become a fluent Yiddish and German

Figure 2. 'Viva la Malwonia!', chorus. Source: ?Shmaltz! (2011).

speaker and released five albums with his band The Painted Bird, as well as curating a challenging series of 'Klezmer Bund' concerts around the city. He is a regular teacher and performer at klezmer and Yiddish workshops across Europe and North America, and Painted Bird alumni number several central younger figures of the international klezmer scene. Like ?Shmaltz!, Kahn and The Painted Bird draw from a broad musical palette, migrating freely between historical klezmer repertoire, Weimar cabaret, the Yiddish song canon and a mid-twentieth-century American folksinger ethos, all informed by a radical socialist politics. What is markedly different between the two bands, however, is their approach to the city. Where ?Shmaltz!, the native Berliners, are liberated adventurers, starting from the musical and linguistic vernacular of their own city, Daniel Kahn, the American Jewish incomer, finds the constraints of the city insurmountable, echoing all around him. To return to Krims: 'The urban ethos thus poses a set of basic stances concerning the relationship of subjects to their urban setting: Who can go where? Who is constrained by the city, and who is freed by it?' (2007: 13).

In a city that for large parts of the twentieth century has been a piece in someone else's global chess game, a contemporary zeitgeist of the city as a gateway to freedom is not so surprising (Schneider 2014; Ward 2011). For Kahn, however, Berlin is instead a site of unresolved questions, of disturbing resonances. Although his artistic imagination remains unbounded, Kahn specifically chooses a vision of Berlin that never allows us to forget history. Drawing on his love of Brecht, Kahn's self-dubbed *Verfremdungsklezmer* (a 'klezmerised' version of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* [alienation effect]) demands that we actively avoid closure and continuity as ideological constructs (Williams 1969: 279). Lyrically, musically and performatively, his work makes frequent use of interrogative strategies (Belsey 1980: 92), distancing its audience through 'devices to undermine the illusion, to draw attention to its own textuality' (ibid.). Kahn's distancing strategies are multiple. The band frequently wear bird masks and sing through megaphones, effects that render them anonymous whilst simultaneously drawing attention to the materiality of voice and face by the very act of disguising them (Bakhtin 1984: 40). Kahn will slip from Yiddish to German to English, often in the course of a couple of verses. This linguistic ambiguity self-consciously erases any sense of narrative hegemony, highlighting textual construction and artifice whilst also comically distancing different listeners at different points—in a multilingual city, no two audience members are likely to 'get' exactly the same thing.

It is an instance of temporal and spatial duality on which I want to concentrate: Kahn's 2011 song 'Görlitzer Park'. Görlitzer Park is a broad strip of green running west from the canal in Kreuzberg. A popular hangout in a hip (perhaps overly hip) neighbourhood, it is known for Mayday marches, funky musical gatherings and widespread dope dealing. From this liveliest of Berlin spaces, however, Kahn conjures a symbolic wasteland, a scene of tragic love, but more importantly a space that, rather than transcending the city's history, symbolically catapults us right back into it. This temporal shift is paralleled by the song's musical references, drawn here from well outside the Painted Bird's klezmer gravitational centre—texturally evoking 1950s American folk ballads whilst harmonically referencing the romance of 1920s French and German chanson. Again, however, this breadth should be contextualised against the centrality of klezmer and Yiddish song within the band's wider repertoire: despite its manifold points of musical reference, the piece remains framed by the multiple references that Kahn's work overall makes to Yiddish musical tradition.

The site of the park was originally Görlitzer Bahnhof, a mainline terminus. Badly hit by wartime bombing and languishing unused during the Cold War, the park has more recently become one of Kreuzberg's well-known 'do what you like' spaces, as well as a site of refugee protest. This contemporary manifestation figures little, however, in Kahn's treatment, which instead uses the park as a spatial embodiment of wartime and post-war unease:

in the garden of frozen desire
on the derelict couch we sat down
wie die Stadt hier wir brauchten ein Feuer   [like this town we needed fire]
um uns aufzuwecken vom Traum   [to wake us from our dream]
und du mit den blutigen Haaren   [and you with your bloody hair]
ich seh' deine Augen sind zu   [I see that your eyes are closed]
so I'll be the Wilhelmine Baron & you can be the ewiger Jew   [… eternal Jew]

& the trains of Berlin / they run her and hin   [back & forth]
through tunnels below in the dark / but the station is gone
so I'll wait for you on / the ruins of Görlitzer Park

from the ivy at Grünewald station to the Treptower Soviet blade
you built your triumphant narration out of stones from the Mendelssohn grave
where the sun is as gold as the names on the ground
& the walls grow up over the trees
& the tower antenna is haunting the town & the past is a quiet disease[17]

The city is emphatically placed in the song text: Grunewald station; the Treptower Soviet war memorial; the famous Fernsehturm and the more recent *Stolpersteine* ['stumble stones']. But none of these placements is mere atmosphere. All relate directly to the city-in-war and post-war, and most evoke a specifically Jewish history: trains bound for Auschwitz and Theresienstadt departed from Grunewald; the small gold-coloured *Stolpersteine* found all over Berlin mark the names and former residences of victims of Nazi deportations. Set within the potent similes and metaphors that dot the text, these sharply resonant geographies create a semiotic slippage between subject, object, time and Berlin itself, a back and forth of perspective and identity that finds its echo in the disinterested and endless journey of the trains below.

Musically, the song is unadorned, a steady three–four ballad set to ukulele, bass, strings and toy piano—a stripped-down echo of ?Shmaltz!'s otherworldly sound. The melodic compass of the verse is small, the harmonic progression subtle and unshowy, underscoring the song's pathos rather than playing up its lurid drama (Figure 3). The rising major seventh then minor sixth of the chorus vocal line open things up slightly, offering a melodic high point from which the tune descends to an octave below (Figure 4)—this relatively dramatic musical moment poignantly juxtaposed against the monotony of the trains running in darkness beneath.

This expansion, however, is quickly reined in with the second half of the chorus, returning to its familiar four-note range. Where the song steps out musically is in the middle eight. The lyrical D major becomes an angry D minor, and a series of minor 1–5 cadences ratchets up the harmonic rhythm. This is intensified by a more strident violin part, bass switching to *arco* and the first entrance of drummer Hampus Melin's sinister take on the slow klezmer 3/8 *hora* rhythm, played heavily and ruthlessly on

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[17]For the full text, see: http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77_GOERLITZER_PARK.pdf (accessed 23 September 2017).

Figure 3. 'Görlitzer Park', verse. Source: Daniel Kahn & The Painted Bird (2011).

the first beat of each bar. Fittingly, here the lyrics are most accusatory and pointed—National Socialist and Cold War legacy explicitly named and implicated, along with the city's silence (Figure 5).

Textually, the song is structured around a sense of debasement and reversal. This is a world where walls grow higher than trees, where lovers are murderers and identities are transient. It is a place marked by silence, subterfuge, boundaries and transgressions: in short, Berlin as it once was. And indeed, most interesting in this song is its wilful refusal to 'move on', its avowed recognition that everyone is in some sense implicated. The 'ruins' of the text are nowadays a vibrant Sunday hangout—children visit the urban farm, couples (and vagrants) rest on the rocks and sound systems vie with *djembes* in the large grass-covered crater that was once a linking tunnel. But Kahn forces us to re-examine the site, pointedly reminding us that one thing cannot exist without the other; that all our dark pasts are never far from the surface. The tenderest of lover's gazes, framed by Berlin's most sociable of spaces, must nevertheless face what lies beneath:

> where the air is filled up with sparrows when once it was clouded with crows
> & the Sleepwalker shot his last arrow then he buried himself with his bow
> oh my lover, my murderer's daughter accomplice to all of my sins
> our city of love & of slaughter
> *wird immer noch heißen Berlin*. ... [will always be called Berlin]

Figure 4. 'Görlitzer Park', chorus first half. Source: Daniel Kahn & The Painted Bird (2011).

Figure 5. 'Görlitzer Park', middle 8. Source: Daniel Kahn & The Painted Bird (2011).

Figure 5. Continued

In talking with Kahn in 2013, he told me, 'I embrace Jewishness as a historical identity, but I like to choose what history I am engaging with'.[18] This historical choice seems to be at the heart of the song, confronting not only a relationship to Jewishness, but also the role of history in a Jew's present-day relationship to his adopted city. Kahn's urban ethos is one which must acknowledge the worst parts of Berlin's history as fundamental to his place in the city, as well as the city's place in his music.

Knoblauch klezmer, Berlin style

Knoblauch Klezmer Band is a five-piece that has been playing klezmer in and around Berlin for the past five years. The personnel typify the current internationalism of the city's music scene: an Israeli fiddle player, a French clarinettist, a Scottish accordion player and a German bassist and drummer. Knoblauch began by playing well-known klezmer tunes, supplemented by *coceks* and *rebetiko*, but more recently original compositions based on traditional klezmer forms and modes (imaginatively reconstructed)

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[18]Personal interview, Berlin Neukölln, 6 December 2013.

have become central to their repertoire. Of the members, only fiddler Eli Fabrikant is tied in any significant sense to other klezmer musicians and networks in the city—he is a regular participant at Bar Oblomov's klezmer jam sessions and in 2014 attended Yiddish Summer Weimar's instrumental workshop week. This is significant, as Fabrikant is—by his own admission—the band member who has taken most time and effort to learn and internalise an idiomatic klezmer vocabulary. He is also the band's only Jew.

Several aspects of Knoblauch Klezmer Band distinctly locate the city and its urban ethos. The first is extra-musical: their onstage outfits. Where the band's soundworld rarely departs far from a conventional klezmer aesthetic, beefed-up with heavier drums and plenty of onstage testosterone, their visual impact is anything but: tricorn hats, sequinned waistcoats, pink feather boas, purple veils, bare feet and skin-tight PVC trousers are common fare. As mentioned earlier, wardrobes like this are not unusual on the Berlin stage. What is different here is the apparent disjuncture between the traditional sound and roots of their music and its fantastical performance attire. For violinist Eli, this juxtaposition also describes a transformation in his own perception of what the band is doing, and their relationship to the place in which they are doing it:

> I found myself in the beginning really trying to break this and saying 'guys, it's really easy to dress up funny and play funny circus music, but we know a hundred bands that are doing that.' But the moment that I realised, wait, wait, wait, it's not instead of making good music, it's in *addition* to making clever, beautiful interesting music. And I said yeah! You can go crazy and not be like the traditional German klezmer, all buttoned-up, wearing what they think *klezmorim* wore, trying to produce something that states it out loud. But saying, ok, it's Berlin, those guys have nothing to do with Jewish culture or klezmer per se, but they love the vibe and this is how they express it.[19]

In other words, what began for Fabrikant as a semi-accidental collision of Berlin cabaret codes and Ashkenazi Jewish wedding music has come to embody a particular performative response. It locates the band's intentions within a contemporary discourse of Berlin performance, consciously distanced from the perceived artificiality and cliché of 'recreated' klezmer semiotics. More than this, the band's visual statement in fact articulates what is for Fabrikant a closer, more authentic relationship to his musical forebears:

> I don't know, I was always thinking about at least some descriptions of *klezmorim* [klezmer musicians]. Not everybody agrees what was exactly going on there. But one of the descriptions that I read about was really about this, a little bit outcasts. It wasn't the respected members of the community, they were always like the troublemakers and so on [...] So for me, I said, ok, this is how I feel klezmer, actually.

From the more bordered structures of the German klezmer revival, Knoblauch's inclusive zaniness offers an alternative functional reading, one that opens up the music's counter-cultural meanings in a non-confrontational, distinctly Berlin-rooted way. A good illustration is their cover of German electronic pioneers Kraftwerk's famous 'Das Modell'—a source unexpectedly sympathetic to a klezmer treatment. Introduced at gigs by clarinettist Arnaud Duvoux, in heavily pastiched East European accent, as 'an old song from the women of the *shtetl*', the tune is a smart and witty reworking of 1970s electronica into an acoustic klezmer dance anthem, complete with a newly composed

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[19]All Fabrikant's quotes come from a personal interview, Berlin Kreuzberg, 9 June 2014.

Moldovan-esque instrumental break. Structurally, Knoblauch's version is surprisingly faithful, the opening motif here turned by accordionist Chris Lyons into a left-hand pattern, while his right hand becomes an acoustic drum machine (Figure 6). As part of the 'klezmerising' process, fiddle player Fabrikant offers counterlines to the vocal melody, moved up a minor third and altered to fit the sharpened fourth of the Jewish *mis-heberakh* (Idelsohn 1944: 185) mode (Figure 7).

As a final tour de force, the band transforms the iconic arpeggiated synth line of Kraftwerk's original into a boisterous wordless singalong (Figure 8). Referencing Hasidic traditions of wordless communal *nigun* singing (Wood 2013: 137), Knoblauch's version begins slowly and accelerates back up to speed, with plenty of tongue-in-cheek shouts and ad libs in the process. Part bottle dance, part football chant, it is a nicely irreverent nod both to Jewish musical traditions and the pogoing tendencies of their dancefloor demographic—a piece of motivic and stylistic elision that bridges the roots of the German techno scene and the Berlin klezmer discourse.

Fantasist geography and the 'New Old Europe Sound'

Daniel Kahn addresses Berlin from the outside in, viewing the city through a deliberately provocative and politicised lens that problematises the smooth ideological incorporation of klezmer and Yiddish music into the contemporary city by making it part of a performance approach. Conversely, ?Shmaltz! and Knoblauch Klezmer Band explore a 'fantasist' klezmer aesthetic: a self-conscious musical eclecticism marked by a large degree of playfulness in presentation that in turn frames a dramatically personal engagement with klezmer musical identity. They have taken romanticising the *shtetl* to its semi-absurd

Figure 6. 'Das Modell', opening. Source: Knoblauch Klezmer Band (2013).

Figure 7. 'Das Modell', verse excerpt. Source: Knoblauch Klezmer Band (2013).

Figure 8. 'Das Modell', chorus. Source: Knoblauch Klezmer Band (2013).

conclusion, embracing the weirdly coherent imaginary land of Malwonia and a re-creation of German electronic dance music as a deconstructed version of Yiddish tradition.

In 'Cinderella Berlin' (Schneider 2014: 8), a city that has spent the last few decades rein-venting itself and has by now developed a finely-tuned bricolage approach to cultural pro-duction,[20] such self-consciously performative parallel klezmer worlds are a good fit and a logical counterpart to the city's lack of klezmer 'tradition'. Emplaced within networks of performers, venues and recordings, these imaginary territories gain a material foothold in the day-to-day cultural operations of the city itself:

> cities and regions come with no automatic promise of territorial or systemic integrity, since they are made through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition, porosity and relational connec-tivity […] 'hauntings' of things. (Amin 2004: 34)

In other words, we can read the deliberately ambiguous territoriality of these bands as a direct response to the city itself, a set of musical and contextual juxtapositions (and coher-ences) to set against a larger absence of 'territorial or systemic integrity'. Fantasy klezmer becomes less concerned with specific geographies, and more with articulating the spatial fluidity and indeterminacy of the urban itself.

There is also a wilful escapism in these creations, a non-specific sense of elsewhere that offers 'the freedom to glimpse our own hybridity, our own contingency' (Taj-bakhsh 2001: 83). The gleeful profusion of competing identities is of course hardly exclusive to klezmer, or to Berlin. But in the context of the 'virtual Jewishness' debates that have surrounded German klezmer music over the last two decades (Gruber 2002), we might ask whether one can also detect an ideological layer at work here. Kaminsky (2015: 144) argues that the erasure of specific ethnic origins allows contemporary practitioners of the 'New Old Europe Sound', often with no ethnic ties, to lay claim to an east European musical 'bricolage' (ibid.: 143), at the same time denying Roma, Jewish and Balkan identities further agency in their music. How much can we apply this critique here? ?Shmaltz!'s Carsten Wegener is quick to point up the roots of the music he plays, but identifies his own musical journey as a continuously developing one:

> I was always interested in traditional styles, this is a big thing for me. Pretty soon, I found what I need in music for myself is some root […] Later I went on to explore other territories, like playing a hora with a musical saw or with blues harmonica, but in the beginning it was very traditional, I just wanted to learn the traditions.

Whilst ?Shmaltz!'s stylistic palette is wide, Wegener is careful not to erase its musical origins—at the same time defending in creative terms his right as a musician to adapt them. And although ?Shmaltz! exhibit clear 'blurring' of sonic markers (Kaminsky 2015: 144), Wegener's strong network ties to the city's klezmer scene also place him in a much more direct relation to klezmer as (originally) Jewish music.

In dealing with questions of appropriation, however, we must also engage with the musicians' sense of their own identity, although—as all of the artists here are quick to

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[20]Despite the term's widespread traction nowadays, I am sticking to Levi-Strauss' (1968) original formulation of a process of patching-together from what is available rather than starting with the 'correct' materials for the job—in the process creating new syntagmatic and paradigmatic discursive possibilities (Clarke 1976: 149). This aesthetics of 'mix-and-match' is a dynamic feature of Berlin's cultural and street life.

point out—one's Jewishness (or lack of it) does not confer any more or less 'right' per se to klezmer music. Nevertheless, Knoblauch's Eli Fabrikant draws explicit links between his own constantly evolving Jewish identity and the music he plays. By his own admission, Fabrikant sees his musical role (in good-natured conflict with the rest of the band) as continuing to define the 'klezmer' part of Knoblauch Klezmer Band—in contrast to fellow members happier to blur the lines more readily. For Eli, this dialectic is intimately connected to his life as an Israeli in Berlin:

> I define myself by Zionism, but I also placed myself against all the Jewish culture that I knew. And I think that coming here really mixed up everything, because suddenly I was not a majority […] And then I started asking myself, am I a Jew? What does it mean, actually to be a Jew? Because in Israel it's a default, it was just kind of external rules. *Here suddenly I felt it really strong.* And I started asking myself also what it means, what my parents and my grandparents went through, what Jewish identity meant to them […] what is this tag, and why do I feel it so strongly?

Such expressions of the ambiguities of young Jewish identity are by no means specific to Berlin, but they have in this case been brought into focus by that city's particular combination of contested history, long-time liminality and contemporary open-ended creativity. If free-floating 'Berlin-ness' has prompted these questions for Eli, it is the musical processes of klezmer—its privileging of social over sacred and its distance from Zionism —that have allowed him to unpack them further. And the fantasist indeterminacy of Knoblauch Klezmer Band offers an effectively fluid environment within which to do this: keenly felt tactical 'shadows and ambiguities' (de Certeau 1984: 100) to set against the grander historical narrative of Jewish identity. The broad spectrum of signifying practices contained within 'klezmer' offers a multiply diffuse set of identities that, whilst liberating, demand a dialogic engagement that ultimately grounds the fantasist enterprise. The result, I would argue, nuances the 'New Old Europe' paradigm, bridging the rootless tendencies critiqued by Kaminsky and a more sophisticated consideration of musical tradition.

Berlin as Borderland

A final emphatic example of the tying of music to place, or specifically to musically emplaced heritage, comes again from Daniel Kahn, this time in collaboration with Riga-born Yiddish singer Sasha Lurje. At the Gorki Theater in January 2014, the duo put together a programme of *Strangelovesongs—fremde Liebe, fremde Lieder, fremde Sprachen* ['strange love, strange songs, strange languages']. In an evening that leapt joyfully between German, English, Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew, one of the most striking moments came with the pair's rendition of the Yiddish chestnut 'Margaritkelech'. Originally a 1909 poem by Zalman Shneour, subsequently published in Menachem Kipnis' 1918 *folkslider* collection and recorded many times, the song tells the story of Chavele, a young girl who heads dreamily into the forest to pick flowers. There she meets a man with whom she falls (briefly) in love. The setting sun finds the man gone and Chavele once again alone in the woods. Conventional interpretations play the song as a coy coming-of-age fairytale, the gently comic commingling of the man's black hair and flaming eyes with Chavele's ('the prettiest daisy of all') blond curls, lost in a dream and far away from her elderly mother's beady eye, all underscored by a soothing 3/4 lilt.

Kahn and Lurje's version, however, found a much darker heart to the song, foregrounded by a closer inspection of the lyrics:

–O, loz mikh, men tor nit;	–O, let me go, I mustn't;
di mame zogt m'tor nit	mama said I mustn't
Mayn mame iz alt un iz beyz.	My mama is old and wicked.
–Vu mame? vos mame?	–Where's mama? What mama?
do zaynen nor beymer,	There's only trees here,
Nor beymelekh, tra-la-la-la.	only young trees, tra-la-la-la.
–Du libst mikh?—Ikh lib dikh!	–Do you love me?—I love you!
–Du shemst dikh?	–Are you ashamed?
–Ikh shem mikh!	–I'm ashamed!
–O lib mikh un shem dikh un shvayg.	–O love me and be ashamed and keep quiet.
Un ze vi es mishn zikh pekh-shvartse kroyzn	And see how pitch black curls mix
Mit goldene … tra-la-la-la.[21]	With golden ones … tra-la-la-la.

In order to further push the point home, Kahn and Lurje's rendition arrested the musical accompaniment (up to this point motoring along jollily) at 'Vu mame?'. Kahn spat out his questions with menace, Lurje answered them with eyes averted, in a whisper. The music again halted at '*shvayg*', delivered now as a venomous shout. That the sweet pastoral had turned sourly into sexual abuse was clear,[22] but this is not all the pair found in the song. This particular rendition was smoothly spliced with Heinrich Werner's setting of Goethe's 'Röslein auf der Heiden', a well-known German song telling a similar tale:

Und der wilde Knabe brach	And the savage boy picked
's Röslein auf der Heiden;	the little rose on the heath;
Röslein wehrte sich und stach,	The little Rose fought and pricked,
Half ihr doch kein Weh und Ach,	Still no pain or cry could help her,
Mußt' es eben leiden.	She had to suffer all the same.
Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot,	Little rose, little red rose,
Röslein auf der Heiden.[23]	Little rose on the heath.

Just in case anyone that evening might have missed the significance of reframing a much-loved German song (with words by Germany's most iconic poet) as a metaphor for rape and abuse, the duo stopped their performance part-way through for this brief commentary from Kahn:

> Ok, this is a fucked-up song ['Margaritkelech', at this point]. I really hate this song and actually I wanted to somehow create an entire programme in which I could sing this song that I fucking *hate*. And I hate 'Röslein auf der Heide' too. And you shouldn't ever sing it [laughter]. It's not pretty. And look, yeah, ok, *a bokher, a shvartse*,[24] it doesn't mean that he's dark, it means that he has black hair. Which is also fucked-up too! It's a cliché and it's racist and it's sexist and it's *gewalttätig* [violent].

That folk songs and tales might reveal and challenge cultural ground rules of sexuality and deviance is nowadays a commonplace (Levi-Strauss 1968). But to bookend a Goethe poem with a Yiddish folksong and to implicate both in a chilling tale of rape and subjugation is to confront the 'unpresentable in presentation itself' (Lyotard 1993: 46), an explicit refusal to close the semiotic gap and to deny 'the solace of good forms, the

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[21]Mlotek (1987: 40).
[22]Kahn and Lurje are not the first to offer this interpretation. The 'Margaritkelech' sub-text is apparent in earlier renditions by Theodore Bikel (in 1958) and Chava Alberstein (in 1969).
[23]Goethe (1882: 12).
[24]The description of Chavele's mysterious stranger. In this case it means 'a guy with black hair'.

consensus of a taste' (ibid.). And given the context of an evening of 'strange love songs', music of alterity and difference, the historical framing of German–Jewish power relations is of course unavoidable. But importantly, Kahn and Lurje upset the norms of this dialectic: both sides are collusive, the parochial Yiddish lullaby as guilty as the nineteenth-century German pastoral. Once again, the particularly Berlin urban ethos foregrounded is one where sides are never clear, frontiers are porous, ambiguous and unreliable (Silberman, Till and Ward 2012: 5). Somewhere between Yiddish song tradition and radical singer-songwriter politics, Berlin is emphatically (re)framed as a borderland: 'a constant state of transition [where] the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants' (Anzaldúa 1987: 3–4).

Conclusion

Shepherd (1991: 214) suggests that, existing within the 'cracks and margins', beyond 'what passes for "reality"', music can act as mediator between 'the acceptable and the unacceptable, that which is powerful and that which is dangerous.' Perhaps best placed, then, to articulate the complex dimensions of Berlin's urban ethos—in this case a continuum that runs between dialogic escapism and an inescapable historical complicity. Through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Berlin has been cosmopolitan hotspot, National Socialist epicentre, Cold War frontier, beacon of new Europeanism and Europe's coolest 'poor, but sexy'[25] city. That its sound world should reflect this is not

Figure 9. Neukölln graffiti. Rumours of the band's demise were premature. On Halloween 2014, they appeared ('undead') at Gorki Theater. Source: Photograph by author, March 2014.

surprising—the various historical manifestations of Berlin are inseparable from the city's cultural production. They become points of reference in the city's urban ethos. Ambiguously tied to multiple historical roots, contemporary klezmer's international musical praxis also renders it paradoxically root*less*. The material and cultural links forged with Berlin are therefore crucial, providing a local urban counterpart to klezmer's international dialogue, and grounding the music in a way that its transnational discourse (Rubin 2014) cannot. Through these processes, klezmer music in Berlin steps beyond the revitalisation of Jewish cultural forms and enters into meaningful dialogue with the complexities of the contemporary city: the urban ethos becomes a way of working through these contradictions and ambiguities. Traditional music, born elsewhere, is here revealed as a richly malleable and provocatively expressive channel through which to speak the modern city, to probe its unresolved questions and to interrogate its social processes. For the majority of klezmer and Yiddish musicians in Berlin, the city that frames day-to-day life figures only peripherally in their musical meanings. For the few who choose to scratch the surface, the multiple intersections exposed offer sites of musical emplacement that continue to open up creative, challenging and ongoing ways to hear—and so negotiate—the city in which they live and breathe.

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Phil Alexander gained his PhD in 2016 from SOAS, University of London, UK. Since March 2017 he has been working as a Research Associate at Glasgow University, UK on the AHRC-funded project 'Jewish Lives/Scottish Spaces', looking at early-twentieth-century Jewish musical practice in Scotland. He is also a busy and active musician, composing and performing klezmer and jazz regularly around the United Kingdom.

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[25]Mayor Klaus Wowereit's famous characterisation of Berlin (*'arm, aber sexy'*), reproduced on tourist t-shirts and postcards, has by now arguably become something of a millstone around the city's neck.

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