

Ovio OLARU
Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
olaru.ovio@gmail.com

TRANSNATIONAL ASPECTS OF GERMAN-TURKISH LITERATURE

Recommended Citation

Olaru, Ovio. "Transnational Aspects of German-Turkish Literature". *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 3.1 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2017.3.03>

Abstract: This paper aims to shed light on the different aspects of transnationalism and transnational literature in regard to the German cultural space and the so-called *(Im)Migrantenliteratur* (immigrant literature and migrant literature, respectively). By this approach, the historical context of post-war Germany will prove itself to be of great relevance, especially in studying the sociological consequences brought about by the import of Turkish work force in Germany, the concept of difference and its modes of realisation, and the prevalence of cultural specific characteristics in works belonging to Turkish-born German authors (f.e. Feridun Zaimoğlu). Last, but not least, our study will include a series of considerations regarding translation and the problems and debates resulting from the effort of transferring the symbolic signs of one culture into another.

Key words: transnationalism, *Migrantenliteratur*, translation, difference, interculturality.

The context of Turkish transnationalism in Germany

Transnationalism has become a very resourceful theme of study in the last two decades. In its core, this trend in cultural studies aims to lay the theoretical foundations of the world we currently live in and to explain its mechanisms in the age of a steadily increasing globalisation and digitization. And the need for such an approach makes itself clear when trying to grasp the ever more heterogeneous

manifestations of contemporary culture with traditional hermeneutic means. A monolithic approach in literary study proves itself out-dated in the dissemination of more and more exotic phenomena, whose emergence have ultimately come to constitute the norm. Thus, an appeal to traditional critical instruments – let us say, text-immanence – in the case of a novel written by a Russian Jewish woman in the German language seems that it would grossly exclude any discussion regarding gender identity, negation or acceptance of German past and the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the Russian literary and cultural tradition, on the other. The field of transnationalism possesses the advantage of incorporating different levels of cultural code in its conceptual framework, from gender, identity and historical events to international conflicts and racial tensions. Literary criticism constitutes only an example, among many others, in which transnationalism has become indispensable in explaining contemporary cultural norms. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen argues that

The idea of national literatures is strong, despite anything that globalization may do to the notion of national identity, not least because markets, education, and in some cases, languages, still have a solid national base. Hence, the idea of world literature still seems based on a concerto of national literatures, even in those cases of writers who are very international in their own outlook as well as in their reception, because there is no tradition of thinking about authors as belonging to a subsystem within the literary world which is independent of nations (Thomsen, 23).

This might seem a defence of nationally bound literature, but he further adds, in an act of deconstructing this perceived preconception, that

Beyond their qualities as individual writers, the visibility of migrant writers in contemporary literary culture and in literary history provides an argument for the existence of transnational literatures that correspond better to the cultural streams of the age than much other literature. An argument both for and against the importance of the role played by migrant and bicultural writers is that national borders are just one kind of border that inspires and challenges writers (Thomsen, 62).

To a certain extent, nation-states have lost their hegemony and their boundaries in favour of cultural, economic and social exchange brought about by migration, travel, tourism and access to media. The age of the great *Nationalisms* has dawn,

and it is more and more clear that the *Nation* is nothing more than a construct built rarely upon a sense of unity and convergence of values, but upon racial, religious and linguistic discrimination *against* historically variable marginalized groups. The two great nationalist projects of the last century, the last of their kind in Europe, prove this argument to a great extent. The Third Reich was built on the collective fear and hatred of Jews, while the ideological foundation of the Soviet Union was the eternal class-struggle of the working-class against the bourgeoisie.

The case of Germany, which constitutes the object of this paper, represents a classic tale of cultural confrontation and, ultimately, of integration. The end of the Second World War brought about not only a territorial division of Germany, but also the assigning of cultural influences. West Germany underwent a total political and economical rebirth under the influence of the Allies, while East Germany fell under the power of the Soviet Union. The construction of the Berlin Wall did nothing but exacerbate the ever increasing differences between the two ideological poles. A tendency inscribed in the logic of American imperialism was indeed the forceful distancing from every form of ideological contamination, especially when this contamination was coming from leftist positions, as it was the case after the war. The “hardening of attitudes, the tightening of the grip of demeaning generalization and triumphalist cliché, the dominance of crude power allied with simplistic contempt of dissenters and «others»” (Said, 15) came to greatly diminish any forms of dialogue possible between the two zones of influence after the war. Edward Said makes the general affirmation that the United States has the tendency to find “an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an ersatz model of free market «democracy»” (Said, 15), and that is precisely what took place in West-Germany.

The Wall also caused an increase in the shortage of labour prevalent after the war, which ultimately led to the agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Turkey regarding the importation of so-called *Gastarbeiter* (Kelek, 2011), workers who were to be housed and to perform services in West Germany, to send their earned money back home in Turkey and consequently leave. Historically speaking, it was an act of *Wiedergutmachung*, of compensation in the form of mutually advantageous cooperation between a First World country and a Second World country, through which Germany sought to

come to terms with its turbulent past in the wakes of postcolonialism. In 1961 alone, more than 800.000 migrant workers were brought in (Ataman, 12).

Despite the slogans of the day, that greeted the importation of foreign workers with enthusiasm, and despite videos bordering on propaganda that boasted convincing phrases such as “Hurra, die Türken kommen!” (*Hoorray, the Turks are coming!*), the opening of the borders did not immediately translate in the contouring of *Willkommenskultur*. This agreement was made not from within a leftist political agenda, but in the logic of the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*, the economic boom of the 1960s: relatively cheap imported work-force had the purpose of consolidating an economy developing with a greater strength than its own work-force would permit it. On the other side, an appeal to the myth of German welfare was made, in order to convince Turkish workers to immigrate, in hopes of a better life back home. Another deciding factor resided in the precarious political circumstances in Turkey, which on May 27th 1960, went through a military coup, leaving the country in uncertainty. In 1974, family reunification laws were introduced in Germany, which permitted the workers to bring their families to the country. In 1980, the country underwent yet another coup, which reinforced the immigration tendency and resulted in the fact that “in Germany in 1997, migrants from Turkey numbered over 2 million, about 30 percent of all the foreign population of the country” (Findley, 221). Later, as the European Union expanded, Germany, as leading decision-making element within it, did not deliberately seek the integration of Turkey and refused, albeit tacitly, to help grant the country membership. The argumentation against the integration of Turkey may have possessed a political origin, but the geographical positioning between two continents was surely an impediment for the strategically expansion of the European Union, because “the Ural Mountains may appear as a feasible and tangible place to mark the end of Europe and the beginning of Asia (after a generational change of the guards in Russia), but once Turkey is in (...) no line will be left to demarcate Europe” (Soysal, 199).

This fact is not without importance in the context of transnationalism, mainly due to the fact that a good deal of transnational literature owes its existence to cultural differences, and these differences would have been greatly ameliorated if Turks had more easily received citizenship or had had the promise of indefinite residence. Tensions began to appear in the decades following the first wave of

Gastarbeiter and hit their peak after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, when it became clear that the temporary character of the residence was delusional, and that the only solution was the naturalization of Turks in German society, a society in which racial and religious stereotypes had already set in and which, as a result, experienced a rather aggressive form of *Fremdenangst* during the 1990s and a surge of right-wing feelings and racist tendencies. Furthermore, the unification saw a revival of nationalist discourses and an aversion to foreigners:

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s controversies raged over German citizenship law and the political status denied most Turkish residents. The early years after unification saw a surge in violent attacks on Turks and other “foreigners”, real or perceived. This elicited public outcry at home and abroad, as many wondered what values the newly unified and powerful German nation would represent. In roughly the same decade that spanned the German Historians’ Debate of the mid-1980s and extended debates about Berlin’s National Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe, German public figures repeatedly opposed full membership for Turkey in the European Community and subsequently the European Union (Adelson, 84).

Even the term *Gastarbeiter*, “invited worker”, has come to betray a precarious, if not fully marginalized status. Because of the temporary character of their stay, any real naturalisation was rendered useless and was subsequently not pursued. The integration took place at a superficial level, in the project of making the migrants functioning members of society, good, efficient and cooperating workers, and elements that did not disturb German social order. Later on, after the Reunification, the tendency was to encourage Turks to return, the German state even offering financial rewards and courses in Turkish for those who expressed interest to return. The prevalent view was that guest-workers were dispensable and their integration avoidable:

If icons of migrant labour mediate cultural values and social capital, the value mediated by images denying social capital to Turkish men and women is a cultural sense of German superiority. This perception rests on the conceit that Turkish migrants are at bottom dispensable features of German life, much like the refuse they make disappear. This is important because the conceit falls away when public discourse shifts attention to equally iconic images of Turkish women reaping the

benefits of emancipation from Turkish and Islamic patriarchy in Germany or even Turkish men cast as delinquents or thugs (Adelson, 128).

It was this condescending view that forced the migrants to resort to an isolationist class consciousness: on the one hand, the public discourse revolved around the beneficial aspects of German life and the successful integration of Turks in the work field, but on the other hand, the public opinion treated them with fear and aversion. Views expressed by state media did not coincide with those prevalent in German society: the linguistic barrier, as well as the conservation of Turkish social norms inherent to the rigidity of Islamic traditions played an important role in this contradiction, transforming the Turk into an image of intangible strangeness, a necessary burden from the point of view of history: “Turkish migrants have been interpellated for four decades in Germany as subjects, if far less frequently as citizens, of a capitalist state committed to certain forms of historical memory” (Adelson, 123).

Transnational Turkish Literature in Germany

It was obvious that this problematic positioning would result in a form of literature that is neither German nor Turkish altogether, but in which the two poles would combine to form a third, non-canonical expression, which warrants new methodological instruments in its analysis. Leslie A. Adelson proposes the concept of *touching tales* instead of the more facile and theoretically impractical one of “between two worlds”. Because setting the migrant authors in the coordinates of a third space, unable to attain a full and undisputed status, makes the methodological means of critical interpretation obsolete. Matters of hybrid identity take their place in the centre of interpretation and become the sole lens, eluding real criticism and an honest insight by accentuating difference:

Germans and Turks in Germany share more culture (as an ongoing imaginative project) than is often presumed when one speaks of two discrete worlds encountering each other across a civilizational divide. *Touching tales* thus takes conceptual leave from a model of incommensurable differences to stress a broad range of common ground. (...) It acknowledges affective dimensions that shadow the literature of Turkish migration, which in varying configurations reflects German guilt, shame, or resentment about the Nazi past, German fears of migration, Turkish

fears of victimization, national taboos in both countries, and Turkish perceptions of German fantasies (Adelson, 20).

Another problematic question is the one regarding origin. Is the German-Turkish literature to be labelled as German, as it is written on German territory and in the German language, or is it inherently Turkish in the sense that it constitutes a chapter in Turkish literary tradition? To a certain degree, this question loses its relevance in transnationalism, where the mere concept of national literature has lost its grounds in the favour of a literary production that cannot be inscribed in geographical or cultural borders, ultimately becoming world literature. As Mads Rosendahl puts it,

World Literature is worth taking seriously as a challenge to research and teaching, not only because it has a resource-filled history, or because history has reached an era of intensified cultural globalization and therefore is ready for world literature, but because it is an emergent field of its own that takes seriously both cultural globalization and literature that can be characterized as transnational. World literature in this sense acknowledges the existence of a world literary system, which is arguably a more realistic way to describe the history of the world's literature than the prevailing national and comparative paradigms (Rosendahl, 5).

David Damrosch also explicitly concedes the existence within World Literature of a transnational dimension, defining it as “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language” (Damrosch, 4).

During the 1980, the interest in foreign authors writing in German grew, and migrant literature ceased to be regarded as an accidental literary phenomenon, but to be integrated in the German canon through the Adelbert-von-Chamisso prize, founded in 1985 and dedicated exclusively to foreign authors writing in German. The latter half of the decade was dominated by Turkish authors, whom were awarded the prize four out of five years. Furthermore, the specific interest for German-Turkish literature led to the publication of two anthologies, *In zwei Sprachen leben* (*Living in two languages*, 1983) and *Türken deutscher Sprache* (*Turks of the German language*, 1984). The premises for these collections were already present from the latter half of the 1970s, when the realities of the migrant workers' lives were becoming less of a mystery for the German

public through the publication of Max von der Grün's *Leben im gelobten Land* (von der Grün, 6). *Gastarbeiterporträts* (*Life in a praised country. Portraits of guest-workers*) in 1975. As it was the case, the interest for the underprivileged working class was complementary in a Germany self-conscious about its turbulent past with the attention to social injustice and a journalistic inquiry prone to discourses of inclusion. But the fact that most of the inquired migrants were Turks – they were still, statistically, the greatest part of the imported workers – and that they were male – women not being allowed or refusing to answer was detrimental to the project and did nothing but increase the pre-existing *Fremdenangst* (Feldvoß, 5).

An observation is to be made regarding the development of the literary field in the Federal Republic and in the German Democratic Republic. Although the GDR was under ideological constraints dictated by the USSR, it sought to renew its cultural production, firstly in order to meet the needs of the German consumers of cultural goods, and secondly, to strengthen its political foundations:

The GDR's promotion of consumer culture was fostered by the need to compete with the FRG, and to meet the high expectations of East German consumers. It was also fostered by the crucial geo-political position of the GDR as a frontline state confronting the capitalist West (Anselmo, 78).

On the other hand, West-Germany found itself under the direct influence of American consumer culture, an aspect that made cultural transfer inevitable. Itamar Even-Zohar, when talking about transfer, notes that it mainly occurs because of the "willingness to consume new goods" (Even-Zohar, pp. 173-181). The so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 60s, far from being an independent phenomenon, was the result of the Marshall plan, together with the immediate contacts with American culture, contacts that "may raise a sense of insufficiency, especially if the other repertoire is richer, more prestigious among many groups, or may even promise «a better life»" (Said, 15) and this sense of insufficiency ultimately built the incentive of importing not only goods, but culture. The preferred manifestation of this cultural transfer was, in the first decades after the war, the translation of lyrical anthologies. *Junge Amerikanische Lyrik* (Corso/Höllnerer, 1961), *Beat. Die Anthologie* (Paetel, 1962), *Underground Poems. Underground Gedichte. Letzte amerikanische Lyrik* (Rygulla, 1967), *Fuck you(!)*

Underground Gedichte (Rygulla, 1968), *Acid. Neue amerikanische Szene* (1969) und *Silverscreen. Neue amerikanische Lyrik* (1969) are merely a part of the translations published in the West-German book market after the war.

This cultural transfer, together with the mutations of Turkish identity under the influence of German social norms have been of key importance to the development of a distinct German-Turkish literature within FRG. It seems that these two have helped shape two different, but not incompatible types of literature, one dealing with the immigrant past and the problematic conservation of cultural traditions, and the other with the immediate German present, with the politics of integration and with the emergence of a new, German-Turkish identity, which deals less with Turkish past as it does with the racial and cultural stereotypes of integrated or integrating migrant youth. So that two stages of integration are to be followed in these two types of literature, the first one being specific to the first generation of migrant workers, and the second one addressing the second generation. They are not to be seen as temporally separated, hence works describing the context of migration (as, for example, *Selam Berlin*, the novel of Yadé Kara) or recuperating the myth of Turkish origins can occur simultaneously with novels mocking the contemporary German art scene from the point of view of a fully integrated Turkish man (as is the case in *German Amok*, a novel by Feridun Zaimoğlu). Older authors like Aras Ören, although prone to deal more in their writing with themes situated in the immigrant past, have also addressed contemporary subjects.

Aras Ören, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Zafer Şenocak, Yadé Kara, Zehra Çırak, Selim Özdoğan and Feridun Zaimoğlu are probably the most renowned writers of this group, which as well in the 1980s and 1990s, but also after the turn of the century, have come to demolish the long held belief that the literature of migration “reflects the social disorientation of hapless foreign labourers in Germany” (Adelson, 15). Emine Sevgi Özdamar is a relevant example for the preoccupations of this first wave of migrant authors. Her notorious novel, *Das Leben ist eine Karawanseraï, hat zwei Türen, aus einer kam ich rein, aus der anderen ging ich raus* (*Life is a Caravanserai, I came in one, I went out the other*, 1992), tells the tale of a young girl and her turbulent upbringing marked by poverty in Turkey, and can be regarded as a family chronic. It has its roots in a somewhat exotic, postcolonial

setting, dealing with past, tradition, travel, strangeness, and exploring, and ends with her decision to move to Germany as guest-worker at 18.

Mutterzunge (*Mothertongue*, 1990), by the same author, deals on issues of nostalgia, cultural isolation, lack of orientation and identity loss. The title is a play of words originating in the Turkish word for language, “tongue”, whereas “first language” is translated in German as “Muttersprache”. Furthermore, in the works of Özdamar, a female writer, is it not surprising to find themes such as freedom from the oppression of a patriarchal system based on arranged marriages, disregard of women’s rights, rigid social and behavioural norms, exclusion of women from any form of political decision making and so on; Germany, in this sense, offered women not necessarily their freedom, because most of them were still caught up in strong familial ties, but the prerequisites for emancipation: “Die in den verschiedensten Texten der Gastarbeiterliteratur immer wiederkehrenden Themen sind die Sehnsucht nach der Heimat, die Einsamkeit und Isolation im Gastland; nicht selten, sind die Texte eine einzige Klage über die Orientierungslosigkeit im Niemandsland oder über die Leiden der harten Arbeit” (Tantow, 23).¹

In the beginning, texts written by *Gastarbeiter* were accepted within the conventions of a *temporary* literary phenomenon and were not regarded as a permanent marker of a subculture or as an emerging alternative to the German post-war literature, ideologically divided as it was between East and West Germany. They were seen as entirely foreign literature, which, although interesting in their aesthetics and use of language, did not constitute a noteworthy appearance, since their objective conditions were precarious and the migrant workers would eventually return to their homes. Aras Ören is one author that, despite having lived in Germany for more than three decades, famously still writes his works in Turkish before giving them up for translation in German. And that is because in the first phase of historic migration during the 1960s and 1970s, the preferred literary language was still Turkish (or, in the case of migrants of other nationalities, the corresponding languages of the country of origin).

1 “The recurring themes in all the different texts from the literature of guest workers are the longing for home, loneliness and isolation in the country of residence; not rarely are the texts a single cry over the lack of orientation in No Man’s Land or over the sufferings of hard work.” (My translation).

This preference, expressed not only by Aras Ören, is explained, pragmatically, through the lack of skill in the German language, on the one hand, and in regard to the public. Texts of this period possessed a double coding and served two different purposes. They sought to ensure a sense of solidarity by loyally reflecting the political and social conditions in the *Bundesrepublik*, and secondly, they sought to alleviate the conflicts between the isolationist, traditional Turkish group and the highly industrialized, estranged and socially libertine German society. Far from reflecting a belligerent attitude, the literary production of this period aimed at deconstructing racial and cultural stereotypes, presenting the details and background of the *Auswanderung*. This period is not marked by any tensions, mainly because the migrant literature underwent a process of domestication, being integrated into the German book market not independently, but, paradoxically, as translation from a language belonging to a radically foreign culture developing within Germany.

Fluent translation may enable a foreign text to engage a mass readership, even a text from an excluded foreign literature, and thereby initiate a significant canon reformation. But such a translation simultaneously reinforces the major language and its many other linguistic and cultural exclusions while masking the inscription of domestic values. Fluency is assimilationist, presenting to domestic readers a realistic representation inflected with their own codes and ideologies as if it were an immediate encounter with a foreign text and culture. (Venuti, 12).

Being assimilated and implicitly subdued through translation, books written by foreign authors lacked any sort of conflictual nodes that could spark a polemical discussion about the status of the *Gastarbeiter* or their future. Tensions and hardships occur in this point in the pragmatic process of integration: surpassing the language barrier, learning the rules and codes of European lifestyle, accepting restrictions in the practice of religious beliefs, breeding tolerance in regard to world views divergent of one's own, and so on. In this case, Germany acted upon the myth of cultural integration. The question of integrating guest workers, if it occurred, rested upon the refusal of accepting them in their difference.

Their image in the German public had to be that of slightly different, but ultimately identical human beings, of whom it was expected to tacitly, accept prevalent social norms. For them to be assimilated into German life, Turks had to

come to resemble Germans in their views and lifestyles, in a process not only of integration, but one of civilization. An effort of colonization had to be undertaken: the exotic image of the Oriental may appear to the extent that it does not betray a cultural tension that could recall recent feeling of guilt. Migrant stories may only confirm pre-existing stereotypes, but eliminate the stereotypes themselves and transform them into cultural inheritance, intangible and convenient, while allowing the Turkish subject to reject his conservative Muslim past, in order for his image to grant narcissistic self-recognition:

The self-recognition is recognition of the domestic cultural norms and resources that constitute the self, that define it as a domestic subject. The process is basically narcissistic: the reader identifies with an ideal projected by the translation, usually values that have achieved authority in the domestic culture and dominate those of other cultural constituencies (Venuti, 15).

The second generation

A belligerent and revengeful attitude is more visibly present in the ranks of authors of the second generation of migrants, where the results of the superficial integration of Turks have taken its toll. The 1980s and 1990s were decades characterised by mild social tensions in Germany, where the children of the migrants who settled in the first half of the 1960s were confronted with ostracization and racism. Born into families that had barely to a certain extent given up their conservative views in favour of German openness, they were forcibly put in the position of making a choice. They had to betray their Turkish identity as children, so as to avoid ridicule and bullying in a period when Turks were portrayed as disturbing elements and associated with patriarchal views, illicit activities and hostile exoticism, then hate Germany for having done so during their adulthood, when they found themselves marginalised for being different, neither fully Turkish nor German. Their efforts of cultural integration proved themselves useless, mainly owing to the fact that there were no complementary measures taken on behalf of Germany for their proper integration, such granting citizenship. They have thus developed a borderline identity. As Moray McGowan observes in regard to the German-Turkish novelist Zafer Şenocak and his positioning to the political turmoil of the 90s:

In the early 1990s, the phase of political and socio-economic uncertainty following the seismic shifts of 1989–90 had brought numerous outbreaks of xenophobic violence in Germany. In 1993, the year that five members of one Turkish family died in an arson attack in Solingen, writer Zafer Şenocak and political scientist Claus Leggewie co-edited the bilingual anthology *Deutsche Türken/Türk Almanlar: Das Ende der Geduld/Sabırın sonu* (*German Turks: The End of Patience*). While this does not make Şenocak (any more than Leggewie, of course), a spokesman or representative of ‘German Turks’, it underlines his determined intervention in debates on migration, ethnicity, belonging and exclusion that had acquired a bloody contemporaneity (McGowan, 83).

The main protagonist of *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft*, Sascha, explores his family’s history and discovers that his grandfather had contributed to the Armenian genocide. Later, after moving to Europe, his mother had to return to Turkey during the Second World War, thus fleeing the Holocaust. Sascha consequently discovers both his Jewish and his Turkish ancestry:

Once activated, Sascha’s previously unconsidered Turkish and Jewish descent links him, potentially, to collective memories of both perpetration and victimhood. But he has to invent them, since his upbringing as a German gave him no access to those collective memories (McGowan, 83).

In regard to the protagonist himself and his importance for the portrayal of a double identity, McGowan notes that Sascha

is neither a consistent moral subject nor a representative of an ethnic or even socio-economic group, certainly not of ‘Turks’ or ‘Turkish-Germans’. Rather, he is a construct, a textual ganglion where transnational historical processes intersect, from which Şenocak can develop new perspectives on central questions in modern German culture; unsettle and challenge German, Jewish and Turkish myths of self and other; explore the implications of a commingled Turkish, Jewish and German remembrance; and introduce new terms to topple the syllogisms of ethnicity rather than remaining trapped in their false-premise logic (McGowan, 86).

Two factors are relevant in trying to fixate the second movement of the German-Turkish literary production. Firstly, Pop as global phenomenon, and the emergence within it of a minor literature, theorised by Deleuze and Guattari in regard to Franz Kafka and supported by the acceptance of German as literary

language by the migrant authors. Regarding the pop-phenomenon, the novels written by young Turks of the second generation converges with the German pop novel in its anti-establishment tendencies, its cynical self-awareness, and easy-going attitude. Pop breeds superficiality and accepts it as its own, contouring simultaneously the outlines of a generation grown tired of all existing stereotypes of civilized “Europeanness”. Furthermore, inscribed in the logic of Pop is the notion that any form of social marginality is a sign of *coolness*. Accepting the migrant identity thus becomes a nearly subversive gesture in a period when identity is regulated by market dynamics. Social capital increases proportionately with the measure of exclusion one is subjected to, so that ultimately, by borrowing slang and in the mimicry of cultural signs belonging to Turkish immigrants, even the new German youth imported a form of rebellion and a means of disrupting the social norms prevalent in their surroundings. Consequently, the German-Turkish literary phenomenon is during this period one marked by social and political criticism, but this criticism is not to be regarded as part of a cultural manifesto in favour of migrant identities, but as an expression of sincere irritation in regard to the artificiality of the Pop-era and the welfare myth associated with Germany. The debut novel of Yadé Kara, *Selam Berlin*, tells a classic tale of disillusionment: a young Turk leaves Istanbul right after the fall of the Berlin Wall to pursue fulfilment in the German capital and finds himself unable to find a job, a house or a girlfriend. The dream of successful immigration fails to deliver.

Secondly, the theory of “minor literature” presented by Deleuze and Guattari in regard to Franz Kafka fits remarkably well to the literary production of migrant authors during this period. *Kanak Sprak. 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*, the notorious work of Feridun Zaimoğlu, documents the merging process between radically different lifestyles and cultural hybrid forms. The *Kanak* language is part of the marginal, subversive code of the underprivileged. *Kanakendeutsch* or *Türken slang*, this mixture of German and Turkish is a specific sign of bilingual upbringing. Zaimoğlu exploits cultural stereotypes and prejudices, thereby fighting against discrimination not through explicit political discourse, not through theory and activism, but by accentuating difference, accepting it fully, strengthening exactly that which generates discrimination and hate-speech, namely the signs of the uncivilized and the exotic, of the naive Turk who cannot

speak proper German, the *Kanak*, both despised and feared. It is through this self-depreciating rhetoric that deterritorialization occurs:

A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization (Deleuze-Guattari, 16).

A second characteristic of the “minor literature” is the political dimension. Political in the extent in which it violently provokes not only by mocking German society as a fable of Welfare, but also at the level of racial taboos. *Kanak-Sprak* is an offensive expression that injures leftist sensibilities and shows an ostensibly incorrect political agenda. But Feridun Zaimoğlu, as he is a Turk, is allowed to insult his own nationality by portraying stereotypes; a German portrayal of stereotypes would be unpardonably racist, but from the Turkish part it becomes an act of subversion. “The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political. In major literatures, in contrast, the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or a background”.

Subsequently, the Turkish migrant literature took on collective values, incorporating the frustration of an entire generation. Political without becoming activism, the literary production of the migrants contains a *Weltanschauung* that appeals to more than one group. Polish migrants, for example, may not understand the paradoxes of being a Muslim in Germany, but they identify with the Excluded and the Despised. The Bulgarian Ilija Trojanow with *Der Weltensammler (The Collector of Worlds)*, his novel dealing about nomad identities, the Bosnian Saša Stanišić or the Hungarian Terezia Mora, all of them writing in German and residing in Germany, are well aware of their exotic positioning in regard to the German literary tradition, and even if their works do not necessarily make use of their former cultural backgrounds, all possess an element of exoticism that make them stand out. This is partly due to the interest in postcolonial themes, alternative histories and marginal sensibilities, because German authors of other nationalities never write about singular experiences, mediated through the lens of a lone protagonist, without simultaneously offering

larger insights into the lives of communities, thereby generating collective traumas. Herta Müller is a striking example:

The ‘trans’ within transnationalism is more obviously associated with language and translation, as in Müller’s *Herztier* (*The Land of Green Plums*, 1994, see Chapter 12), in which German ‘screens’ Romanian, namely the protagonist’s traumatic experience in that country and in that language, or, more positively, in any number of novels in which non-German lexical items recall other histories and other traditions, or invoke other possibilities and other anxieties (Taberner, 15).

The main character of the novel *Herztier* is harassed by the *Securitate* together with her friends. This seemingly individual trauma becomes a collective one through the prism of Romanian communism, in which mistrust and betrayal were daily occurrences. What could generally be held as an intimate story of political persecution takes on societal significance through an appeal to collective memory and historical trauma?

In Müller’s work, the use of German in the place of Romanian both acts as dissociation and enables representation. Both in the treatment of recurring memories– not least the friendship which is the model for Tereza – and, in her move towards Romanian, Müller’s oeuvre as a whole demonstrates the belatedness of the traumatic narrative, moving towards direct articulation.

But this collective dimension surpasses in the later phase of German-Turkish literature the strict issues of migrant identity and their problematic correlation to exclusion. Their coming to terms with their Turkish identity becomes a coming to terms with the precarious positioning of German youth in a society riddled by confusion and lack of direction. This entire decade was one of political and social turmoil, the reunification threatening to generate immigration within the country itself and determine young *Ossis* to flood West-Germany for better opportunities. Beyond the point of cultural conflict and reconciliation, even the German-Turkish literature saw itself integrated into a larger scheme. Taking this collective dimension into account, it becomes clear that minor literature, in the process of constructing an alternative canon within a major literature, cannot afford the luxury of hierarchies:

Indeed, precisely because talent isn't abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that "master" and that could be separated from a collective enunciation. Indeed, scarcity of talent is in fact beneficial and allows the conception of something other than a literature of masters; what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement (Deleuze-Guattari, 16).

Further questions

The question that ensues is one regarding the validity of transnationalism in today's context. Is the transnational paradigm out-dated in contemporary Germany, where around three to four million Turks currently reside? (Curtis, 69). Although the discourse about the network of cultural influences and transnational links is a very important one, it is also becoming an impractical one. Germany's Turkish minority, it can be argued, is fully integrated, so that any cultural difference between its citizens and ethnic groups has slowly subsided. Occurring conflicts are resolved within German society, or, most recently, within European society, which serves as a larger frame for dialogue. In the age of globalization, every literary work, regardless of its textual influences, becomes a part of World Literature in the sense that nothing within it can be traced back to a single, clear cultural milieu. And this is not necessarily because it is unrealistic from the point of view of literary criticism, because it does not confuse nor complicate discussions on the topic, but because these milieus themselves have lost their specificity in favour of a global identity, governed by politics of integration rather than aspirations to segregation. Public discourse, in the wakes of cultural Marxism, has ceased to regard transnational subjects – second and third generation of immigrants – as radically different from the average German subject, mainly due to the fact that, besides matters of religious and familial inheritance, both possess the same background. As Feridun Zaimoğlu once put it: "Ich habe immer gesagt: Ich bin Deutscher. Und auf Nachfrage: Mit türkischen Eltern" (Schwarz, 12).

What is required to facilitate the escape of transnational identities and, implicitly, of transnational literatures from the loop of interpretations ruled by desperate efforts of dialogue? A return to work-immanence would not suffice, yet an exclusive focus on the communicational dimension is grossly reductionist when dealing with narratives that are not inherently different from others solely in the

extent that they are transnational. When at first, the literary value of the works of German-Turkish authors was accorded in view of their status as minor literature, their exoticism and value as political message holders, a more impartial hierarchy is needed, now that everything can hold the claim of being transnational and global. When transnational works constituted the exception, the investigation of their background was mandatory. Now, global narratives are the norm: important as the specific backgrounds may be, one has to build a bridge between tradition and the remapping of transnational values.

References

- Adelson, Leslie A. *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature. Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Anselmo, Marcello. *Defining the Socialist Consumer. Market Research in the GDR, 1960s/'70s*. In Apor, Balazs; Apor, Peter; Rees, E.A (eds). *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*. Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008.
- Curtis, Michael. *Jews, Antisemitism, and the Middle East*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2013.
- Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Deleuze, Gilles, Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Even-Zohar, I. (1997): *The Making of Culture Repertoire and the Role of Transfer*. In: *Target*, 9(2), pp. 373-381.
- Feldvoß, René. *Die Selbstwahrnehmung von Arbeitsmigranten in der Bundesrepublik 1955-1973*. Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 2014.
- Hecken, Thomas; Kleiner Marcus S.; Menke, André. *Popliteratur. Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2015.
- Kelek, Necla. "Die Kunst des Missverstehens". *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 29, 2011. Accessed June 14, 2017.
<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/integration/gastarbeiter-die-kunst-des-missverstehens-11502703.html>.
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 1978.
- Schwarz, Christopher. "Feridun Zaimoğlu im Interview: «Ich bin ein begeisterter Deutscher»." *Wirtschaftswoche Online*, October 12, 2008. Accessed April 10, 2017.
<http://www.wiwo.de/unternehmen/feridun-zaimoglu-im-interview-ich-bin-ein-begeisterter-deutscher/5474382-all.html>.
- Soysal, Levent. "Europe and the Topography of Migrant Youth Culture in Berlin." In *Europe without Borders. Remapping Territory, Citizenship, and Identify in a Transnational Age*, edited by Mabel Berezin and Martin Schain. Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Tantow, Lutz. "In den Hinterhöfen der deutschen Sprache. Ein Streifzug durch die deutsche Literatur von Ausländern". *Zeit Online*, April 6, 1984, Accessed April 10, 2017: <http://www.zeit.de/1984/15/in-den-hinterhoefen-der-deutschen-sprache/komplettansicht>.

Thomsen, Mads Rosendahl. *Mapping World Literature. International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The scandals of translation. Towards an ethics of difference*. London; New York: Routledge, 1998.

Von der Grün, Max. *Leben im gelobten Land. Ausländer in Deutschland*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994.