

German-Turkish Literature: an Analysis of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*

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My aim in this article is, after tracing the general lines in the development of “migration literature”, to examine German-Turkish literature through an analysis of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's 1998 novel *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*.

Nowadays the terms “migration literature” or “guest worker literature” are not frequently used, and the labels “German-Turkish Literature” or simply “German Literature” tend to be considered more appropriate to apply to the second and third generation of migrants' literature, showing that these generations are now considered a part of the German literary tradition. There is not, however, a complete consensus on this topic between literary critics and historians. Therefore, for general comprehensibility and simplicity, I will continue to use the term “migration literature”, whilst conceding that writers of the second and third generations writers contribute more to “German literature”, if only because their literary language is German, than to “migration literature”.

For a better understanding of the historical and literary context of the topic, it is necessary to describe the historical, social and cultural conditions of labour migration before delivering an overview of migrant workers' literature and its role in German society. At the same time, it will be helpful to discuss the problems of terminology arising in the definition of “migration literature” and to look at its perception in German society.

I. The Social-Political and Cultural Conditions of Workers' Migration

Labour migration began with an assignment of the so called “Labour Exchange Agreement” between Turkey and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1961. The German State admitted foreign workers because of the necessities created by economic expansion and the construction of the Berlin Wall which had stopped the influx of workers from the German Democratic Republic. However, Germany had already admitted foreign workers in 1955 and signed agreements with other states such as Italy, Spain, and Greece. The term *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker), established in the 1960s, underlined that a permanent residency of the workers and therefore integration into German society was not intended. Germany did not, and does not, consider itself as a migration country. Moreover, the workers themselves also initially only planned to stay a few years in order to save enough money and then to return to their

homeland. The German State implemented a system of the so called *Rotationsprinzip* (rotation principle) that should force the workers to return to their homelands after a limited time. However, it renounced this system because of the costs and labour affectivity for the German employer.

As Max Frisch's well-known statement "workers were wanted but instead human beings arrived" indicates, the social problems and difficulties regarding the integration of the workers soon made the human dimension of labour migration all-too-visible. Today, without any discussion, migrant workers are a part of German society, but their social position and expectations have changed. This reality was clearly understood with the coming-of-age of the third and fourth generations. Turkish migrants now constitute the largest ethnic minority, and it is significant that they are recognised as such, and are now no longer merely a large group of "guest workers".

As time passed with migration and the migrants' experiences a new subculture arose within German culture, which included expression in different areas in the arts. The migrant workers' culture has become a source of inspiration and a resource for literature, cinema, theatre, painting, music, and analysis in the social sciences. With the so-called *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (Guest Workers' Literature) the migrants broke their silence and began to speak. The situation of the workers, their problems of alienation, ethnic prejudices, culture shock, homelessness, and their perspectives were the favoured literary topics of the writers of the first generation at the end of 1960s and in the 1970s. They described through literary means the process before the workers were allowed to "enter" Germany (especially focusing on themes such as the health report for which they were subjected to thorough medical examinations, even including their teeth). The economic and political reality that labour migration, for the workers meant the hope of find new economic prospects and a better life in Germany, and it was not chosen willingly, but was forced upon them by the economic conditions of their home country, was an important topic of the first generation's writing. A pioneer of migrants writing, Aras Ören, depicts this reality in an epic and ironic form in *Berlin – Trilogy* (1973-1980):

*One day a crazy wind
blew the beard of a Turk*

*and when the Turk ran after his beard
he found himself in Naunyn Street.*

*He was a silent,
middle aged person.
Settled down under the floor of Mrs. Kutzer.
He was not eating and drinking, but saving money.
Then one day, he left as he came, in silence.
He left;
after him
women and men
with bag and baggage
his country people hurried...
And Naunyn Street was covered
with the smell of fresh thyme
with fresh hatred
with longing
with hopes
with the steppe fragrance
[...]
So that today
Naunyn Street without Turks
would surely remain still Naunyn Street,
but in its old days
without a new beginning.*

(Ören,1980, pp. 33-34, my translation)

Following this introduction into Naunyn Street, Ören describes the experience of migration through a number of different figures. Niyazi is one of these figures who go through a process of consciousness-development as a member of the working class. Finally, Niyazi sees the

opportunity for the creation of a new society through the workers' solidarity against capitalism. The *Berlin-Trilogy* consists of three poetic volumes narrating the lives of both Turkish and German workers in Berlin's Kreuzberg district: *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstrasse?* (*What does Niyazi want in Naunyn street?*, 1973), *Der kurze Traum aus Kağıthane* (*The short dream from Kağıthane*, 1974), *Die Fremde ist auch ein Haus* (*A foreign country is also a home*, 1980) (Karakuş, 2001, pp. 115-127; Chin, 2002, pp. 44-72).

II. Problems of Definition

From the very beginnings of labour migration, workers have written about their problems, longings and expectations in letters and in diaries, in stories and in poems. However, as a defined literary *genre*, the concept of "migration literature" first appeared in Germany at the beginning of the 1980s, and discourse and discussion concerning "migration literature" have been continuing ever since. Initially, problems arose in defining and naming this literature. All of the following terms have led to discussions reflecting the ideologies and migrant policies of different times: *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (Guest Workers' Literature), *Gastliteratur* (Guest Literature), *Literatur der Betroffenheit* (Literature of Shock and Sadness), Foreigners' Literature, Migrants' Literature, Migration Literature, and much later a label applied against the exclusion from German literature: "*eine nicht nur deutsche Literatur*" (not only a German literature) (Irmgard Ackermann, Harald Weinrich).

Without doubt, these definitions were suitable for the first generation of migrants' literature, for among its themes are longing, dreams of going back, in-betweenness, Germany as a "land of promised dreams", and the hope for material wealth.

The discussion of terminology was settled by the publication organ of migrants' literature *Südwind* (South Wind) which was published in 1980 by the association PoLiKunst (association for polynational literature and art) with the aim of serving as a bridge and solidarity organisation for the diverse migrants' groups. *Südwind's* pioneering representatives Franco Biondi (originally from Italy) and Rafik Schami (from Syria) insisted upon the terms "migrant worker" and "migrant workers' writing" as an emphasis of cultural and political exclusion (Zielke, 17). German is the common language of the writing and the first aim is, beside solidarity between the migrant workers, to reflect the migrants' experiences. In their anthologies called "South Wind – Guest Workers' German", the literary topics were the

exclusion from the majority society, racism, the lack of political rights, a foreign life style and their anxieties. The main aim of the *Südwind*-group was to bring migrants and German workers together. Its members saw the workers in Germany as a totality, as members of the working class.

In the mid-1980s other terms were introduced: Ackermann, who was in 1985 among the founders of the Adalbert von Chamisso Literature Prize for non-German writers from the German Language Institution of Munich University, defined migration literature as “a German Literature from abroad” or “not only a German Literature”. Another term used in this period is “national minorities’ literature” (Chiellino, 1995, pp. 289-300).

Among all of these competing definitions, Yüksel Pazarkaya's position is interesting and original: Pazarkaya translated contemporary Turkish Literature (e.g. Orhan Veli, Nazım Hikmet) into German in order to show German readers that Turkish culture is far more than “guest workers’ culture” (Karakuş, 2001, p. 76). Pazarkaya writes about the migrant workers’ experiences since 1961, but rejects all categories of definition. He considers the German language as a road/means to the humanist traditions of Lessing and Heine, Schiller and Brecht, Leibniz and Feuerbach, Hegel and Marx. (Chiellino, 1995, p. 340) No matter how strongly Pazarkaya underlines the universality and internationalism of literature, it remains a fact that non-German writers’ productions were generally not considered by the German public as a contribution to German literature, but were separated through their national identities.

As previously stated, from 2000 onwards, the terms “literature in the German language” or “German-Turkish Literature” have become the proper terms to define the literary productions of authors of Turkish origin.

III. The Development of Migrant Workers’ Literature in the Federal Republic of Germany

“Migration Literature” has been a seminar topic at German universities since the 1980s and 1990s. Sociological analyses indicate that we can distinguish between four groups within “migration literature”.

1. The first authors of the workers' migration from Turkey since 1965, of whom Nevzat Üstün (1924-1979), Bekir Yıldız (1933-1992), Yüksel Pazarkaya and Aras Ören are the most important representatives. Written in Turkish, the literature of the first generation depicted the problems arising from migration and fulfilled a kind of therapeutic function. The main theme of the literature of the first generation can best be expressed by the German word *Betroffenheit*: which can be translated as 'sadness', 'shock', or 'bewilderment'. This "bewilderment-literature" dwells on the pains and suffering of the migrants, as well as on homesickness and dreams of return.

These pioneering authors were followed by the first generation's "labour exiles", writers such as Güney Dal, Habib Bektaş and Fakir Baykurt. The first generation literature thus consists both of professional writers who began their career as writers in Turkey (Aras Ören, Yüksel Pazarkaya, Güney Dal and Fakir Baykurt) and writers who came to Germany as workers and began their writing career there. (Habib Bektaş, Şinasi Dikmen, Yaşar Miraç, Fethi Savaşçı, Yücel Feyzioğlu). Authors writing in both Turkish and German are Yüksel Pazarkaya, Kemal Kurt and, to some extent, Aysel Özakin. Two other authors belonging to the first generation, but writing only in German, are the satirist Şinasi Dikmen and Saliha Scheinhardt. Dikmen has lived in Germany since 1972, and can be said to be the only satirist of the first generation writers, a position which would be taken over in the second generation by Osman Engin. He manages to make his readers and audience (he is also a review artist) laugh and think. His literary topics are the prejudices between Turks and Germans and the integration problems of the Turks. Saliha Scheinhardt, is a woman writer who has lived in Germany since 1967, and has portrayed the sufferings of Turkish women, but has often been criticised for stereotyping them.

2. Writers of the second generation have been educated and socialized in Germany, are bilingual, and write in German. Osman Engin, Zehra Çırak, Zafer Şenocak, Feridun Zaimoğlu, Akif Pirinçi, Renan Demirkan, Nevfel Cumart and Selim Özdoğan belong to the latter group. Generally the second generation is described as a lost generation, "in between" two cultures, "in a crisis of culture", "a tree with leaves and branches but without roots", or as a generation "with identity problems" (Mushaben, 1985, p. 144;

Veteto-Konrad, 1996, p. 28). However, although the writing of the second generation initially dealt with the search for identity, and with in-betweenness, or homelessness, there are also writers who do not touch upon the question of migration at all: e.g. Akif Pirinçi and Selim Özdoğan, who both write crime fiction.

3. The literary current led by Feridun Zaimoğlu's "*Kanak Attack*" has influenced the migration literature by its attitude of attacking, celebrating difference, and rejecting the notion of a fixed position. This literary current rejects all identity politics and multicultural discourses and declares the end of the dialogue culture as follows:

'Kanak Attak' is a community of different people from diverse backgrounds who share a commitment to eradicate racism from German society. Kanak Attak is not interested in questions about your passport or heritage. [...] Kanak Attak is therefore anti-nationalist, anti-racist and rejects every single form of identity politics, as supported by ethnic absolutist thinking [...] we reject everyone and everything that exploits, dominates and humiliates people. The field of interventions of Kanak Attak covers critiques of the political and economical circumstances that allow racism to fester, to the culture industries that perpetuate the commodification of racism, from discrimination to violence, in Germany. [...] For many decades migrant societies, organisations and initiatives have existed, that have criticised the socio-political situation and desperate living conditions of those denied full entry into the German public sphere. However these efforts and campaigns have been restricted to the very communities they seek to help, leaving the main body politic unchallenged. Kanak Attak is therefore critical of the benefits possible from individual communities lobbying for their particularistic interests, and the non-confrontational mode of politics evident within contemporary democracies. It's high time to stop asking about respect and tolerance without naming the political economic conditions of social inequality.

(http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/archiv/passagiere/manifest/manif_en.htm)

This group, with its commitment to attack and provocation, arose at the end of the 1990s in response to a sense of exclusion from German society. As the name “kanaksta” (a combination of “kanak”¹ and “gangster”) suggests, it is made up not only of people of Turkish origin but also of Arabs, Russians, Pakistanis and Tunisians, as well as German punks. Their representative is, as previously mentioned, Zaimoğlu, who is against the whole notion of the search for identity and multicultural discourses. Zaimoğlu states: “Turks, fatherland, identity don’t exist. All of them are brain washing. Only and only kanakstas exist and so the slogan is kanak attack.” (Lottmann, 1999, pp. 82-85) If, for others, authenticity is the main key word, Zaimoğlu invents for his characters a language which is mixed with Turkish vocabulary and body language, under the influence of hip-hop and rap music. Zaimoğlu published two anthologies – *Kanak Sprak* with male, and *Koppstoff* with female, Kanakstas – where he talks with young people from the second and third generation of immigrants. *Kanak Sprak* is a metropolitan jargon that expresses the immigrants’ anger and frustration.

4. Woman Writers: Within the second generation women writers can be analyzed as a separate group. Writing in German, Saliha Scheinhard, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Alev Tekinay and Renan Demirkan describe the patriarchal society from a critical point of view and concentrate on prose genre using autobiographic elements. As a structural element, language is important in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's and Alev Tekinay's literature. Thinking in Turkish but writing in German, their literary works especially in Özdamar's case deliver a special exotic taste or flair for the German readers. For example “*ana dili*” in German “*Muttersprache*”, Özdamar translates as “*Mutterzunge*” (“mother tongue”), or in Tekinay’s case “*içim yanıyor*” as “*ein Feuer brennt in mir*” (“a fire burns in me”) which means “I suffer a lot”. For a reader who does not have knowledge of the Turkish language these images are of course interesting and reminiscent of the *Thousand and One Nights* fairy tales.

1 The word “*Kanacke*” in German was originally used by German racists to label the foreigners as “black head” in order to discriminate against them and humiliate them. So Zaimoğlu reversed the usage of “*Kanacke*” in German as a strategy of resistance.

Critical analysis of migrant women writers tends to lead to two contradictory theses: whereas the majority of German critics observe the literary works as a result or reflection of an ethnic and sexual humiliation, a feeling of in-betweenness between the Islamic and Christian Culture, academics such as Azade Seyhan, Nilüfer Kuruyazıcı, and Kader Konuk write that women writers entertain and teach the readers as well as challenging the German readers' borders. As Seyhan maintains:

Aysel Özakın, Saliha Scheinhardt, Alev Tekinay, Zehra Çırak, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and others challenge and question the image of Turkish women depicted by many German writers and social scientists as remnants of a medieval culture, as unassimilated foreign objects in a modern society, literally as eyesores, with covered heads, bundled or bound bodies, cattlelike, bought and sold.

(Seyhan,1998, p. 232)

5. Finally, we can say that the writers and poets who were forced to leave Turkey after the military intervention on 12th September 1980 constitute a distinct group. They include Yusuf Ziya Bahadınlı, Aysel Özakın, A. Kadir, Servet Ziya Çoraklı, and their writings deal with the themes of exile and migration.

III. Emine Sevgi Özdamar

Özdamar's 1998 novel *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei, hat zwei Türen, aus einer kam ich rein, aus der anderen ging ich raus* ('Life is a Caravanserai, it has two doors, I came in through one, I went out through the other') has secured her a place (along with fellow Turkish writers Orhan Pamuk, Yaşar Kemal and Latife Tekin) on the list of the thousand and one books everyone should read in their lifetime (<http://www.listology.com/list/1001-books-you-must-read-before-you-die>). Özdamar received a number of important literature prizes, among them the 1991 Ingeborg Bachmann Literature Prize in 1991, as the only writer of foreign origin. Born in Malatya (Turkey) in 1946, Özdamar came to Germany for the first time in

1965. She worked for a while in a factory, later she began studying theatre. Between 1967 and 1970 she studied theatre in Istanbul. Since it was her dream to work with an assistant of Brecht, she started working at the Berliner Ensemble with Benno Besson and Matthias Langhoff for two years (1976-1978) (Konuk 2001: 83-85). This was her reason for returning to Germany. As she remarks in an interview:

The theatre where I worked in the 1970s closed. In this period every day I read Brecht's poems aloud, listened to his songs. [...] My dream [...] was to work at his theatre with a student of his. As if I wanted to take my sick Turkish words into the sanatorium of a poet. Brecht is a great poet; I thought that his words would heal my words. I took the train with my sick words and came to Berlin.

(Özdamar, 2007b, p.5)

Between 1979 and 1984 Özdamar acted at the Bochum Theatre, and played in several German movies (in Hark Bohm's *Yasemin*, Dorris Dörrie's *Happy Birthday, Türke* and Matti Geschoneck's *Tödliche Rettung*). In her novel *Mutterzunge* Özdamar concentrates on language play. Her style was interpreted positively as attempts to challenge the structure and to overcome the borders of German (Kuruyazıcı, p. 266; Seyhan, 1998, p. 247).

In what remains of this article I will concentrate on Özdamar's novel *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (*The Bridge of the Golden Horn*) (1998) for which the author received the Adalbert von Chamisso Literature Award. The preface to the novel was written by John Berger.

The Bridge consists of two parts: in the first part, "The Offended Station" the narrator, a young Turkish woman, arrives in West Berlin as a migrant worker and lives in a "Frauenwonaym", or Women Workers' Hostel. The social, political and cultural events of the FRG in the 1960s, for example, the division of Berlin, German students' protests against the Vietnam War and the death of the students' movement leader Benno Ohnesorg during these protests, are told from her point of view. Aiming to become an actor, the narrator begins working in a radio factory, then she decides to learn German, and in order to do this she learns the headlines of the newspaper every day by heart. Afterwards she is able to work in a hotel to earn money.

In the chapter entitled “We stood day and night in the light”, the heroine comes to Istanbul. The first thing which strikes her is the crowded mass of men. After staying for a short while in Istanbul she goes back to Berlin, and from there to Paris.

Travelling between Berlin, Istanbul and Paris, the heroine meets many different people. Some of them, such as the Communist hostel warden in Berlin who lends her books, encourage and direct her life. The books she borrows include Friedrich Engels’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Maxim Gorki’s *Mother*, Brecht’s plays and poems and Nazım Hikmet’s books. The heroine has the tendency to be motivated and directed because she wants to be free from the family and social restrictions. In this way her friends help her to solve her problems, and to analyse the world socio-politically. In order to become free, the first step she thinks she should take is to lose her virginity, which she calls the ‘diamond’.

The second part of the novel - entitled “The Bridge of the Golden Horn”- is set partly in Istanbul, partly in Anatolia. With surrealist images Özdamar describes the students’ and workers’ movement of the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey and Germany and the state repressions and tortures. Other themes are the foundation of the TIP (The Turkish Workers’ Party), the defeat of the American 6th Fleet by the students, the death of Vedat Demircioğlu during a student protest, the intellectual environment of the Cinematheque and her theatre. World events such as the intervention of the Soviet Army in Prague, Martin Luther King’s murder and the aggressive policies of the USA are also mentioned. The heroine takes part actively in both the political movement and the art scene although she has gone through a dilemma when she felt torn between the two. Of her theatre teacher’s warning at drama school: “Watch out that politics doesn’t take you away from the theatre!” (2007a, p. 227) she comments: “Politics didn’t draw me away from the theatre, but my tongue divided into two. With one half I said: ‘Solidarity with the oppressed peoples,’ with the other half of my tongue I spoke lines by Shakespeare: !What thou seest when thou dost wake,/Do it for thy true love take.” (p. 227-228)

With the division of the tongue, other divisions follow: the division of the Worker’s Party into two factions, the division of the newspaper readers on the steamboat into fascist newspaper readers, religious newspaper readers and left-wing newspaper readers (the heroine herself reads *Cumhuriyet* as a leftist), the division of the socialist left into many factions

(Trotskyist, Maoist, Stalinist) and so on. Politically the process that led to the 12th March 1971 (second military *coup* in the Turkish Republic) can be foreseen in the novel.

In an ironic as well as intimate style Özdamar is also depicting the left-wing intellectual men and women, and their relationships during the 1960s and 1970s. The heroine of the novel is encountering contradictions and difficulties in the society while she is trying to experience her sexuality.

Özdamar is important not only for her literary accounts of social and political events, but also as a writer of social memory. As John Berger states in his preface, Özdamar refers directly to reality filling the gap created by the official version of history:

In its cruelties, its injustices, its repetitiveness, and its gifts, there is nothing more exaggerated than reality. Governors, ruling class, bureaucrats, moralists, judges ceaselessly pretend that reality is not exaggerated. Slaves, citizens, scammers, know otherwise, and mostly they keep quiet about it – except when they are asleep and dream. This is why stories fill the emptiness created by all the official pretences that reality is not exaggerated. (x)

The novel ends with the chapter “The Voices of the Mothers”, where Deniz Gezmiş and his friends are executed. The description of the news about their death as follows is dramatic and affecting:

“The next day people sat on the ship with the newspapers on their knees, no one read them. Big black letters. Just one word: ASILDILAR. (‘They have been hanged.’) A peasant, illiterate, held the newspaper the wrong way round, wept, his tears remained caught in his beard. A seagull flew into the ship and its head struck the ship’s side. Many mothers walked silently, looking at the ground, across the Bridge of the Golden Horn. They didn’t say anything, but I heard their voices.” (p. 252)

Mothers crossing the Golden Bridge who don’t talk but whose voices can be heard (“They didn’t say anything, but I heard their voices.”) is an elegy for Deniz and his comrades. This part of the novel can be traced at the same time as an awakening of the collective memory (for

Konuk “cultural-political memory”, p. 85) which is not part of the official historiography. In their inner monologue the mothers on the Golden Bridge are mourning their murdered children:

If one loses one's children, one at first hopes to find them. When one sees that they are not coming back, one gets up every day to die. We go on. We cook, we iron, they have torn our bodies apart. Such young necks, so young, like those of a newborn animal. What does a child think? [...] Pregnant women look, their hands clapped to their mouths, at children leaving their stomach. They fall down like feathers, as light as sinless deeds. The milk they drank from our breast came out of their nostrils. [...] Here we stand on the Bridge of the Golden Horn. With these eyes in this blind world we have seen the Day of Judgement.

(pp. 252-254)

To sum up, the reception of Özdamar and the other German-Turkish writers show that the second generation's literature can be regarded as part of German literature. Hofmann, for instance, writes that Özdamar is a pioneer of Germanic literature and that she never wrote “guest worker's literature”, emphasizing “Özdamar is an important representative of intercultural literature.” (2008, p. 72) But Hofmann says also, that during the reception of these texts one should escape the Orientalism trap. Furthermore, according to Hofmann, Özdamar's literature's magnetic characteristic is the “alienation effect” (p. 73). Nedret Kuran-Burçoğlu also, interprets Özdamar's work as a part of the German culture: “Özdamar [...] with her original style [...] a synthesis of both languages/cultures [...] shows that in spite of the resistance of some literary critics, the literature of the Turkish migrant authors has moved from the periphery to the centre of the German cultural polysystem. (Kuran-Burçoğlu, 2009, p. 83)

Özdamar is recognized due to her aesthetic and literary worth, but because of her language practice (change of the language structure) she is marginalized (Konuk, 2001, 111). On the other hand, in Turkey it is asked why she does not write in her native tongue. So sometimes the exclusion of writers like Özdamar is unavoidable. It needs time for “marginal”

writers to be freed of the notion of “authenticity” which Rushdie calls a “bogy” (1992, p. 67), and for us to see beyond the merely exotic characteristics in this literature.

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