

Mein Istanbul, mein Berlin.
Emine Sevgi Özdamar's literary re-negotiations
of Turkish-German division

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»Place is a powerful agent in the formation of cultural memory.«¹

The appreciation for the awarded literature of the Turkish-German writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar is often attached to features and particularities of her work that are marked as typical Turkish or typical oriental. The multiple dimensions of her literary work disappear behind the reductive categorization of her work in the oriental storytelling tradition of 1001 nights. The ›Germanness‹ of both Özdamar's literature and of Özdamar herself as a writer is mostly reduced to the (German) language of her writing.² Özdamar's *German* literature is considered *accented* German literature, whereby the accent indicates a deviation from the norm, an ›abnormality‹, and is all too often taken as ground for literary devaluation.³ By now several studies resist this orientalisising tendency in the reception of Özdamar's literature and positively acknowledge – and look beyond – the ›Turkish accent‹ of her literary work. These studies accept this ›accent‹ as a particular *aesthetic* quality of Özdamar's literary work and

1. Azade Seyhan: *Writing Outside the Nation*, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press 2001, p. 139.

2. Comp. Karen Jankowsky: »German‹ Literature Contested: The 1991 Ingeborg-Bachmann-Prize Debate, ›Cultural Diversity‹, and Emine Sevgi Özdamar«, in: *The German Quarterly* 70.3 (1997), pp. 261-276.

3. Comp. Hamid Naficy: *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2001. In his analysis of the emergent transnational cinema Naficy points out that »accent« is both a marker of belonging and of displacement.

language and examine this quality as well as its (disputatively disruptive, undermining) effects on exclusive standards of ›German‹ literature. Numerous analyses of Özdamar's work focus on ›in between‹-concepts as »hybrid writing«, »Schreiben mit Akzent« or »Zwittertext«.⁴ They discuss her literary re-inventions of Turkey and of Turkish-German migration.

Despite the obvious importance of a suchlike approach, in this article I will shift the focus away from Özdamar's ›accent‹ as a sign of her Otherness in respect to German literature. Instead I will turn my attention in the opposite direction, towards her literary (imaginations of) ›Germanness‹ and ›German identity‹. By focussing on the ›German‹ instead of on the ›Turkish‹ dimensions of Özdamar's literature of migration, I will provide a counterpoise to interpretative localisations of her work – whether of positive or of negative judgment – that re-inscribe and consolidate an orientalist tradition of exoticising the (Arab) migrant Other, in particular the female Other. In a detailed analysis of the two stories *Mein Istanbul* and *Mein Berlin*, both published in the prose-collection *Der Hof im Spiegel* (2001), I will challenge the dominant rhetoric of German Self and oriental Other in a similar way as Özdamar's work itself in my opinion challenges and negotiates this stereotypical and hierarchised, binary division.⁵ Özdamar's literature seems obsessed by conceptions of space and even more so by the boundaries that constitute, mark and separate these spaces. In my opinion her particular ›obsession‹ with (re-)mapping spaces can be interpreted as a literary variation of what Sigrid Weigel in her article on the ›topological turn‹ in cultural studies describes as the »[...] Entfaltung von Gegendiskursen in den Zwischenräumen einer kolonisierten oder auch eurozentristischen Topographie«.⁶ Özdamar's literature contributes to such a ›Gegen-

4. Elizabeth Boa: »Sprachenverkehr. Hybrides Schreiben in Werken von Özdamar, Özakin und Demirkan«, in: Mary Howard (ed.): *Interkulturelle Konfigurationen: zur deutschsprachigen Erzählliteratur von Autoren nichtdeutscher Herkunft*, Munich: Iudicium 1997, pp. 115-138; Kader Konuk: »Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei: Heim-at bei Emine Sevgi Özdamar«, in: Gisela Ecker (ed.): *Kein Land in Sicht. Heimat – Weiblich?*, München: Fink 1997, pp. 143-157; Luise von Flotow: »Life is a caravanserei: Translating Translated Marginality, a Turkish-German Zwittertext in English«, in: *Meta XLV.1* (2000), pp. 65-72.

5. Emine Sevgi Özdamar: *Der Hof im Spiegel. Erzählungen*, Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 2001.

6. Sigrid Weigel: »Zum ›topographical turn‹. Kartographie, Topographie und Raumkonzepte in den Kulturwissenschaften«, in: *KulturPoetik 2.2* (2002), pp. 151-165, p. 155.

diskurs«. The autobiographic literary mode that Özdamar deploys functions as a particular, literary form of resistance against what Azade Seyhan calls a »cultural amnesia that denies the historical legitimacy of different identities«. ⁷ In the following I will show how Özdamar's literary re-imaginings of (German) national space – traversed and transformed by her protagonist's travelling and migrating movements – question and re-negotiate monolithic notions of German (and non-German) identity. Her quasi-autobiographic work proposes an »alternative Subject« of German national history, whose personal memories install a poignant instance of cultural criticism.

Özdamar's »unauthorized biography« of the two Germanies⁸

The 2001 collection of short prose *Der Hof im Spiegel* can be taken as a representative literary landscape of Özdamar's oeuvre. The collected pieces not only cover a broader period of time as well as a larger geographical space, they also bring together most of the central themes in Özdamar's literary work. The short stories in *Der Hof im Spiegel* connect to Özdamar's literary debut *Mutterzunge* (1990) and to her three major novels *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei hat zwei Türen aus einer kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich raus* (1992), *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998) and *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (2003). These connections are established by means of narrative themes, through chains of association as well as on a linguistic level through repetitive use – both literal and slightly altered – of particular words and expressions. Characters, places, but also sayings and phrases re-appear in different situations in distinctive works of literature. Both the novels and the shorter pieces of prose refer to and even pre- and re-tell each other, so that together they can be seen as a complex web of oeuvre-immanent intertextualities. This interwovenness makes up a conspicuous characteristic of Özdamar's work. The intertextual cross-references establish her particular narrative universe of fictional continuity, offered in a rather discontinuous form. The fact that most of her work is written in an autobiographic mode – assumedly the ideal genre for identity-construction – functions as the glue that holds the different pieces together. On the one hand this autobiographic mode, with its female

7. A. Seyhan: *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 150.

8. A. Seyhan casts the fascinating term »unauthorized biography of the nation«, *ibid.*

first-person narrator that is sometimes addressed as ›Sevgi‹, provides an impression of unity and continuity. The biography of one person, one life-line being retold, offers the narrative frame for the fragment-like stories and novels. On the other hand Özdamar's *particular mode* of autobiography – its disrupted and disruptive fashion, its fantastic and ironic elements, its playful use of time and space of memory – at the same time resists suggestions of unity and continuity. The narrations repeatedly shift in temporal, spatial and thematic terms, refusing any suggestions of chronological and transparent stability of such a life-line. Despite ›real-life‹ correspondences with its author, the ›autobiographic Self‹ presented in Özdamar's writings is clearly a fictional construction: in a playful way this Self is ›almost-Sevgi‹ – invented, unfathomable, elusive.

The narrative strategy that is probably most characteristic of Özdamar's quasi-autobiographic work is that of naïve surprise. Whereas Regula Müller emphasises the critical, questioning function of this strategic naivety,⁹ Claudia Breger further differentiates this assertion by pointing out that naivety is in fact a problematic ascription in an orientalist tradition of knowledge.¹⁰ She argues that Özdamar re-inscribes the trope of the ›naïve oriental woman‹ by the strategy of a parodical mimicry. This strategic mimicry disturbs a strictly autobiographic reading as well as it hampers the determination of the narrator's identity as ›oriental‹. Seyhan argues that the particular possibilities of autobiography as a genre make it into a preferred mode of writing for ›writers of the diaspora‹. She postulates that autobiography is an »out-of-bounds genre that captures the fluid character of memory, migration and transition in an appropriately nuanced fashion«. ¹¹ In my opinion this idea is even more true for Özdamar's specific autobiographic *mode*, her ›almost- or quasi-autobiography‹. Özdamar's literary representation of personal memories of (life after) migration is critically annotated by the questioning potential of temporal and spatial disruption. Özdamar's shift-

9. Regula Müller: »Ich war Mädchen, war ich Sultanin‹: Weitgeöffnete Augen betrachten türkische Frauengeschichten«, in: Sabine Fischer/Moray MacGowan (eds.): Denn du tanzt auf einem Seil. Positionen deutschsprachiger MigrantInnenliteratur, Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag 1997, pp. 133-149.

10. Claudia Breger: »Meine Herren, spielt in meinem Gesicht ein Affe?‹ Strategien der Mimikry in Texten von Emine S. Özdamar und Yoko Tawada«, in: Cathy S. Gelbin/Kader Konug/Peggy Piesche (eds.): Aufbrüche: Kulturelle Produktionen von Migrantinnen, Schwarzen und jüdischen Frauen in Deutschland, Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag 1999, pp. 30-59.

11. A. Seyhan: Writing Outside the Nation, p. 96.

ing and fragmented writing refuses any ›simple‹ stories of identity. Despite its autobiographic character it undermines one-dimensional determinations in terms of Self and Other, German and Turkish, oriental and occidental.

The protagonist's identity strongly depends on the specific chronotopes, the time-place constellations, of the particular moments of narration. Her identity adapts to the role that she plays or represents in a certain chronotope, and it re-adapts to actual or possible other roles that she plays or might play in other chronotopes. Dependent on the temporally and spatially localised perspective as well as on the various (national, familial, lingual) contexts presented in the narrations, Özdamar's autobiographic Self consists of multiple personae in a complex web of relations: she is simultaneously a labour migrant, a German writer, a political activist, a child, an artist, a returning migrant, a granddaughter, a lover. The same counts for her ethnic and national identity: she is Kurdish, Turkish, East-German, West-German and German, depending on place, time and perspective, both hers and that of others. In many of the above-mentioned chronotopically-specific ›identities‹ the experience of migration is of determinant importance. Migration often functions as an *enabling* movement. Whereas on the one hand it demands an unlimited flexibility, on the other it opens up the possibility of a ›nomadic subjectivity‹ in return.¹²

In Özdamar's work boundaries – between Turkey and Germany, East and West, Orient and Occident – are presented as shared as well as divisive constructions. These boundaries simultaneously operate as ambivalent zones of contact and as sites of contestation.¹³ Rather than stable lines of demarcation, they are dynamic ›spaces‹ where positions of power and powerlessness are being negotiated. The two selected stories present the protagonist's multiple crossing of several of these boundaries – temporal, spatial, but also political or ideological. She travels from Turkey to Germany, from West- to East-Berlin, and back again, in actual or imaginary, past or present movements. Hello and goodbye, Orient and Occident, life and death: all these dimensions intersect and fuse in Özdamar's narration. At

12. Aware of the critique on intellectual idealisations of the concept of nomadism that do away with its coercive dimensions, I want to stress the self-chosen character of the nomadism of Özdamar's protagonist.

13. Comp. Inge E. Boer: »The World beyond our Window: Nomads, Travelling Theories and the Function of Boundaries«, in: parallax. A journal of metadiscursive theory and cultural practices 3 (1996), pp. 7-36, p. 16.

the end of this confusion, it is hard to distinguish between home and away, Self and Other. The continual boundary-crossing puts monolithic and homogeneous notions of identity up for discussion. Besides, by pointing out several transnational parallels and similarities between Turkey and Germany (as well as between East- and West-Germany), Özdamar's work questions the assumedly neutral – geographical –, but in fact artificial – ideological – division in an East and a West.

The stories *Mein Istanbul* and *Mein Berlin*, with their specific and connected chronotopical constellations, offer an alternative trajectory of identity that is coloured and signed by the personal markings of experience and memory. They establish a specific tension between official ›geographies of history‹ and a personal ›cartography of memory‹. Whereas these first often assume (or pretend the existence of) stable, natural boundaries (if not borders) between for instance East and West, Orient and Occident, German and non-German, the personal cartography of memory that Özdamar's stories offer, connects places and locations that from the perspective of these official geographies appear rigidly separated. As such these stories contribute to what I consider Özdamar's literary project of re-mapping national identity – Turkish *and* German national identity. In her narrative recollections Özdamar offers a perspective on (German and Turkish) history and public memory that usually remains unnoticed. The trajectory of identity that her literature imagines, represents a fascinating and resisting counterpoise to dominant notions of national identity. As Seyhan argues in her introduction to *Writing Outside the Nation*:

»Literature tends to record what history and public memory often forget. Furthermore, it can narrate both obliquely and allegorically, thereby preserving what can be censored and encouraging interpretation and commentary in the public sphere. Through the lens of personal recollection and interpretation, the specificity of class, ethnic, and gender experiences gains a stature that is often erased, forgotten, or ignored in the larger management of public memory.«¹⁴

Özdamar's literature contributes to the writing of an alternative biography of the German nation in a very specific and complicated period in its history: the separation into two Germanies between 1949 and 1989. In this sense it not only determinedly resists orientalising readings, but also writes »a new subject of German remem-

14. A. Seyhan: *Writing Outside the Nation*, p. 12.

brance into being«. ¹⁵ Özdamar's literary work performs a subtle rewriting of dominant national history – German as well as Turkish – from the perspective of Turkish-German migration.

Mapping memories: Berlin-Istanbul connections

The two stories *Mein Berlin* and *Mein Istanbul* build on several striking parallels. First of all both stories represent ›personalised metropolises‹. They offer descriptions of the cities of Istanbul and Berlin as experienced by the stories' female protagonist and first-person narrator. This protagonist is familiar to the practiced reader of Özdamar's literary work, as these city-stories again use the autobiographic mode discussed above. Other than in her earlier novels fantastic elements (that hinder autobiographic identification) are missing here, but the narrative tone of naïve wondering and associative surprise is the same. It is this travelling, nomadic protagonist that establishes the first link between Berlin and Istanbul: the personal, experiential link of migration. As the stories proceed, the two metropolises – generally conceived of as very different and far apart from each other – turn out to have more in common than usually acknowledged. They are not only connected by developments of globalisation, by labour and other migrations as exemplified by the case of Özdamar's protagonist, but they also share a comparable history of division: both metropolises were once rigidly separated (by a wall and a waterway) in an East- and a West-part. In the case of Berlin the political character of the boundary – the 1961 erected Berlin Wall – is undisputed. In the case of Istanbul Özdamar's story makes clear that the contentious decision to (*not*-) build a bridge – connecting the Muslim and non-Muslim parts of the city – is just as political. Özdamar's literary cartography unites these two politically problematic histories of division in a transnational comparison. Her cartography of memory critically questions and compares the meaning of these histories in terms of geo-political hegemony and the global and local distribution of power. The ›geographic‹ variables East and West – both in terms of the cities and in respect to the two nation-states represented by these capitals – are revealed as locally specific, ideological constructs. Their semantic value varies between Asian and European, communist and capitalist, Orient and Occident. ›East‹ and ›West‹ are fundamentally relative categories.

15. Leslie A. Adelson: »The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature and Memory Work«, in: *The Germanic Review* 77.4 (2002), pp. 326-338, p. 333.

In both the Istanbul and the Berlin story the protagonist recalls travelling between the two separated parts of the cities, collecting and connecting locations on both sides of the division on her personal city-map. In Berlin references to many train and underground journeys testify of her nomadic existence. The Istanbul story narrates a parallel wandering by boat or ship, from the one side of the Bosphorus to the other. Spatial tropes of separation and connection abound in Özdamar's city-stories. The main activity of the protagonist is the crossing of boundaries and thus the establishment of moments and spaces of contact that subvert the strict divisions. In the specific narrative contexts offered by the stories her boundary crossing constitutes an undermining activity on a socio-political level. At the same time, on a more personal level, this continuous crossing forecloses the protagonist's homecoming as much as it disables enduring feelings of belonging.

The story *Mein Berlin* begins with the sentence »1976 kehrte ich nach neun Jahren nach Berlin zurück«. ¹⁶ This opening sentence immediately situates the narration in both temporal and spatial terms, introducing and connecting three distinctive chronotopes: Berlin in the year 1976, Berlin 9 years before and the time-space of 9 years ›elsewhere‹ in the period between the two moments mentioned. That this elsewhere is to be located in Turkey, the protagonist's ›homeland‹, becomes clear from the next sentence that refers to the politically precarious situation in Turkey after the military putsch of 1971. In the novel *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* Özdamar extensively describes the experiences of the female protagonist in Istanbul in this period in between, as well as her *repeated* migration to Germany. In the first act of migration, in the mid-sixties, the young woman travelled to Germany in the company of other recruits to work as a labour migrant. Özdamar's literary representation of this experience as an exciting adventure breaks with stereotypical images of labour migrants being passive victims of fate. The young girl ›Sevgi‹ consciously tries her luck abroad. She searches freedom from familial and traditional constraints – mainly exercised by the (nevertheless) beloved mother and grandmother – that bind the young woman to strongly gendered expectations and responsibilities. The protagonist's second migration in the mentioned year 1976 further disturbs dominant reader-expectations in respect to labour migration. At this time the self-assured protagonist travels to Berlin for an internship in the theatre-field. To her delight and excitement she has been invited to work as a production-assistant of director

16. E. Özdamar: *Der Hof im Spiegel*, p. 55.

Matthias Langhoff and Bertold Brecht-pupil Benno Besson at the respectable East-German ›Volksbühne‹. The novel *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* offers a fascinating impression of this period of the protagonist's life.

The first sentence of *Mein Berlin* brings these two moments together in one story and installs a certain feeling of continuity, of repetition. Berlin is connected to Istanbul through and in the moment of narrating migration. The second migration is in fact a return and raises feelings of familiarity and homecoming. Istanbul on the contrary, as well as Turkey as the left behind country of origin, are remembered in the emotional terms of sad separation and dissatisfactory goodbyes. As a result of her migration the protagonist has to leave her dear old grandmother behind, who begs her granddaughter – and even makes her promise – to return to Istanbul after two days. The remembering character of the first person narration makes clear that this promise has been broken. The thought of this broken promise sustains feelings of sadness in the granddaughter. Migration in this sense also stands for an experience of loss – a loss that might well be of a definitive character, seen the grandmother's old age. Another sad reference to the left behind Turkey, this time coloured by a lens of socio-political critique, evokes a more violently connotated goodbye: migration as a painful and traumatic repetition of a *final* separation. This remembrance concerns a parting from dear dead: the leaving behind of assassinated friends who have fallen victim to the Turkish military dictatorship.

Despite the sadness about saying farewell, the protagonist's departure is not involuntary though. As I've already mentioned, migration is primarily an enabling movement in Özdamar's literary work. The protagonist's transnational travelling brings about loss as well as gain, just as her continual commuting between the separated parts of the divided cities does. The contrary emotions attached to both leaving and arriving result in a game of balancing. In *Mein Berlin* the sadness evoked by the farewell to beloved ones, dead and alive, is more or less neutralised by the re-encounter with the also once left behind Berlin. The tone of this re-encounter is happily excited. The city is held in dear and warm memory of the last visit there and, in the perception of the protagonist, the personified Berlin itself seems positively expectant of her return. The protagonist relates of an encounter with a city that has been waiting for her, waiting for her return. She describes this encounter as follows:

»Am Bahnhof Zoo begrüßte ich alle Busse, die vorbeifuhren. Ich war in Freiheit und freute mich über den Regen. Ich dachte: Berlin hat neun Jahre auf mich gewartet. Es war, als wäre Berlin damals, als ich nach Istanbul zurückgegangen war, zu einem

Foto erstarrt, um auf mich zu warten – mit den langen, hohen Bäumen, mit der Gedächtniskirche, mit den zweistöckigen Bussen, mit den Eckkneipen.«¹⁷

The imagination that the left behind Berlin has been expecting her, holding life still until her return, functions as a source of comfort for Özdamar's nomadic Self. At the same time Berlin's attitude constitutes an interesting contrast to the often proclaimed (and experienced) rejecting, and even hostile attitude of the city's population towards Turkish (labour) migrants. In the protagonist's personal experience of place, on her personalised city-map of Berlin, liveliness and motion are connected to the protagonist's presence, to her being present. She imagines how the places that she abandoned and revisits now later, have all freezed to photographic images at the moment of (de-)parting. In her narration they appear as projections on the screen of her mind, as souvenirs that she can take around with her and preserve as memories hold dear. A similar personalised chronotope caught in a photographic image, appears in the *Mein Istanbul*. Here the protagonist recalls the Istanbul that she has left behind, using exactly the same formulation as in *Mein Berlin*:

»In den Gesichtern der Menschen suche ich meine Freunde von damals, aber ich suche sie in den jungen Gesichtern von heute, als wären meine Freunde in den zweiundzwanzig Jahren nicht älter geworden, als hätten sie mit ihren damaligen Gesichtern auf mich gewartet. Als wäre Istanbul in dem Moment, in dem ich nach Europa gegangen war, zu einem Photo erstarrt, um auf mich zu warten – mit all seinen Bädern, Kirchen, Moscheen, Sultanspalästen [...]. Als hätte Istanbul auf mich gewartet mit seinen Millionen von Schuhen, die in den Häusern auf den Morgen warten, mit seinen Millionen von Haarkämmen, die vor den mit Rasierseife befleckten Spiegeln liegen.

Ich bin da, jetzt werden sich alle Fenster öffnen.«¹⁸

As the text-passage illustrates, moments in time blend together here. They condense as it were in the protagonist's web of memories. Her reflections end on an expectant, but at the same time rather unrealistic, utopian note: now that she – the nomadic migrant – has arrived again, the windows that in her photographic perception remained closed during her absence, will open up again and let life in, let life continue. The passage conveys the impression that the protagonist's absence from the cities causes their standstill: nothing happens, as she is not there to notice and to observe what is hap-

17. Ibid., p. 56.

18. Ibid., p. 74.

pening. The juxtaposed images of the metropolises, both passively waiting for the protagonist's presence, for her return, stress both her central and parallel position in the city-narrations. The titles of the stories also emphasise this subjective dimension: these stories imagine ›*Mein Berlin*‹ and ›*Mein Istanbul*‹. These are the metropolises as the protagonist has experienced them; these are the metropolises as preserved in *her* memory and as revived at *her* return.

German national history by the German national Other

The protagonist's memories of Berlin and Istanbul, her personal histories of these two capitals, intersect in significant ways with German and Turkish *national* histories. ›Sevgi's‹ personal memories can be considered comments on and additions to German and Turkish cultural memory. They intervene and contribute to the larger frame of institutionalised national history from a very specific viewpoint, namely that of a female migrant of Turkish origin. In the following I will concentrate on the literary re-imaginings of the *German* national space, and on the position that Özdamar's protagonist claims for herself there.

Özdamar's Berlin writings concern a particular period (and place) in Germany's history of division.¹⁹ As I've already mentioned, the *German* particularity of these writings is often overlooked though in favour of either the ›Turkishness‹ or the ›Turkish accent‹ of her writing. Following Leslie Adelson, I will now read Özdamar's stories on Germany's relatively recent past as a particular kind of *Wende*-literature.²⁰ The stories offer a very particular after-1989-view on the pre-1989-period of German-German division and can be considered exceptionally insightful sites of German memory work. They lay bare an often forgotten dimension of a very complex transitional phase in German history and as such constitute an instance of cultural counter-memory.²¹

19. With the term ›Berlin writings‹ I refer to Özdamar's pieces of literature that are narratively situated in the German capital and im- or explicitly make the city's exceptional state of division into a theme.

20. In Özdamar's Berlin writings the ›cultural transformation‹ resulting from migration indeed intersects with the ›cultural effects of national unification‹. Comp. L. Adelson, »The Turkish Turn«, p. 327.

21. Comp. Jonathan Crewe: »Recalling Adamastor: Literature as Cultural Memory in ›White‹ South Africa«, in: Mieke Bal/Jonathan Crewe/Leo Spitzer (eds.): Acts

In the story *Mein Berlin* the narrating protagonist offers a colourful image of what she in another story in *Der Hof im Spiegel* calls »beiden Berlin«:²² the two parts of the divided Berlin of the after-war period.²³ She combines impressions of daily street-life on both sides of the border by listing text-graffiti, slogans and political statements written on the houses on the West side of the Berlin Wall, and the old-fashioned shop inscriptions still visible on the house facades in Berlin's East part of the city. Slogans varying from »Alles Vergessene schreit im Traum um Hilfe ...« and »Wir brauchen kein Tränengas, wir haben genug Grund zum Heulen ...« to »DDR: Deutscher DReck ...« and »Attention! You are entering the Axel Springer Sector ...« are juxtaposed to (out)dated advertisements as »Brennholz – Kartoffelschalen« and »Särge in allen Preislagen«.²⁴ In this way Özdamar simultaneously sketches a personal and a political image of this specific chronotope: Berlin as a combined city, a city-alloy, in the year 1976. *Mein Berlin* integrates personal impressions and experiences of a female Turkish migrant into a historical frame of socio-political division. The remarkable given that this personal dimension in fact contradicts the historical one – integrated memories of ›both Berlin‹ despite their rigid division – lends these memories an unusual and even slightly disruptive quality. This quality is in my opinion strongly related to the protagonist's status as an Other, an outsider (in national, lingual and visual terms) on *both* German sides of the Wall. As Andreas Huyssen assesses, »the ultimate Other« in the 1976 situation of political tension between two antagonist Germanies was prescriptively located at the other side of the inner-German border.²⁵ He writes:

»When Germany was divided, the question of German nation had become increasingly theoretical [...]. East and West Germans came to live with separate identities. They became even somewhat exotic to one another and recognised each other in their differences.«²⁶

of Memory. Cultural Recall in the Present, Hannover, London: University Press of New England 1999, p. 75-86.

22. E. Özdamar: *Der Hof im Spiegel*, p. 63.

23. The grammatically incorrect plural-singular combination of ›beiden Berlin‹ constitutes another subtle instance – on a linguistic level – of disruptive resistance against regulating boundaries.

24. E. Özdamar: *Der Hof im Spiegel*, p. 58ff.

25. Andreas Huyssen: *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York, London: Routledge 1995, p. 73.

26. *Ibid.*

Huyssen's use of the term ›exotic‹ here for the ›other‹, antagonist German is striking and unusual, but at the same time its applicability seems to be confirmed by Özdamar's story. Whereas the inner-German border was generally kept closed for German citizens of either German state and whereas passing was subject to rigorous restrictions, the protagonist's daily routine actually consists of crossing this German-German border. Her ›double‹ Otherness establishes her an outsider position that in this exceptional case enables rather than disables movement. On both sides of the border the protagonist is positioned as coming from elsewhere, from ›faraway‹. She is perceived of as having neither part nor interest in the German-German conflict. Despite the fact that in and after the moment of travelling from East to West and from West to East she does represent the respective opposite German side, this antagonist-German representativeness is neutralised by her ethnic Otherness in a re-assuring way. In the West she is the *Turkish* woman working in the East; in the East she is the *Turkish* woman living in the West. Her boundary-crossing praxis in this particular situation of German-German division disruptively re-signifies her ascribed status as ›exotic Other‹. The unusual given that the label ›exotic‹ is already reserved for the *German* Other, confuses this discursive dichotomy and subverts the (still efficacious) orientalisising discourse that exclusively reserves this label for the (female) ›Arab‹ Other, in this case the Turkish-German migrant.

Özdamar's writing thus contributes identificatory memories to the present field of contesting political discourses on German identity from an unexpected angle. Özdamar's commuting protagonist is and remains an observing outsider on both sides of the Wall at the same time. In this sense she offers a ›privileged‹ perspective on a situation in which any *ethnic* German was considered inevitably complicit.

Crossing borders, trespassing politics

In the story *Mein Berlin* the protagonist observes and registers many instances of division, but leaves most of them *explicitly* un-commented. In fact, her subtle commentary is the narrative mode of tactful wondering that often touches upon the sad and tragic absurdities of the situations of separation described. The listed selection of ›West-‹slogans written on the Wall signal the politically heterogeneous, partly radicalised West-German society. They install a political image without taking a political standpoint though. The protagonist's experiences on the East-side of the Wall provide an insight in the

limited margins of freedom in East-Berlin. This is for instance the case in a registered dialogue between the protagonist and the character of playwright Heiner Müller. He explains to her why the East-Berlin theatre audience holds back its spontaneous responses to politically significant scenes in a play. She writes: »Heiner sagte: ›Sie wissen, daß das Stück verboten wird, wenn sie zuviel lachen. Deshalb lachen sie nicht, sie verständigen sich über das Nicht-Lachen.«²⁷ The first-person narrator refrains from adding explicit political statements or judgements.

The protagonist's narration of East-Berlin is generally characterised by an excited attitude of ›recognition‹ in both meanings of the term. On the one hand her observations mediate a delighted, recognizing identification of ›Germany‹ as the country that she tried to imagine in Istanbul, before coming to Berlin. There she read and performed German drama, and became fascinated by the German society that this drama represented. On the other hand her narration attributes recognition in the sense of appreciation and respect to those German intellectuals that inspired the (repressed) Turkish oppositional student movement of which she was once part. She writes:

»Jedes Mal freute ich mich über den Namen der Haltestelle an der Volksbühne: ›Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz‹. Ich freute mich auch über die U-Bahn-Haltestelle ›Marx-Engels-Platz‹. Wegen der Bücher von Marx, Engels und Luxemburg hatte man in der Türkei Menschen verhaftet. Ich freute mich auch, dass eine Gurke in jedem Laden gleich viel kostete: 40 Groschen. Im Gegensatz zu West-Berlin gab es an den Hauswänden oder an der Mauer keine Sprüche.«²⁸

The last two sentences of this passage offer another example of the effective combination of positive wondering and naïve surprise, combined with a latent comment on the political situation. Her ascertainment that in East-Berlin no slogans appear on the walls, contains a critical comment on the lack of freedom of speech without explicating this critique directly though. Her comment seems not more than an observation, a more or less neutral assessment. Several reviewers of Özdamar's Berlin writings criticised this observing narrative mode as a problematic playing down of a repressive political regime.²⁹ They interpreted her naïve, a-political stance in re-

27. E. Özdamar: *Der Hof im Spiegel*, p. 59.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Harald Hartung: »Wir sind nur Hospitant auf Erden. V-Affekte: Emine Sevgi Özdamar lernt das Brecht-Theater«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 June

spect to GDR politics as an irresponsible attitude. In my opinion though it is important to distinguish between narrator and narration here. Whereas Özdamar's narrating protagonist could be considered a-political and uninvolved, this is not the case for her narration. It is the exceptionality of the protagonist's outsider position that – by contrast – foregrounds the inescapable complicity of *all* other ›German‹ positions, of all *ethnic* Germans. The protagonist's ethnic Otherness combined with her seemingly naïve observations make an alternative perspective on a situation of polarised division possible. This perspective does not carry the burden of ›German‹ complicity, but instead addresses and questions this untenable situation. For informed readers the ›neutral‹ remark above is a meaningful indication of East-German suppressive politics. It is clear that no slogans appear on the walls, while dissent to the GDR state ideology is forbidden – another transnational parallel with the 1976 Turkish situation.

Despite the narrative *connection* of ›both Berlin‹ through the mapping of memories of a commuting outsider, the city's »lived division« is nevertheless clear, also for those readers who aren't able to locate »Kino Steinplatz« or »Café Käse« at either East- or West-side of the Wall. References to »[t]ote Bahnschienen, zwischen denen Gras wuchs«, to desolate platforms of East-Berlin railway-stations that the West-Berlin underground passes without stopping, and to the search lights of the East-Berlin police, install an atmosphere of political tension and discomfort.³⁰ The same counts for the repeated instances of border-crossing-formalities: the strictly regulated money exchange and the intimidating interrogations by border control officers. This tense atmosphere reaches a climax, when at a certain point in the narrative the border-crossing protagonist is allowed a longer stay in the GDR. She has been invited for an internship at the East-Berlin ›Volksbühne‹ and for this reason is assigned a residence permit for a period of three months. This permit obliges her to actually *stay* in the GDR and disables further border-crossing movements. The practical gain of not having to go through the daily, time-consuming money-exchange anymore fades against the feeling of being locked up. This experience, the loss of the freedom to perform her identity-constituting travelling, is of great impact on the protagonist. She has to give up her self-chosen nomadism (and even her not-belonging) that she enjoyed and celebrated so

2003; Michael Opitzl: »Stern über geteilter Stadt. Emine Sevgi Özdamar entführt ins Berlin der 70er Jahre«, in: Neues Deutschland, 6. August 2003.

30. E. Özdamar: Der Hof im Spiegel, pp. 56-57.

intensively. Trapped as it were in the Berlin East, she develops a longing desire for the other side, a feeling that she tries to alleviate by visiting the railway-station Friedrichstraße:

»Manchmal, am Samstag oder Sonntag ging ich zum Bahnhof Friedrichstraße. Dort hielten die Züge, in denen Westdeutsche saßen, und fuhren dann weiter nach West-Berlin. Hier bekam sogar ich eine große Sehnsucht nach dem Westen. Ich rief Kati an. ›Schneit es bei euch auch?«³¹

The phrasing »sogar ich« stresses her ›other‹ position, other in comparison to the East-German nationals. They, as the text suggests, also long for the closed off part of their city, for the former unity of their ›homeland‹. The limitation of the protagonist's freedom increases the ambivalence of the offered (apparently a-political) GDR impression. The traveller status enjoyed previously enabled her to compare both antagonistic societies from a relatively neutral position as outsider. Her impressions resulted from the uninvested comparison by someone who is foreign in both parts of the city, but who is nevertheless participating in both cities' everyday life. With the GDR residence permit the protagonist more or less loses this outsider position and is forced to temporarily become part of, and thus complicit in, one of both German national spaces, the GDR.

The question »Schneit es bei euch auch?« in the citation above addresses another mutuality connecting ›both Berlin‹. Whereas the city's separation is underlined every time that Özdamar's protagonist crosses the border, the city's unity is established and emphasised through repeated references to its ›natural oneness‹, symbolically represented by the weather. The wondering surprise about the weather being the same across and despite a rigid division recurs in both city stories. In *Mein Berlin* the protagonist relates:

»So lebte ich tagsüber in Ost-Berlin am Theater, und in der Nacht kehrte ich nach West-Berlin zu Kati und Theo zurück. Jedesmal, wenn ich aus der U-Bahn herauskam, staunte ich: ›Ah, hier im Westen hat es auch geschneit. Ah, hier hat es auch geregnet.«³²

In the story *Mein Istanbul* a similar unifying assessment is attached to a shared sky: »Und der Mond war immer da über Europa und Asien.«³³ The naively surprised emphasis on a shared sky and

31. Ibid., p. 60, emphasis LM.

32. Ibid., p. 57.

33. Ibid., p. 68.

moon, and similar weather across the divisions not only underlines the natural commonalities between the two complementary parts of the two divided cities. It also directs the attention to the artificiality of their division. The historical anecdote in the story *Mein Istanbul* about the building of the Bridge of the Golden Horn that finally connects the two parts of the city, emphasises the ideological dimension of the decision to build this bridge. Its juxtaposition to the divisive Berlin Wall further intensifies this perception of bridge and wall as ideological border-constructs. Both the opening of the Berlin Wall and the crossing of the new Golden Horn Bridge in Istanbul are described as events of transgressive liminality. In the act of boundary-crossing the consolidated order is challenged and established structures are opened up for re-negotiation. In Özdamar's stories these moments of life in rupture are portrayed as scenes in an alienating theatre play – a play with uncertain outcome that forces its ›participants‹ to reflect on their own positions.³⁴ The boundaries become spaces of contact and re-negotiation: exceptional spaces, performatively re-imagined in the transitional moments of their crossing.

At the end of the Berlin story the protagonist visits another exceptional boundary-space: the ›Dorotheenstädtischer Friedhof‹ in the Chausseestraße. On this cemetery several famous German writers are buried, among them Bertold Brecht. The cemetery is a boundary-space par excellence, a ›heterotopian space‹ in the terminology proposed by Michel Foucault. Foucault writes about heterotopian spaces that they »have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way to suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect.«³⁵ What these spaces – Foucault mentions psychiatric hospitals, prisons, gardens, brothels and ships – have in common, he argues, is that they are »real places [...] formed in the very founding of society«, but that at the same time they are »outside of all places« and »absolutely different.«³⁶ On the one hand they are part of official geographies of public space and on the other they simultaneously withdraw from its prescribed order and regulation. In Özdamar's story the cemetery is the place where her protagonist visits the dead, seeking both their comfort and advice. In her imagination there is no

34. The comparison with an alienating theatre play is strongly reminiscent of Bertold Brecht's theories of the epic theatre and the so-called ›V-Effekt‹, the alienation effect. This link is supported by Özdamar's well-known interest in the Brechtian tradition.

35. M. Foucault: »Of Other Spaces«, in: *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), pp. 22-27, p. 24.

36. *Ibid.*

rigid boundary that separates life from death: the cemetery constitutes another boundary-space of contact.

At Hegel's tomb at the Berlin cemetery a young boy approaches Özdamar's protagonist. He spontaneously tells her that it was Hegel's wish to be buried next to Fichte. »Fichte starb an Thyphus, Hegel an Cholera«,³⁷ the boy casually adds to this information, reinforcing the connection between the two German intellectuals on the level of illness and death. The narrative web-weaving of persons, places and time, characteristic of Özdamar's writing, continues, this time resulting in a specific intellectual genealogy. From Hegel's grave the protagonist precedes to Brecht's grave, while softly singing the first sentences of his song-text ›Mackie Messer‹: »... und der Hai-fisch, der hat Zähne ...«. ³⁸ This one phrase instigates the protagonist to establish an anecdotal link to her grandmother in Istanbul who earlier in the story commented on this song with musings on her own death. In Özdamar's personal, transnational cartography Brecht is connected to the grandmother, and the cemetery in Berlin is connected to reflections on dying in Istanbul. The story ends with a direct reference to geography: the boy interestedly asks the protagonist where she comes from. This benevolent question inquiring for the protagonist's origin, determines her as visible Other. At the same time the question encourages ›Sevgi‹ to position herself. On her answer »from Turkey« the boy responds with a specifying following question: »where is Turkey?«. Her answer again indicates the relativity and arbitrariness of space, as well as it emphasises the historical situatedness of positionings. Her response »In der Nähe von Bulgarien«³⁹ – a reference to a country that an East-German school-boy assumedly is familiar with – locates Turkey on the *East-German* map of ›the world‹. Just like the recent controversy on Turkey's EU-membership, this specific localisation makes clear that positioning of Turkey on the map of ›the world‹ – East or West, Europe or Asia, Orient or Occident – is a highly political matter, the map itself an ideological construct. When the two characters take leave, the boy assures the protagonist that he will look up her country of origin in his father's atlas. Whereas the protagonist's associative wandering in time and space has created a personal map of memory, the boy redirects the attention to the ›official‹ cartography of history. Both come together in Özdamar's stories that critically interconnect them in her imagined trajectory of identity.

37. E. Özdamar: *Der Hof im Spiegel*, p. 61.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*