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ÖZDAMAR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTIONS: TRANS-NATIONAL IDENTITY AND LITERARY FORM

Elizabeth Boa

ABSTRACT

Emine Sevgi Özdamar's novels *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei · hat zwei Türen · aus einer kam ich rein · aus der anderen ging ich raus* (1992) and *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998), are formally hybrid: as fictional autobiographies they mix invention and history; as first-person narrations they produce the divided figure of the narrator/protagonist; in mixing German with transliterated Turkish or Turkish-German patois and fragments of many other languages they are linguistically hybrid. In conveying a complex sense of transformative interchange between culturally heterogeneous countries under the impact of social and political change, both novels combat fixed national or cultural stereotypes. The first novel pervasively mixes social and magical realism in evoking tensions within Turkey between tradition and modernisation, whereas the second novel more sharply juxtaposes a fleeting magical-realist utopian vision with a mildly satirised picture of student protest in Berlin and a much grimmer account of unresolved ethnic conflict and political turmoil in Turkey.

Emine Sevgi Özdamar's first novel, *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei · hat zwei Türen · aus einer kam ich rein · aus der anderen ging ich raus* (hereafter *Karawanserei*) is set in Turkey, her second, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, in Germany and Turkey. Both novels belong in the mixed mode of autobiographical fiction: both are designated 'Roman', but the dust jacket offers just enough information about the author to tempt us into reading for autobiography. Özdamar's native language is Turkish and her literary medium is German. This position impacts on narrative structure and language: both novels are narrated in German, but *Karawanserei* has a monolingual Turkish protagonist whereas in the second novel the initially Turkish-speaking protagonist learns German. In the first novel, then, the linguistic divide runs between narrator and protagonist, whereas in the second there is a convergence. In both cases, however, the German medium is shot through with echoes of Turkish or of Turkish-German patois so that the languages enter a kind of marriage in linguistically hybrid texts. Accordingly both novels are formally hybrid in three ways: there is the auto/fictional generic mix of fact/fiction or invention/history; there is the two-headed monster of the narrator/protagonist peculiar to first-person narration; there is the forked tongue of bi-lingualism. The texts can also be viewed as thematically and modally hybrid: they deal with the theme of cross- or trans-national identity and evince a modal tension between social, magical and political realism.

The hybrid form blurs any hard-and-fast distinction between factual autobiography and fiction, a distinction which some critics reject altogether on the grounds that experience being always 'already' mediated through

language no categorical distinction can be drawn.[1] As Almut Fink argues, however, for experience to be accessible to literary representation does indeed entail successive acts of reconstruction, which may draw also on knowledge derived from all sorts of textual sources, but this does not do away with referential meaning. She insists, on the contrary, that 'Referentialität und Textualität [. . .] notwendig und unauflöslich aneinander gekoppelt sind'.[2] My concern here, however, is not with epistemological or ontological questions but with the rhetorical impact of the interplay between literary invention and biographical or historical truth. The categorical distinction between fact and fiction produces fruitful textual tensions which a deconstructive tabula rasa would undo, destroying also the arena of historical and political debate in which literary texts too may intervene. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes of black women's autobiography:

> To categorise autobiographies according to the race and gender of those who write them is to acknowledge some relations, however problematical, between the text and its author [. . .]. And to acknowledge this relation is to dispute prevailing theories of the multiple deaths of the subject, the self, and the author [. . .]. These autobiographies defy any apolitical reading of texts, even – perhaps especially – when they seem to invite it.[3]

This holds good also of the hybrid genre, one effect of which is to emphasise the interaction of the personal and the political. Known correspondences between the text and the author's life lend a confessional spin. For example, to see the protagonist's sexual history in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* as being based, however loosely, on the author's creates a sense of an extreme confessional honesty, so by implication also heightening the sense of historical witness. That here the personal is political hardly needs saying in the case of a woman author writing about a culture in which female modesty is a much disputed value and facing orientalist stereotypes circulating in her country of residence. In sum, Özdamar's texts convey a sense of unstinting authorial risk-taking. On the other hand, the choice of the novel over the autobiographical pact obviates the exhibitionistic Rousseau-effect, as one might term it. Fictional autobiography distances the confession and allows for an allegorical or symbolic expansion of the protagonist's representative status, which in a straight autobiography could seem eccentric or megalomaniac. Imagine if Günter Grass had marketed *Die Blechtrommel* as an autobiography.

The subject is constructed through many overlapping discourses including gender, nation, region, ethnicity, religion, class, generation, and that

[1] Michael Sprinker, 'Fictions of the Self: the End of Autobiography', in James Olney (ed.), *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princetown 1980, pp. 321–42.
[2] Almut Fink, *Autobiographisches Schreiben nach dem Ende der Autobiographie*, Berlin 1999, p. 13.
[3] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'Writings of Afro-American Women', in Shari Benstock (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, London 1988, pp. 63–89 (here p. 66).

vague holdall, culture. Although Özdamar's novels are written in German, and one of them is in part set in Germany, in both attention centres more on Turkey, raising the question of the narrator/protagonist's and indeed the author's identification with Turkey. One way of answering the question is to turn it around to see how far the narrator/protagonist is representative of the nation or of some sub-category and in what sense of representation. In the canon of literary autobiography, which critics trace back to Augustine's *Confessions*, extraordinary individuals, great writers such as Rousseau or Goethe, have been seen by generations of readers as representative of their epoch, their culture, or even of mankind in relation to God. Or there are memoirs by political leaders such as Churchill. As William Sprengemann documents, generic definitions often stipulate historical and social conditions necessary for autobiography, notably a culture producing a strongly developed sense of self and a public arena in which the individual can move. Yet as feminist critics have noted, such conditions tend to be so couched as to produce an exclusively male canon.[4] In contrast to extraordinary protagonists, however, the autobiographical 'I' may be seen to represent ordinary people, and, from Dilthey on, historians have drawn on autobiographical texts as a source of knowledge about times and places.[5] Even the marginalised may be typical in that the causes of marginality are symptomatic of social values, whether economic or moral. Traditionally, women's letters or diaries have served as a source of information on everyday domestic life, often charting the birth and more sadly the deaths of children. (Provocatively, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* charts abortions.) Memoirs or interviews with women are often marketed as communal rather than individual expression.[6] On the other hand, female emancipation as a facet of modernisation and the emergence of nation states has given rise to the genre of women's political memoirs. Yet such texts too are often marketed as communal testimony with an exotic spin, as witness the orientalist title and politically correct sub-title of Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1986). Of course the very fact of writing and especially publishing may make the typical person extraordinary, turning them into the mouthpiece for a nation or people. The Nobel Prizewinner Rigoberta Menchú learned Spanish to be able to 'use the language of her oppressors against them', although her testimony was filtered through her interviewer-editor, the anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray.[7] In her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' on the position of intellectuals mediating between

[4] William C. Sprengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven/ London 1980, pp. 207–8; see also Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in Benstock, pp. 34–62; on the male bias, pp. 105–23.

[5] For a survey of work on autobiography as a historical source see Sprengemann, pp. 192–203.

[6] Sprengemann, pp. 205–6, lists women, Blacks, American immigrants, Asian Indians, Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, and journalists (!) among the obscure groups that might otherwise not be heard.

[7] *I . . . Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatamala*, ed. and intr. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright, London 1984, p. xii.

cultures, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak distinguishes between different senses of representation which slide and overlap.[8] The woman writer who depicts a country ('darstellen') and who in so doing may speak for a people ('vertreten') stands in contrast to woman as symbolic embodiment of national honour or as disputed token in tensions between modernisation and ethnicised or theocratic concepts of nation ('verkörpern'). Fictional autobiography often works with allegorical parallelism. Grass's Oskar Mazerath or Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, child of midnight, are notable examples, or there is the model of a childhood, peculiar to a specific epoch, which Christa Wolf, mixing invention and memory, constructs in *Kindheitsmuster*. With the exception of the first two (the great individual; the political leader), elements of all of these modes mix in Özdamar's novels which may yet, of course, assume the patina of classics by a 'great' author were the canon so to develop.

Turning now to the novels, the key metaphors of the caravanserai and the bridge will serve as a focus for discussion. A caravanserai is an old-style inn or hotel with a courtyard where groups of travellers stop for rest and refreshment. Thus the title sketches a picturesque image of life as travel, but one centred on a sequence of stopping places. The title draws on orientalist discourse, but in comic pastiche marked out by the odd punctuation, then echoed in the textual layout which flows on without chapters, with only line gaps marking episodes as the narrator's family moves from place to place. In contrast to the cinema where the urban street movie and the nomadic road movie are opposite genres, the outcome here is a generic hybrid between life on the street and life on the road. The street suggests a close network of communal relations and a family household open to children's comings and goings and full of connections with neighbours. The happiest stopping place is Bursa, the earliest Ottoman capital. Here the protagonist develops an identity dispersed among neighbours who pass her along the street on the way to school, sustaining her with their watching eyes, so that her sense of self is more outside than inside:

> Ein Auge gab uns zum anderen Auge, und wir kamen, in ihren Augen getragen, bis zur heiligen Eiche. Da fing die lange steile Straße an, an deren Ende wir den Fuß des heiligen Berges sahen. In der Mitte dieser steilen Straße war unsere Schule.[9]

The narrator here lends her younger self a communal identity of the kind which feminist scholars have contrasted with the self-conscious individual

[8] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London 1988, pp. 271–313.

[9] Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei · hat zwei Türen · aus einer kam ich rein · aus der anderen ging ich raus*, Cologne 1994, pp. 130–31. Further references in parentheses in the text are preceded by *K*.

of the male autobiographical tradition.[10] But the vivid metaphor of eyes bearing the children up ensures that the reader is aware not only of the watching eyes in the narrated time, but of the past as another country under the eye of a highly self-conscious narrator working in a foreign literary medium.

The neighbourhood stopping places with their street life are dotted along the trajectory of life on the road. This larger journey contains many allusions to Turkey's post-war development. The opening, reminiscent of *Die Blechtrommel* or of *Midnight's Children*, weaves an allegorical thread which will establish the heroine as a child of her times. The first thing of which the heroine, still in the womb, is aware is soldiers on a train travelling eastwards. The first few pages set the historical scene in the immediate post-war years of struggle for control of the Bosporus and the Eastern Mediterranean, the onset of the Cold War and alliance with America, and evoke too, as pictures in a carpet, her grandfather's times of German railway-building and seizure of the Pergamon monuments, of international competition for control of oil, then war and a collapsing Empire. Through the weave in a carpet, a device equivalent to Oscar's drum, the geopolitics of the region is conveyed from a child's-eye view in childish language. In drawing attention to the medium and to retrospective narration, the mimicry of the child's voice is not realistic in effect but strengthens the sense of an allegorical parabola shaping a life as history. If the heroine is born from the womb of post-war Turkey, paternal allegory provides political and social history in silhouette. On leaving the army, the father works as a bricklayer, then develops his own small building firm which is hit by financial crises when he goes bankrupt or has to flee creditors. All this is told in a realist mode offering many typical details which might interest a social historian. But the father's building work also has allegorical value in paralleling the economic ups and downs of post-war Turkey, while his name Mustafa and membership of the Republican People's Party point back to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the nation. Atatürk's power base was the army. The opening with an embryo in a mother's womb in a train full of soldiers moving eastwards thus allegorically evokes the Turkish state but also anticipates the heroine's later journey to Mount Ararat and her father, who is working on a project there, to breath patriarchal air and recuperate from an illness of the urban world. The close too confirms the nomadic theme as the heroine sets off again, this time travelling westwards towards Germany in what the narrator calls the 'Hurenzug' (*K*379). Whores appear as archetypal figures of street life in earlier episodes, but like other workers they will turn nomadic under economic pressures and take to the road, or the railways, as today's sex traffic all too clearly shows.

[10] See Friedman's critique of claims that autobiography does not develop in cultures where individuals do not oppose themselves to others but feel themselves 'very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community' (Benstock, p. 35).

Taken together, the street and the road suggest a flexible ideal of identity: they evoke a sustaining communal base of selfhood, but also the capacity to deal with change and not be submerged in communalism. In keeping with building as a theme, city architecture is a leitmotif infused with historical meaning. Among the comic names the narrator gives the streets she has lived in is the 'Bürokratenstraße'. This points to the bureaucratic elite and to imperial caste privileges surviving into the Republic. In contrast to the grand stone houses in the 'Bürokratenstraße', the happiest stopping place is the street of traditional wooden houses in Bursa, so built that you can hear a fart from a street away: 'Mutter sagte: "Saniye Teyze (Tante Saniye), wir sind so nah, wenn du furzt, hören wir es in unserem neuen Haus"' (*K*159). Neighbourly streets are like one great mosque as the heroine, at prayer with her paternal grandmother, looks through windows at the neighbours at prayer:

> Wenn die Gebetsbewegungen wie in einer Moschee zusammenpaßten, dann guckte ich nicht mehr auf die Bewegungen der anderen. Ich hatte sie in meinem Körper, ich sah nur mich und meinen Gebetsteppich, die Gebetswörter kamen zusammen aus meinem und Großmutters Mund halblaut heraus, trafen sich zusammen in der Luft und setzten sich wieder zusammen auf den Gebetsteppich. (*K*165–6)

Through the rhythmic movements of ritual the heroine incorporates a communal identity.[11] But like the metaphor of eyes passing children along a street, this passage too exemplifies not just the ritual but its aesthetic reflection in literary language as in the weave of a carpet. Within the household, the unevenness of social and mental change in Turkey is conveyed in the contrast between the praying paternal grandmother, the teller of old tales with her hanging grandmotherly breasts, and the modern mother, her elegant body, her clothes, her dyed hair, her love of cinema: this is a span which the protagonist can hold together psychologically. The stories in the household stretch from ancient tales to Dostoevski with no need to choose between orally transmitted legend and *Madame Bovary*.

But such utopian integration of old and new comes up against harsh realities as the novel unfolds a complex reflection on tradition and modernisation. Stephanie Bird notes how the novel shows Turkey as a country marked by many differences, yet detects too 'an essentializing countermovement' towards an idealised Turkishness rooted in communal values, which, she suggests, is assocated with Atatürk, father of the nation, and set against Americanisation.[12] Such a view might seem to be confirmed in the contrast between the neighbourly streets in Bursa and the family's

[11] This passage conveys 'an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in a community', to use Friedman's terms (see note 10 above).

[12] Stephanie Bird, *Women Writers and National Identity: Bachmann, Duden, Özdamar*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 197–206 (here p. 198).

unhappiest stopping place on the outskirts of Ankara, capital of the Republic, in a new development with a scatter of half-built houses, no facilities, no neighbours and not even a street, only the motorway in the distance and the ridge of a new golf course for American diplomats and military. But this wasteland on the edge of the capital is juxtaposed with the bombastic new mausoleum for Atatürk at the centre, suggesting the gap between the ruling elite and the rural poor flooding into the cities on whose backs the modernising project initiated by Atatürk is being built. Bird's argument rests on attributing to the narrator the family loyalty to Atatürk. But the placing side-by-side in this episode of the cult of the leader and the worst effects of modernisation undercuts idealisation of Atatürk and his legacy. Nor is tradition idealised. One symptom of the mother's depression in the no-man's-land outside Ankara is her weeping over her long-dead mother who unwittingly offended against traditional duty to her husband and was dragged in punishment along the ground, her hair tied to his horse's tail.[13] The mother's depression springs at once from an old terrible wrong and from this new desert which is neither city nor country. And yet it is to her terrible but beloved father from Anatolian Malatya that she turns for help. The old man begs his daughter's forgiveness for his cruelty to her mother yet still takes the best fruit from his granddaughter's hand to teach her that patience is a woman's virtue. Like her mother, the protagonist later becomes ill and suffers a breakdown of the communal identity which her childhood had seemed to establish. The first novel closes on an unanswered question: traditional patriarchy is marred by often cruel denial of women's subjecthood, yet a selfhood sustained through family-based and communal ties is a good which is threatened by a modernising process leading to alienation and to new kinds of social and mental divisions in communities which for all the differences of wealth and political allegiance once had a sense of mutual need and support.

The action of *Karawanserei* follows the initial rise then fall of a parabola from the growth of an identity sustained by, yet also dispersed through, the family and the street, which is then undone, leaving the open question of the departure to Germany. Both of Özdamar's novels culminate in a flight westwards, so that diaspora, whether economic as in the first novel or politically driven as in the second, appears as a key aspect of Turkishness. Formally, the growth and subsequent collapse of an identity based on social integration might seem to constitute an anti-*Bildungsroman*. On the other hand, psychoanalytic approaches to autobiography stress ego-formation through movement away from fusion with the mother towards boundaries establishing

[13] See Lale Yalçin-Heckmann, 'Gender Roles and Female Strategies among the Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Kurdish Tribes of Turkey', in Sirin Tekeli (ed.), *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*, London 1995, pp. 219–32, on the custom of 'Ziz bu' whereby a woman in case of conflict leaves her husband, returning to her family for a variable length of time depending on the degree of protest. The narrator's grandfather mistakes an innocent visit to her family for such insubordination and punishes his wife accordingly.

separate identity. The departure to Germany may thus also connote the breaking of an umbilical connection to a maternal Heimat and mark an emergent individuality, a step that for women's subjectivity is perhaps as crucial as the need to integrate young men socially through 'Bildung'. And the heroine's mother, not just an allegorical womb or psychoanalytic cipher, encourages her daughter to make the break. Yet the journey westwards is also the first step towards acquisition of the literary medium through which the narrator will recuperate lost time and memorialise the love of parents who willingly sent her on a journey across boundaries which will prove highly porous in the linguistic domain. Utterly crucial to the novel's impact is the German language deployed by a narrator divided from, yet affectionately evoking, both a younger self and the Turkish language, which appears comically distanced and magically shining through the German medium. Written in German, the text transliterates Turkish idiom, mixing in also Koranic Arabic along with English and American fragments such as the names of film stars spelled phonetically, Humphrey Pockart (*K* 28), or Pürt Lankaster and Ava Kaertner (*K*181). It includes much Turkish, some translated, some not: 'ayakabim da ma atildi' becomes 'Mädchen, dein Schuh ist auf das Dach geworfen worden' (*K* 141), meaning a child's nose put out of joint by a younger sibling; or 'bütün kurtlarini döktü' becomes 'ihre Würmer richtig ausgeschüttelt' (*K*174), meaning a good gossip. The fragment of Pidgin English, 'I am sik' (*K* 178), conceals a hidden meaning ('sik' is a Turkish word for penis).[14] But what is the effect of such mixing? Bakhtin sees the novel generally as an artistically organised system for bringing different social discourses into dialogue, so effecting 'the collision between different points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms'.[15] Bakhtin's model sets a hierarchy: 'An image of language may be structured only from the point of view of another language, which is taken as the norm.'[16] Thus a social discourse, spoken by a character or colouring the narrative, is an object to be illuminated parodically through juxtaposition with the literary language of the narrating subject. As Robert Young argues, however, in post-colonial discourse 'hybridity begins to become the form of cultural difference itself, the jarrings of a differentiated culture whose "hybrid counter-energies", in Said's phrase, challenge the centred cultural norms'.[17] The parodic effect may turn back against the normative language, so turning linguistic hybridity into a mode of resistance to a dominant culture or a

[14] Many thanks to Dr Taner Oc for advice on Turkish idioms; any mistakes in transmission remain mine. For an earlier version of this discussion of language see my essay 'Sprachenverkehr. Hybrides Schreiben in Werken von Özadmar, Özakin und Demirkan', in Mary Howard (ed.), *Interkulturelle Konfigurationen. Zur deutschsprachigen Erzählliteratur von Autoren nicht deutscher Herkunft*, Munich 1997, pp. 115–38.

[15] M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin 1983, p. 360.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 359.

[17] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London 1995, p. 23.

metropolitan language, as for example in British-Caribbean rap.[18] Özdamar does not use German against German oppressors, as Burgos-Debray argues of Rigoberta Menchú's use of Spanish; Turkey and Germany do not stand in a post-colonial relationship. But the situation of Turkish migrant workers has affinities with that of post-colonial subjects, as does Özdamar's mixing of languages with Spivak's intellectual mediating between cultures. An unruly subaltern language speaks disruptively through the German medium, by implication dividing the reading public into innocent Germans naively amazed at exotic strangeness and sophisticated Turkish speakers who recognise and smile at the familiar idioms in their German disguise. Which is normative and which is parodied in this conversation of languages depends on who is reading.

The second novel too describes a rising curve of emergent individuality culminating in political activism first in Germany, then more seriously in Turkey, only to close again on a journey away from Turkey back to Germany undertaken on a mother's advice. Here the key metaphor is the bridge. A bridge connects places and overcomes gaps. But unlike the ferry across the Sea of Marmora between Europe, where the protagonist is an actress and has sexual adventures, and Asia, where her parents live, the titular bridge does not link Europe and Asia. (The first intercontinental bridge over the Bosporus was built between 1970 and 1973, at the very time when the protagonist's political adventures are reaching a climax.) The bridge over the Golden Horn links the ancient heart of European Istanbul, once a centre of Christendom, with newer European districts. The title thus evokes European heterogeneity at the heart of a city which is now a centre of Islamic culture. The choice of the bridge rather than the ferry avoids an orientalist binary opposition of Europe against Asia. Cultures do not provide monolithic, static pillars to support bridges, but are always changing under the pressures of generational, regional, ethnic, religious or political tensions and economic and class differences. In another city, it too divided between East and West, the heroine learns the cosmopolitan politics of Marxism, a tradition rooted in the European Enlightenment. But in this tale of two cities she learns as much from Turkish political exiles in Berlin as from German would-be revolutionaries, and the Marxism which once travelled eastwards returns westwards as Marxist-Leninist or Maoist discourse; the movement of ideas is not uni-directional. Inspired by the student protests in Berlin, the heroine returns full of fervour for change to Istanbul, only to come up against a brutal regime and an impervious landscape on a journey to eastern Kurdish Anatolia. Thus the initial structure of a *Bildungsroman* as the adolescent heroine learns about politics, sex, poetry and the vagaries of human nature, is undone.

[18] Such hybrid mixing is especially punchy in performance art; see, for example, Özdamar's play 'Karagöz in Alamania. Schwarzauge in Deutschland', in *Mutterzunge*, Berlin 1993, pp. 47–101.

The protagonist has three ambitions: to read, write and perform linguistically; to lose her virginity; to become politically active. Language is the indispensable bridge to theatre, love, and politics. The first Berlin episode evokes an unbridged condition. The protagonist cannot yet speak German and moves through a kaleidoscope of topographical and linguistic fragments, a condition emblematically evoked in the fragmentary Anhalter Bahnhof where she and her mates hang out. Phonetic spellings like 'Wonaym' comically convey the foreignness of German. The narrator cites fragments from newspaper headlines which her protagonist could not understand, but offers little commentary to bridge the gap in mentality between 1990s narrator and 1960s protagonist. In the second Berlin phase, the protagonist has learned German and now acts as translator for her Turkish companions working at Siemens. Translation is a bridge between peoples. But the heroine's main job is not so much linguistic translation between Turks and Germans as cultural translation between different groups of Turks: married couples and single women, traditionalists and modernists, sexually liberated women, lesbian cousins who are lovers and Islamist moralists. In depicting Turkish-Turkish tensions and a great range of educational capacities, intellectual interests, and modes of desire among a mix of workers and students, the novel counteracts the homogenising stereotypes of racist discourse. Languages are a key motif also in the brief interlude in Paris – Spanish, French, Turkish, German, Lorca in translation, a love poem in incomprehensible English. Paris is a magical postmodern paradise, spoiled only by absurd Turkish spies. Exotic languages take on erotic allure and offer shimmering bridges across to the other, enabling the meeting of bodies, hearts and imaginations. This reader was fleetingly reminded of another linguistic border-crossing, in Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*:

> Und so möcht' ich alle Freunde,
> Jung und alt, in eins versammeln
> Gar zu gern in deutscher Sprache
> Paradiesesworte stammeln.
>
> Doch man horcht nun Dialekten,
> Wie sich Mensch und Engel kosen,
> Der Grammatik, der versteckten,
> Deklinierend Mohn und Rosen.[19]

Linguistic mingling takes on utopian meaning, signifying a trans-national condition, which is neither an abstract universal humanity nor the preservation in aspic of cultural differences, but mutually transformative, imaginative interchange symbolised through erotic meeting. (At a time of monolingual

[19] 'Höheres und Höchstes', in *Goethes Werke*, II, *Gedichte und Epen*, ed. Erich Trunz, Hamburg 1965, 7. Aufl., pp. 116–17. Goethe's hybrid and dialogic *West-Östlicher Divan* contradicts Bakhtin's claim that lyric poetry is monologic in contrast to the dialogic novel.

virtual meetings in anglophone chatrooms, Özdamar's novel celebrates learning languages and actual meetings in foreign parts – everyone should lose their virginity at least once in Paris.)

If *Karawanserei* offered a Turkish 'Kindheitsmuster', *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, while telling a highly specific story, also conveys representative experiences common to a generation of young, educated people from many countries in the late 1960s who learned languages, travelled, read Marx, protested against Western imperialism, sought sexual liberation, but who would also begin in the early 1970s to question the power relations between the sexes. In Berlin and Istanbul the protagonist becomes a female apprentice, a Wilhelmine Meister with a theatrical vocation, visiting the Berliner Ensemble in Berlin and attending acting school in Istanbul where she also mixes, as the only woman, among the intellectuals who meet in the Captain's Café. (The Baedeker Guide to Istanbul still shows this café.) The three ambitions – learning languages to play theatre, losing her virginity, engaging politically – mix and mingle in an autobiographical fiction which foregrounds the female voice. Female emancipation was part of Atatürk's modernising programme, but as one study puts it:

> Thanks to Atatürk, Turkish women [. . .] won legal equality long before many of their western sisters. But [. . .] Atatürk also disbanded those feminist groups that had been agitating for greater rights in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. The women's movement never quite recovered from not having to fight for its rights.[20]

The heroine's wish to lose her virginity, though provocative within a traditional context, whether Islamic *or* Christian, might none the less seem in its very fervour to re-inscribe defloration as a rite of passage. But the narrator comically defuses the issue by revealing that her younger self was not really sure whether she actually did lose the precious jewel in Paris or only later, a not uncommon uncertainty. This ambiguity – over the supposed defining moment of a membrane breaking – joins with other motifs to undo patriarchal either/or categories. In *Karawanserei* too the either/ors are subverted by motherly street prostitutes, while 'Mundhure' (*K*117) or 'Zungenhure' (*K*257) are terms of honour for a narrator in whose mouth languages illegitimately mix. Such undoing of traditional sexual morality goes along, however, with some scepticism about the new freedoms. In the second novel political protest is erotically infused as the path to the charismatic activists the heroine fancies. She half-reads vast tomes of left-wing jargon to make her sexy, while the men regard her as due reward for their political leader. Karin Struck wrote a novel called *Klassenliebe* (1974) uncovering the sexism

[20] Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Atatürk and After*, London 1997, p. 63. To this should be added that the second-wave women's movements in western Europe had scarcely got going at the time Özdamar is writing about.

of the student left. Özdamar's novel might have been called 'Agit-Liebe', though the barb is directed as much against the young woman in thrall to the phallic power of would-be revolutionaries as it is against the complacent men who take her worship for granted.

Given such ironising of her younger self, how far do narrator and protagonist converge? Does the still only half-digested Marxist faith of her younger self anticipate the retrospective understanding of the more mature narrator, a convergence that would imply a process of growing (western?) enlightenment? On the journey eastwards to Hakkâri in Kurdish Anatolia, the vein of comic irony gives way to bleak yet vivid images of poverty and oppression in a remote region where the population scratch a meagre existence under ubiquitous surveillance and where political assassination is an immediate threat; the agents of the state who seemed merely comic in Paris are here all too frightening. In a café in Hakkâri the picaresque heroine, truly a Simplicissima, proposes that the people should march on Ankara to demand their rights, but the building workers she is talking to do not have shoes for a Long March. The Marxism of student protesters in Berlin, a theory of urban capitalism and proletarian collective action, or even the Maoist version of a peasant army united against foreign domination, do not engage adequately with ethnic conflict and a still largely pre-modern economy of a region held down by modern communications enabling spies to telephone ahead to arrange arrests. (Fortunately, friends too telephone to arrange help for the naïve student travellers.) This section of the novel seems to me to convey the return of an unbridged condition less easily overcome than the initial unbridged state in Berlin, before the protagonist had learned German and become able to link up the urban fragments into a meaningful topography. *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* closes without either the protagonist or her later self having discovered the political key to unlock the world of Kurdish Anatolia, nor how to overthrow oppression or to build Turkish-Kurdish bridges. Published in 1998, the novel appeared when Berlin had been reunited, but the running sore of ethnic conflict still festers in Turkey and the whole region.

That failure does not mean a rejection of politics, of course, nor that love and politics, the heroine's composite aim, have no connection. Back in Istanbul, she and her lover Kerim are arrested during the military clampdown of the early 1970s. In 1970, leftist junior officers sought reforms in loose alliance with students and organised labour, but the upper echelons of the army, fearing anarchy, imposed martial law, then in May 1971 detained hundreds of people all over the country. In March 1972 the main student leader, Deniz Gezmiş was hanged with two friends and many leading intellectuals were gaoled and tortured.[21] The veneer of fiction is very thin in this last chapter which exemplifies the need to resist theories which would undo distinctions between history and invention. (Tortured

[21] See Nicole and Hugh Pope, Chapter 7, for an account of these events.

bodies are not a discursive construct; whether they were tortured is not a matter of competing fictions, but is either true or false, though why may be a matter of political debate.) But the chapter exemplifies too the power of literary images. Just one example, the fate of books: when the police retrieve the heroine's volumes of Marx and Engels from the courtyard where she had thrown them down among the pigeons picking crumbs, they are already dotted with droppings; or there are the ships sailing through sack-loads of leftist books which people fearing police raids have thrown into the Sea of Marmora; or there are the squashed volumes gathered as fuel by slum children; or there is the single volume hanging from a tree with a notice proclaiming that to hang Deniz is also to hang ideas. And so the novel closes on the clash between protest fuelled by ideas and obdurate powers resistant to ideas.

These images catch emblematically not just a moment in Turkish history as the dialectic of enlightenment was brutally played out when the military defenders of enlightened secularism crushed a generation of intellectuals. Volumes of Marx and Engels dotted with pigeon dirt or burnt in slum fires speak now, in a time when idealism is out of fashion, to a generation of readers who may recognise past delusions yet mourn the loss of utopian hope. The closing paragraph starts with a mother urging her daughter to go off and lead her life: '"Flieh und leb dein Leben. Geh, flieg."'[22] But the daughter has kept returning to engage in writing with her personal and the historical past. One mode of engagement is through utopias in a magical realist mode. The utopia in *Karawanserei* is, at the level of the story, a communal identity which can integrate internal cultural diversity; at the level of the text internal integration is transmuted into cross-linguistic discourse as the narrator reflects in the German medium on her Turkish past. The estranged Turkish idioms produce a magical yet comical effect, as does the semi-literalisation of metaphors such as eyes carrying children or words landing on carpets. According to one critic, the compensatory vision of magical realism is a response to 'an intractable and agonizing historical situation' and to 'experiences of extremity – of random victimization, of powerlessness, of hysteria and panic before unmanageable events'.[23] Özdamar's *Karawanserei* pervasively blends social with magical realism in evoking a protagonist's happy childhood which the narrator knows will founder painfully. The second utopia is an erotic trans-national paradise of multiple cultural interchange, signalled by the heroine's ecstatic floating above the ground in out-of-body self-division reminiscent of stories in *A Thousand and One Nights*. This time the magical is momentary in a text which otherwise mixes social realism with increasingly explicit political protest. Writing of Isabel Allende, one

[22] Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, Cologne 1998, p. 329.

[23] John Burt Foster Jr, 'Magical Realism, Compensatory Vision and Felt History: Classical Realism Transformed in *The White Hotel*', in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (eds), *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Durham/ London 1995, pp. 267–84 (here p. 271).

critic suggests that she employs 'magic realism as a bridge to a history recoverable in the political realm, a history that she will ultimately constitute in her text as distinct from the magical'.[24] This is surely yet another bridge – from the magical to the political – which readers of Özdamar's second novel cross.

[24] P. Gabrielle Foreman, 'Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call', in Zamora and Faris, pp. 285–303 (here p. 286).