What is Turkish-German Studies up against?
Occidentalism and Thigmotactics

DAVID GRAMLING
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Disciplinary boundaries allow counterevidence
to belong to someone else’s story.
(Susan Buck-Morss, «Hegel and Haiti» 822)

Recently, the editors of Türkisch-Deutsche Studien made the quizzically de-lightful decision to title their 2012 yearbook – the volume immediately after the semi-centennial of the 1961 guest-worker accord – Fifty-One Years of Turkish Guest-Worker Migration in Germany. With this title, they offered up a gentle satire of «the anniversary» as a collective stock-taking jubilee. But the title also seemed to be suggesting other implications: perhaps that Turkish-German Studies is itself a living, aging endeavor with an idiosyncratic, uneven, and centrifugal temporality. Perhaps further, it reminded us that the future of this field will be negotiated by an always finite and evolving constellation of scholarly personnel, working around the world in specific and complex institutional contexts.

Self-evident as these facts may be, they are just as formative, load-bearing, and yet easily missed in the scheme of things as an off-year anniversary. At the 2013 German Studies Association convention in Denver, Colorado, for instance – 52 years after the first West German labor agreement with Turkey – the scholarly personnel of Turkish-German studies was comprised of just 19 presenters, from among 900 total talks given at the convention. The majority of these scholars who were working actively on Turkish-German topics were dissertators, post-doctoral fellows, or visiting and adjunct faculty, with a few assistant and associate professors among them. There was thus little continuity with the field’s scholarly leaders from previous decades, though that continuity was interestingly supplemented by the fact that around half of the presenters focused on the most canonical voices of Turkish-German cultural production over the past twenty years: namely Zafer Şenocak, Feri-dun Zaimoglu, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and Fatih Akin, though they did so in new and innovative ways. The remaining half of the presentations followed the «Turkish turn» (Adelson, The Turkish Turn) in a very different direction, critiquing the transfer, exportation, and hybridization of political theory,
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statecraft models, and institutional management between Turkey and Germany from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. This productive divergence in focus and method – with all of its institutional, methodological, and epistemic implications – seems to merit a moment of lateral reflection.

One temporal arc that might help contextualize our research situation in 2014 is the full quarter-century that has now elapsed since Turkish-German inquiry hit the American German Studies scene in a formal way. Back in 1989, the entire practical and symbolic domain of Turkishness in Germany presented frontal counterevidence for even the most heterodox methodologies and quotidian procedures of academic Germanistik. In her introduction to the first special issue devoted to Germany’s minority cultures in 1989 – of which there would be many more – Azade Seyhan described a calcifying epistemic isolation in Germanistik, in the face of the Federal Republic’s vastly diversified social, ethnic, and linguistic landscape. In a corrective spirit, she suggested that Turkish-German inquiry and other «minority discourses in our discipline can lead to increased self-reflexive praxis and critiques of systematic constructions of others» («Introduction» 4). This vision was thus one of «benefits and enrichments to the discipline» by way of necessary and as-yet-unspecifiable recalibrations of method. Arlene Teraoka had also laid groundwork for this transatlantic intervention in her own 1987 piece in Cultural Critique on «guest-worker literature.»

In that 1989 introduction to New German Critique, Seyhan cited Aras Ören, the Turkish-writing, Turkish-German poet and novelist, who asked (in translation):

Dies durchsichtige Schweigen
Ist das Weh der Stille
am Ausgang fast des Jahrhunderts
sind noch ungesprochene Worte? (3)

For transnational writers like Ören, and for Germanists like Seyhan – both variously coming to terms with the epistemic pressure of a nearing century’s end – silence(s) of a particular discursive shape in German thought were both transparent and painful, perhaps more painful because transparent. Accordingly, writers and researchers were eager at that moment to open new lines of thought and imagination, to capacitate methods for critique and figuration yet to be uttered – amid the baffles of disciplinary and ethnonational reproduction.

Given this awareness of the as-yet-unuttered in 1989, Ören was indeed a fascinating pick with whom to enframe an initial Turkish-German intervention into US German Studies as a discipline. Ören was, after all, a fountain of nothing but counterevidence for what Turkish-German studies was about
to become at the beginning of the 1990s: a field that would voluntarily focus on Turkish-German writers, filmmakers, former guest workers and former immigrants explicitly addressing German societal and discursive norms and doing so in the German language. During the pre-unification Kohl years, the Chamisso Prize and the offices of the federal Ausländerbeauftragte had seen to it that literary-cultural production in German was to be the gold standard and official focus of attention for Turkish-German relations. This was the case, despite the fact that Ören, the first recipient of the Chamisso Prize in 1985, had been arguably less interested in critiquing Germany as a cultural entity than in transfiguring Europe as a civic one – and doing so while writing primarily in Turkish for an internationalist audience.¹

In the late 1980s, amid what was by most accounts a progressive, post-ethnic reframing of cultural production around the ‘common language’ of German, interventions in Turkish – and (more importantly) the types of discursive interventions that typically happened in Turkish or in Turkish literary lineages – were increasingly made opaque to this cause. Their relevance for an emerging inquiry into Turkish-German questions became diffuse, their potential addressivity to the European reading public seemed askew, and their performative claims seemed often unmoored among the painful, transparent gaps between national imaginaries. Deniz Gökttürk recounts her own experiences translating avant-garde Turkish literature into German in the early 1990s, particularly the postmodernist Bilge Karasu’s collection *The Garden of Departed Cats* (*Göçmüş kediler bahçesi*, 1979): «Established publishers in Germany did not want to take on my translation of *Garden*, claiming that there was no readership for it, that Turkish authors were writing as if they still lived in the nineteenth century. Such efforts to introduce to Europe writers who imagine the essence of Europe regularly ended in impasse, as we grappled with the challenge of presenting a new image of Turkey via literature and other arts» (131). Gökttürk recalls watching, together with Karasu, the television broadcast of Özdamar’s trailblazing 1991 win of the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for Literature, and wondering aloud with him about the implications of this win for Turkish lines of thought on German territory in the coming decades.

Though Karasu had himself been deeply invested in Eastern-Western and Turkish-German reconfigurations, his texts went either unpublished or uncommented in Germany over the course of the 1990s, in part because he didn’t ring in legibly on German-domestic questions of intercultural dialogue. For his part, Ören’s work had also (almost) always been written in Turkish, though it most often debuted first in German and received next to no readerly acclaim or intellectual attention in Turkey. Ören has thus always
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already been presumed to belong to someone else’s philology – both in Germany and in Turkey.

In a sense, there is good reason for this persistent philological discomfiture toward Ören and his generation in Germany and Turkey alike, beyond the fact that he wrote in the symbolically wayward Turkish-German language of Turkish. Particularly Ören’s early work from the 1970s was rather circumspect about the national or the cultural as an integer of inquiry at all – whether Turkish, German, or otherwise (see Gramling, «The Caravanserai» 60–65). The sphere of influence for his poetics in the 1970s and into the 1980s had been socialist-migrational labor internationalism: that is, local organizing in working-class neighborhoods peopled by guest workers and working-class unionists who often happened to be ethnic Germans with their own history of displacement in the midst and aftermath of Nazism. Their location on German territory was not his, nor their, only primary concern. As with Ören’s contemporary Güney Dal, the integrationist imperatives of the Kohl years were only one among a diverse spectrum of figural investments. Dal and Ören’s readability thus became more and more recalcitrant as the symbolic landscape of the 1990s compressed Turkish-German discourse into various prerequisite oppositions: integrationist politics vs. transnational aesthetics, patriarchal Islam vs. Schwarzerian liberal secularism, miserable parallels vs. pleasurable hybridities, etc.

The result was that Dal, Ören, and Karasu’s work (and that of the others I will discuss below) still now frequently lingers at and beyond the methodological frontiers of Turkish-German studies. They offer today what I consider to be a thigmotactic index for Turkish-German inquiry – pointing out to us the limits of what we are willing to consider relevant on a field of critical play that is itself fundamentally predicated on the crossing of borders. Their work presciently seeks out and tracks the self-limiting negotiations of our field (in a Bourdieusian sense), skirting and tracing the proportions of recognizable relevance. Their writings do so not through a preconceived strategy of resistance or reinscription, but organically: as fruits of a transnational literary vision that could always only muster a secondary interest in the ideal of claiming Germanness – an important historical ideal indeed, as these authors acknowledge, but only one among many aesthetic, cosmopolitan, and social visions.

Ören’s words – cited by Seyhan, and translated into German for an American German Studies journal twenty-five years ago – are an enduring emblem for the predicament of Turkish-German Studies in 2014. They trace not only a «history of contact» (Adelson, «Touching Tales») or a «negative hermeneutics» (Şenocak) of Turkish Germany, but indeed pursue those non-places of discourse whose relevance to national philology is opaque and unprogram-
matic, spaces where no charismatic moment of ‘cultural’ contact is even pos-
tible. Ören’s translated questions from the Turkish – about transparent silenc-
es, and about words that are still yet to be uttered – are thus incumbent upon the
ensuing second quarter-century of our research field as well.2

Since the 1980s, the scholarly enterprise of Turkish-German Studies has
tended to nourish some typical rhetorical forms and concerns: interaction, in-
terculturality, dialogue, understanding, contact, misunderstanding, aesthetic
sovereignty, mutual discovery, hybridity, and «dismantling stereotypes» –
though differently so in German intercultural Germanistik than in US Ger-
man Studies. Scholars have worked through and around these metanarratives
on both sides of the Atlantic by means of divergent methodologies shaping
how the field recognizes evidence, counterevidence, relevance, and oblique-
ness vis-a-vis those metanarratives.

Consider for example Michael Hofmann and Inge Pohlmeier’s 2013 delin-
eation of Turkish-German literature, as «literature in the German language
whose intercultural constellations are primarily and decidedly geared toward
the overcoming of cliché images of Germanness or of Turkishness. The his-
tory of German-Turkish literature begins with the labor agreement [of 1961]»
(8, translation mine). Hofmann narrows the aperture further in his 2013 au-
thoritative monograph, Deutsch-türkische Literaturwissenschaft, as follows:
«For an ambitious reading public and for literary studies, Islamically oriented
authors who wish to undo the Europeanization and Westernization of Tur-
key by returning to their supposed roots – these authors are not of interest»
(161, translation mine). Taking this composite gloss at face value, it seems that
a potential text for Turkish-German study has a fair bit of qualifying labor to
do indeed. It has to dismantle stereotypes, to deal explicitly with Germany
and Turkey per se while it does so, to avoid sympathy with political Islam and
reactionary vernaculars, and it cannot tread upon the projects of European-
izing and Westernizing Turkey. This all should be done in German, though
Hofmann does make room elsewhere for exceptions.

Clearly, Hofmann has done a great deal to promote interaction, pro-
gramming, and exchange between German and Turkish institutions, and the ef-
teffects of his and his collaborators’ endeavors are having a positive transatlantic
impact. Yet the kind of relevancy criteria set out above seem to unnecessarily
constrain the complex epistemology that has always nurtured Turkish-Ger-
man writing and thought. The work of Ören, Özdamar, and Dal – and also
Tunç Okan, Nazım Hikmet, Sabahattin Ali, Ahmet Haşim, Ahmet Rasim,
Bilge Karasu, Ahmet Mitat Efendi, and others before them – has been engaged
in much more aesthetically and functionally ambivalent positional endeavors
around Turkish-German lines of thought, many of which do indeed compli-
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cate the cohesion and definability of the field. This immutable fact leads me to believe that we have come to a moment in the arc of scholarly inquiry that requires an unmooring from such delineations of relevancy and cohesion, toward a renewed methodological pursuit of what Ören sought twenty-five years ago in the «as-yet-unuttered.»

Almost a decade ago on the other side of the Atlantic, the preeminent Germanist and translator Leslie A. Adelson published a watershed monograph entitled *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (2005), which brought Turkish-German Studies to a new and vigorous level of theoretical speculation. With her book, Adelson joined a small group of major monographers on the topic: including Kader Konuk with *Identitäten im Prozeß* (2001), Azade Seyhan with *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001), and then, after the publication of Adelson’s book, Tom Cheeseman and his *Novels of Turkish Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (2007), and Venkat Mani with *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* (2007). The evolution in those titles is itself quite telling – the syntax of which is a turn away from identities and nations, as contested analytical containers, toward the claims and openings of cosmopolitanism. With her book on *The Turkish Turn*, Adelson used the phrase «literature of Turkish migration» to consider the iconic position of «the Turk» in German literature from the fifteenth century onward: an unstable, overdetermined icon that itself posed for Adelson a «riddle of referentiality» (17). Accordingly, she proposed a critical «reconfiguration of the German national archive» (12, emphasis mine).

Adelson’s critical reorientation toward the German national archive was indeed a timely, majorizing intervention poised to relieve Turkish-German authors and scholars of the «optical illusions,» «cultural fables,» and autoethnographic responsibilities routinely ascribed to, and expected of, them. This shift in focus however came with a downside, giving implicit methodological sanction for future scholarship pursuing «a Turkish turn» in German Studies to elide those aspects of the *Turkish* national archive, the *Ottoman* imperial archive, or indeed the transnational materials that were always too precarious to make it into an archive of any sort – even though these materials might tell counterstories crucial for «a new critical grammar of migration» in German-Turkish studies.

Consider in this adverse archival context the following scene, in which a Turkish author walks into a German library:

It was a modern and anonymous building. Inside were the types you always find in such libraries: housewives, old people with time to kill, unemployed men, one or two Turks and Arabs, students giggling over their homework assignments, and all
other manner of stalwarts from the ranks of the obese, the lame, the insane, and the mentally handicapped. One drooling young man raised his head from his picture book to stick out his tongue at me. (Pamuk 202)

Just hours before his death, the poet-hero of Orhan Pamuk’s 2002 novel *Snow*, a resident of one of Western Europe’s premier publishing and finance capitals Frankfurt am Main, made his daily visit to this dystopic interior space: the city’s Central Library. For over a decade, Ka (short for Kerim Alakuşoğlu) had been living as a political exile a few blocks away on Goethestrasse, supplementing his government asylum stipend with honoraria from poetry readings before local Turkish audiences. On most days he sat in this library reading Auden, Coleridge, and Browning. One evening, he left the library as usual, stopped by a green grocer on a side street off Kaiserstrasse, and was shot in the back three times. Ka’s body was found on the wet pavement beneath a pink neon K sign. As the only «witness» to his death, this illuminated K pulses above the ill-fated transnational author «in bright pink solitary splendor» (253).

In Pamuk’s novel, Ka spends twelve years living in political exile in Frankfurt am Main – where he prophylactically refuses to learn German, because he worries about the negative effect of the German language on his soul. That is of course a very different way of speaking about such choices than framing them as choices of integration/nonintegration into a given society or supranational entity like Europe. In the lobby of this anonymous library, the Frankfurt Stadtbücherei – which I take to be a reconstruction of Kafka’s Castle of Graf Westwest (Gramling, «Pamuk’s Dis-Orient») – a drooling young man sticks out his tongue at Ka, as if to instinctively expel the intruding author from the space. Indeed, the word *dil* in Turkish can be translated either as *tongue* or *language.*

As we see from this moment of dystopian «contact,» Germany indeed plays a crucial figural role in Pamuk’s novel, but not as a space of aspirational negotiation, reconciliation, or understanding with the West, but rather as a space of Turkish settlement, exile, influence, and creativity – one that is somehow noncoterritorial and noncontemporary with the «Germany» presumed in, say, intercultural Germanistik. Pamuk’s Germany is a place where Turks, Kurds, and Turkish-Germans are in meaningful and complex pursuit of livelihoods that are rather oblique to, or agnostically nonaffirmative toward, Westernness, Germanness, integration, or Hofmann and Pohlmeier’s definition of Turkish-German literature.

What uncanny and disorienting moment in a «history of contact,» or perhaps a thigmotactic moment of non-contact, might Pamuk’s novel offer Turkish-German studies at the outset of the twenty-first century? Ka’s limin-
al, abjected position in the lobby of the German archive is indeed an indexical legacy not only of the exclusion of modern Turkish-language literature from Turkish-German studies, but also of the robust and wily tradition of Turkish Occidentalist since the mid-nineteenth century. Occidentalist figularity is indeed a widespread and vigorous facet at large throughout Turkish – and Turkish-German – literary modernity. However, it seems that these Occidentalist moves and dispositions have often been and continue to be blended out of the presumptive categories of analysis in Turkish-German studies. This is the case because Occidentalist doesn’t serve well as a resource for sociopolitical discourses that aspire first and foremost toward reconciliatory interaction through mutual, intercultural dialogue.

Among the Turkish and Turkish-German authors I know of who engage in modernist literary Occidentalist with a particular focus on Germany are Zafer Şenocak (particularly in his newer Turkish-language novels), Murathan Mungan, Orhan Pamuk, Sabahattin Ali, Aras Ören, Güney Dal, Zülfü Livaneli, Nâzım Hikmet, Ahmet Haşim, Ahmet Mitat Efendi, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, and Bilge Karasu. These authors, however, are still more or less waiting in the lobby of German Turkish studies with Pamuk’s Ka – looking at the drooling man and his (dis)interpellating tongue. In some cases, Pamuk’s *Snow* among them, Turkish transnational literary modernity uses the West, Europe, and Germany as a symbolic space for reconfiguring or reconstructing domestic political questions that are otherwise unstageable in the Turkish context. Germany becomes a proxy mise-en-scène of sorts, or a quizzically modernizing space to be observed and refigured dispassionately and without commitment. This kind of Occidentalist is closer to James Carrier’s 1995 coinage than to Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit’s sense of it in 2004, in that its figural stance is characterized by distance, aestheticization, and agnosticism, rather than of enmity and anti-Western sentiment. Turkish transnational Occidentalist is a tradition of viewing, observing, cruising, or assessing the West from a variously appropriative and noncommittal functional stance – that of the flaneur, or the tourist, or the *amateur*-skeptic.

To my mind, Occidentalist is not a mere reversal of Orientalism, by which the West/Europe becomes the unchangeable static object knowable only to Eastern observers. Nor is Occidentalist, as Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit claimed in their 2004 book, «the dehumanizing picture of the West as painted by its enemies» (5). What Buruma and Margalit refer to, somewhat sensationally, as the «venomous brew of Occidentalist» crowds out a much more modest and matter-of-fact tradition, more akin to the Arabic word *(al)إِلْيَسْتَغْرَابُ (الاستغراب)* which means broadly «moving to, or existing, in the West.» The literary Occident of Turkish transnational modernity is some-
thing similarly matter-of-fact and ambiguously motivated: it is a symbolic space loosely coextensive with European territorial and intellectual history, a space which houses many diffuse and often conflicting functions, dispositions, counter-histories, romances, fantasies, experiments of thought and figure. Texts with a literary occident are penned by authors who have necessarily gone through a process of appropriating Westernness through education or autodidactism rather than by inheritance, and the primary feature of such occidentalist texts is that the Western symbolic space serves as a resource to explore questions that have an uneven or noncommittal relationship to the paradigms and concerns of their contemporaneous Western Europeans – by which I mean Western Europeans by birth or inheritance.

These perspectives are as much a constitutive feature of Turkish-German literature as anything deliberately designed to dismantle or undermine stereotypes, or to mitigate misunderstandings in an ongoing intercultural dialogue. Kristin Dickinson, for instance, has researched the translations of Goethe’s Leiden des jungen Werthers into Ottoman by Ahmet Rasim and a group of his contemporaries between 1886 and 1895 («Recontextualizing Late Ottoman Translations»). Dickinson’s analyses of these translations suggest that this collaboration in the post-Tanzimat period of Ottoman letters was something much more than a cultural importation or Westernization effort. Rasim and his colleagues rewrote and amended the Werther texts, domesticating and embellishing them, not in order to provide an intercultural window on Germany, but according to their own whims as universalist poets and aesthetes.

Around this time the Ottoman Orientalist Ahmet Mithat Efendi, one of several Ottoman Orientalists on their way to an Orientalists’ convention in Poland in 1891, wrote his travelogue Berlin’de üç gün (Three Days in Berlin) in which he surveyed the modernizing city in much the same terms as other European Orientalists were simultaneously describing Istanbul. This tradition continued into the twentieth century, with travelogues by, for instance, the major Turkish poet Ahmet Haşim, who wrote his Frankfurt Seyahatnamesi (Frankfurt Travelogue) on the occasion of a medical consultation he sought in Germany in the early 1930s.

Indeed, when we look at all of the literary and proto-literary work linking Germany and Turkey, it is a vast field with little philological or disciplinary order to it. It is very much conditioned by the salutary neglect and opacity typical of confounded frontiers. Only a few comparatists are taking responsibility for it (among them of course Nergis Ertürk, Azade Seyhan, Kader Konuk, and Kristin Dickinson), and also only a few scholars in Middle East Studies, although there is more and more interesting work being done on this
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arena in Turkey and in Turkish – for instance by Selçuk Ünlü (2005), Deniz Göktürk (2014), and Ali Osman Öztürk (2000), among others. Nonetheless, a general erasure out of the critical Occidentalism of Turkish and Turkish-German modernity has been shaping scholarship since the early 1990s at the latest. Its persistent elision in scholarly and public attention has been primarily structural, arbitrating what types of texts get predictably translated, commented, and then adopted into curricula – and under what aegis, book series, discipline, pedagogical and scholarly conventions, or university department these texts and traditions might be presumptively housed.

A fascinating further case of Turkish modernist Occidentalism on German territory is Sabahattin Ali’s novel *Kürk Mantolu Madonna*, or *The Madonna in the Fur Coat*. Written in 1943, it is a stirring love tale about a young wayward student from the city of Havran, whose businessman father sends him to Weimar-era Berlin to build character and learn about the soap trade. As any good study abroad student would do, Raif spends his days sleeping and his evenings milling about in night clubs and galleries, and eventually falls in love with a Czech-German Jewish painter named Maria Puder. She schools him in the ways of German feminism and the classicist conservative strain of *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting. On their urban sojourns together Raif encounters all the famed libertine features of Schöneberg:

In front of a big store they call Ka De We, young men with their red boots and faces painted like women leered at the people on the street with beckoning eyes. […] The undampened exuberance of the post-war years was on display in all its nakedness. The state of the young men – their frail bodies, their bony faces, and eyes shining as if they had survived a brush with cholera – and the young girls, who thought the best way to revolt against the unjust and illogical constraints of society was to wantonly unbridle their sexual desires. (Translation by Ilker Hepkaner and myself, unpublished.)

In part, the novel is of course an intertextual refiguration of Sacher Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* (1870) and a cultural study of urban Germany in the age of hyperinflation. Yet Kristin Dickinson («Reading the Turkish Republic») and Ilker Hepkaner («Who is the Woman in Furs?») argue that the novel is primarily a palimpsestic vehicle for exploring the political hubris of the early Republic of Turkey, and particularly its major intellectuals’ lockstep commitment to a particular form of social realism that was geared towards banishing Ottoman belletristic conventions from the new Republican literary scene. Against this backdrop, moving the show to Germany allowed the novelist Sabahattin Ali to stage confrontations with his own modernist-Westernizing contemporaries and colleagues in Turkey by way of the proxy symbology and social landscape of Weimar Berlin. This was on one level a pragmatic case
of ‘hiding one’s valuables in one’s neighbor’s house,’ since Ali had been constantly in and out of prison for his literary-political transgressions in this period, and was eventually assassinated without his political critique of social realism ever finding much resonance. (Indeed, his other novels more or less conformed to the social realist genres of which the Berlin-based *The Madonna in the Fur Coat* was a not-so-veiled critique.)

Ali’s functionalization of Berlin for Turkish aesthetic and political purposes in the first half of the twentieth century leads us quite provocatively to the core of what I consider to be a thigmotactic method for Turkish-German thought – i.e., toward the persistent ill-fit between literary production itself and the relevancy criteria and principles of discursive cohesion poised to receive that production under the episteme of (intercultural) national philology. Indeed, this seems to be a problematic that Ali himself anticipates in *Madonna*.

In the novel, after several years in Berlin, the hero Raif is eventually compelled to return home to Turkey, where he lives out his years as a downtrodden translator at an Ankara bank, where the frame narrator of the novel shares an office with him. One day at the office, Raif is reading over his own journal from his days in Berlin, and the narrator catches him in the act. The narrator asks: «What’s that Mr. Raif?» It felt like I had caught him in a moment of delinquency, since he blushed and stuttered «Nothing … Just a novel in German!» and closed the drawer right away. Still, no one at the office thought he could speak a foreign language. Maybe they were right, because his manner and comportment never signaled that he could speak any language at all. (Translation by Ilker Hepkaner and myself, unpublished.)

This moment of «delinquency» that Raif is caught in is, as I understand it, a kind of smoke signal for literary history, indexing the true nature of Ali’s transnational misdemeanor in a compulsorily national age. Ali seems all but oracular about the fate of his «German novel,» and he has his meek and exhausted hero Raif beg the narrator on his deathbed to burn the manuscript and never to read it. This icon of early Turkish Republican literature knows that this novel of his, one of his three, will fall on deaf ears precisely because of its wayward behavior toward the philological and political imperatives of his day. It is too German, too disinterested in promoting Turkish national coherence and distinction, too unsteady a building block upon which to found Turkish national literature in the wake of empire. And Ali’s hunch was correct. While his other works became centerpieces of an emerging Turkish literary canon, the *Madonna* novel descended into functionless obscurity after its publication in 1943 and only began to resurface in the late 1990s. It was translated into German in 2008 by Ute Birgi, amid a marked upswing in Turkish translating into German since 2000.
In lieu of a conclusion, I’d like to reflect on a recent call for papers that circulated online for an upcoming German Studies conference. One of the qualifying criteria for submitting a proposal was framed as follows: «Wünschenswert, aber nicht verpflichtend, ist die Bezugnahme auf Gegenwartsliteratur, die in irgendeiner Weise demjenigen verbunden ist, was wir «deutsche Sprache» zu nennen gewohnt sind.» This is indeed a fascinating gesture – a welcome sign to anyone working in the far-flung domains of German Studies to recalibrate how they account for their linguistic relationship to the discipline. And yet it worries me a bit. The rhetorical basis for this call for papers is a shift from an ethnonational conception of disciplinary responsibility to a linguistic one. Where we used to see calls for «German literature,» we now issue calls for «German-language literature.» This shift, which took place first around twenty-five years ago, was of course progressive because panethnic or de-ethnicized (Gramling, «The New Cosmopolitan Monolingualism»). However, the opportunity costs for making that substitution in our scholarly work and disciplinary conventions are slowly making themselves visible. While ethnonational parameters for research and programming circa 1989 had taken no position on language as such, the category «German-language literature» causes an immediate elision, one that goes unremarked because of its apparently progressive cultural politics. We do not then notice what has gone missing or disinvented, including the Turkish transnational modernist tradition dwelling on German territory since the nineteenth century if not before.

Such multilingual, translingual, code-switching, and otherly-languaged meanings – though made on German territory, through German institutions, or in complex contact with the same – are still, and sometimes increasingly, construed as too «far afield,» as belonging to «someone else’s story» (Buck-Morss 822). But it is often there – in the other-languaged satellite spheres of German and Turkish–German Studies – that we are to find our most compelling counterevidence, which in turn challenges the validity of many of our discursive formations around transnational topics, and the ways we tend to debate them. Indeed, as much as we may seek recourse to «intercultural Germanistik,» many of our objects of study seem to be calling for an interlingual Germanistik instead. As Turkish–German Studies now settles into a new period of permanence and recognition within German Studies and Germanistik, it is precisely the ill-fitting, excitable counterevidence on the borders of our discursive vision that can help nourish more capacious methods for the future, in keeping with Seyhan and Ören’s call for the «as-yet-unuttered» twenty-five years ago.
Notes

1 See for instance Ören’s decisive focus on Europe in his Chamisso Prize acceptance speech in 1985 (Göktürk et al. 391).

2 Chicana Studies has struggled with and against similar dynamics. Essayist and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa increasingly found herself over the 1990s to be the lightening rod for similar critiques as those that often accrue around many early voices in Turkish-German cultural production. Debra Castillo summarized Anzaldúa’s predicament of positional utterance and reception as follows:

[Anzaldúa’s] most acute critics are often those who know her best and who come from the same South Texas background. She is too brash, too essentialist, not quite rigorous, not theoretical enough; her thinking, while grounded in her personal experience as a Chicana lesbian feminist from the Southwest of the United States, is nevertheless too abstract – it is, as Pablo Vila and others have pointed out, too utopian for a concrete reality that has always been informed more by border enforcers than border crossers. Mexican scholar María-Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba comments that Anzaldúa’s transnational projections are likewise too limited and constrained by an exclusively United States understanding of the Mexican-American border region and its inhabitants, strangely omitting any concrete reference to Mexican scholars or the Mexican side of the border despite continually evoking its metaphoric presence. (261).

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