Toward a Multiculturalism for the 21st Century: German and Scandinavian Literary Perspectives, 1990-2005

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Elisabeth Helena Karlsson

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Poul Houe
Arlene A. Teraoka

September 2008

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the following individuals and institutions for support and assistance:

- My advisors, Arlene Teraoka and Poul Houe, whom I admire more than they know, and who always challenged me to think for myself and trust my own voice.
- Monika Zagar and Ingeborg Kongslien for showing interest as well as encouragement.
- Ruth-Ellen Joeres, for support and words of encouragement.
- Kaaren Grimstad, for laughter in the mailroom, tea and friendship.
- Charlotte Melin, for guidance in teaching and generous support.
- Arsena Ianeva-Lockney, for friendship.
- The department of German, Scandinavian and Dutch for several fellowships and TA-ships that helped me progress.
- Gerhard Weiss for the fellowship in his name.
- All my students of Swedish and German at the University of Minnesota for inspiring me to be a good teacher.
- The wonderful students and staff at the American-Swedish Institute, Minneapolis, for loving the Swedish language and culture and for reminding me that learning is a life long project.
- My dissertation group, Alison Guenther-Pal, Monika Moyrer, Nicole Grewling and Brechtje Beuker, for coming together in the spirit of cooperation and generosity. *Danke Schön!*
- Roland Thorstensson at Gustavus Adolphus College for wisdom, kindness and humor.
- Philip Bryant at Gustavus Adolphus for insight into poetry and how to translate poetry.
- Bernard Reuter for correcting my German.
- My mother and father in Sweden, Lisa and Allan Karlsson, for planting the seeds of independence and curiosity, for keeping me grounded and for always loving me unconditionally and being interested in what I do.
- The rest of my family in Sweden, Torbjörn and Torgny and their families; Alva and Åke; for always been supportive. *Jag saknar er!*
- Benjamin Fink, for intelligent feedback and a sharp editor's eye.
- Last, but not least, I want to thank my *sambo* Jairo Espinosa for generosity, optimism and love. *Te quiero mucho.*

Till
Far och Mor
Allan and Lisa

Abstract

This dissertation is a reading of literary texts from 1990-2005 by four authors of immigrant extraction in Germany and Scandinavia. I ask how these authors engage in both a reality of multiculturalism and a discourse of multiculturalism. The project is organized around the tension in these texts between negative experiences of ethnic and global disadvantage and positive representations of minority identity and cultural mixture. I argue that the four writers - Feridun Zaimoglu (Germany), Bertrand Besigye (Norway), Jonas Hassen Khemiri (Sweden) and Emine Sevgi Özdamar (Germany) – combine in their texts a serious critique of the dominant culture with a playful, critical, often provocative outlook on identity. In light of recent theoretical critiques of the terms "multiculturalism" and "minority", I defend the value of minority perspectives and sensibilities to contemporary German and Scandinavian society, identity and culture.

I start my discussion with an analysis of the *Kanak* identities in two of the Turkish-German Feridun Zaimoglu's texts. I discuss how Zaimoglu's appropriation of the derogatory word for foreigner in Germany serves a critique of a dominant German culture reluctant to embrace its new ethnic minorities. Then I analyze the Ugandan-Norwegian Bertrand Besigye's prose poetry. I show how cultural and racial difference can be used playfully to insert difference into a national identity too narrowly and homogenously defined. In Jonas Hassen Khemiri's texts, I discuss how Khemiri criticizes the ethnic definitions assigned to immigrants by the Swedish majority culture and how he pushes for a more open, cosmopolitan national identity. Engaging with the Turkish-German Emine Sevgi Özdamar's texts, lastly, I examine how the author's conciliatory and humorous attitude toward the reality of multiculturalism potentially fosters cross-cultural identification and more open and generous identities. In the end, I show that a multiculturalism worth defending is one that acknowledges persisting ethnic and racial inequalities and prejudices while it at the same time expands the horizons of our cultural, national and individual identities.

Toward A Multiculturalism for the 21st Century:
German and Scandinavian Literary Perspectives, 1990-2005

Elisabeth Helena Karlsson

INTRODUCTION

The linguistic manifestation of our mobility is called Kanaksprak, that is the Babylonian gibberish that this country has really been waiting for from an extremely loud and showy, extremely offended generation. [1]

- Feridun Zaimoglu

Outside Norway, to the south in Europe, the exaggerated, the theatrical, the expressive, is not something inferior. […] Maybe […] we fill that need for poets who have something to say, who dare to use feelings and colors. We are not afraid of the banal or the high-strung.[2]

- Bertrand Besigye

We have Tunisian fathers and Swedish-Danish mothers and we are neither entirely Swedish nor entirely Arabic but something different […] a new collective without boundaries, without history, a creolized community where everything is mixed and hybridized. We are the reminder that their days are numbered. [3]

- Jonas Hassen Khemiri

I find it very beautiful,…when I notice…because I notice, that when you speak to people from your heart, regardless of what nationality you are, how much they open up. An old, lonely woman on the street in Germany, for instance, when I speak with her and notice how she opens up. That is, to bring out the childlike in people, to have a voice, without thinking about what you are. […] Yes, to see people without judging them. [4]

- Emine Sevgi Özdamar

---

[1] "Die sprachliche Manifestation unserer Mobilmachung heißt Kanak Spray, das ist das babylonische Kauderwelsch einer unbedingt auffälligen, unbedingt angestoßenen Generation, auf die dieses Land wirklich gewartet hat" (Zaimoglu, *Kopf und Kragen* 15). [All translations are done by myself if not otherwise indicated. I have *not* attempted a translation of slang or ethno-lects but attempted to translate into standard English].

[2] "Utenfor Norge, sørover i Europa, er ikke det overdrevne, det teatrale, det ekspressive noe mindreverdig. [...] Kanskje […] fyller vi et savn etter poeter som har noe å si, som våger å bruke følelser og farver. Vi er ikke redd det banale og det høyspente" (qtd. in Levin, "Å dikte det er å leve" 18).

[3] "Vi har tunisiska pappor och svenskdanska mammor och vi är varken helt *suedie* eller helt *arabis* [my italics] utan något helt annat […] ett nytt kollektiv som saknar gränser, som saknar historia, en kreoliserad krets där allt är blandat och mixat och hybridiserat. Vi är påminnelsen om att deras tid är räknad" (Khemiri, *Montecore* 292).

[4] "Ich finde es sehr schön,… wenn ich merke…, weil ich merke, wenn man mit Menschen so richtig aus dem Herz redet, egal welcher Nationalität, wie sehr sie sich auch aufmachen. Eine alte, einsame Frau auf der Straße in Deutschland z.B., wenn ich mit ihr rede und feststelle, wie sie sich aufmacht. Das heißt, die Kindlichkeit aus den Menschen herausholen, die Stimme haben, ohne darüber nachzudenken, was man ist. [..] Ja, die Menschen zu sehen, ohne sie zu beurteilen" (qtd. in Wierschke 263).

Multicultural Transformations

During the past 60 years, the ethnic composition of Germany and the Scandinavian countries has undergone a massive shift. What were not long ago largely homogenous populations with small minority and immigrant subcultures have, quite quickly, become truly multi-ethnic and multicultural populations. Even Edward Said mentions Stockholm and Berlin in the context of a contemporary mass migration, the result of poverty, colonialism, decolonization, political revolution, famine, and ethnic cleansing:

> In a place like New York, but surely also in other Western metropoles like London, Paris, Stockholm, and Berlin, all these things are reflected immediately in the changes that transform neighborhoods, professions, cultural production… […] Exiles, émigrés, refugees and expatriates uprooted from their lands must make do in new surroundings, and the creativity as well as the sadness that can be seen in what they do is one of the experiences that has still to find its chroniclers. (*Reflections on Exile* xiv)

Although neither immigration nor multiculturalism should be understood as new phenomena to our age or to the northern European nations, it is not an exaggeration to say that Germany and Scandinavia are currently undergoing significant identity transformations. By the turn of the third millennium, European nations have established that multiculturalism and ethnic diversity are definite social facts that will impact the future nation in significant ways. One contradiction at the heart of multicultural Europe is that since the 1990s, the interest in multiculturalism, diversity and minority experiences as sources of renewal, transformation and even truth coincides with a renewed concern with the strengthening of national identity.

In light of the deadly ethnic conflicts plaguing many parts of the world, the northern European democracies – to which some of the victims of such conflicts have fled – may appear as havens of democracy and social justice. In statistical tables comparing material wealth and quality of life among countries in Europe, and around the globe, these northern European nations are often found at the top. Their highly developed welfare systems have been successful at eliminating poverty, and their governments have been critical of the major colonial powers as well as of American imperialism.[5] Although unequally generous in their reception of refugees (Germany and Sweden have accepted the largest number), they have all been relatively generous in their development assistance to third-world countries. Generally, their populations are educated and inclined toward liberal political views.

Despite this favorable image of Germany and Scandinavia, until recently, multiculturalism and ethnic diversity were not defining features of these democracies: in popular perception, if not always in statistical reality, they were (many believe they still are) considered ethnically, religiously and linguistically homogenous. A traditional reluctance by the dominant culture to embrace the foreign combined with the challenges of recent immigration explain an increasing anxiety about the future of national identity and national culture. Recent discussions of *Leitkultur* (in Germany) and *svenskhet* (in Sweden), for instance, evidence that the multicultural society has prompted a renewed desire to define national identity.[6] Michael McEachtrane and Louis Faye, who have been

[5] For example, during the Iraq war, Scandinavia and Germany have received tens of thousands of refugees from Iraq. In 2006 alone, over 9,000 Iraqis sought asylum in Sweden. The number was thought to double in 2007.

[6] In Germany, the term *Leitkultur* (Leading or Dominant Culture) was introduced in 2001 into the political discourse. The idea suggests that there is a clearly identifiable continuum of German cultural values and

actively engaged in promoting multiculturalism in Sweden, point to the paradox of the open yet closed western democracy in a book titled *Sverige och de Andra* (Sweden and the Others)(2001). Since the Second World War, they write, Sweden has defined itself as an anti-imperialist and solidaristic nation. Yet, it is increasingly obvious that global solidarity does not automatically imply an everyday culture open to immigrants. One of the obstacles for immigrants and their children in Sweden, they claim, is that Swedishness is still largely ethnically defined: to be "Swedish" is not only to be European, modern, and secular, but also to be "white" (9). The majority of Germans and Scandinavians can still regard their people as tied together by cultural and blood ties.

From an American perspective developed from a longer history of ethnic and cultural diversity, Arlene Teraoka writes, "multiculturalism […] represents only the latest consequence of a global revolution in the postwar period that seeks to dismantle Eurocentrist hegemony in all areas of life" ("Multiculturalism and the Study of German Literature" 65). Literature by non-white minorities in the US, often referred to within English departments as "multicultural literature," has long been viewed as a source of insight into the rich dynamics of US society as well as into power structures that sustain inequality. This literature has thus prompted a differential view of American national culture at the same time as it has unveiled the ethnic inequalities in American society. In similar ways do immigrant and minority writers in Germany and Scandinavia contribute to a richer national literature and a more truthful and critical picture of their respective

---

that foreigners who live in Germany should be "led" by these values in their integration into German society; see Stefan Manz, "Constructing a Normative National Identity". In the book "Försvenskningen av Sverige," the Swedish ethnologists Ehn, Frykman and Löfgren similarly claim that the increasing interest for Swedish tradition in the 1990s as well as a renewed attention to "Swedishness" and "our way of doing things" are directly related to Sweden becoming more plural and heterogenous (Ehn, Frykman, Löfgren 1993).

societies. Moreover, it is my presumption that ethnic minority views, experiences and sensibilities are greatly underrepresented in German and Scandinavian literary discourses, and that these views, experiences and sensibilities are important for a fairer, richer and more nuanced understanding of German and Scandinavian identity today. In contrast, the increasing theoretical critique of both minority discourse and multiculturalism signals a development away from the healthy dream of a socially just and culturally- and ethnically- plural society.

Two theorists who have influenced this critical stance toward multiculturalism are Slavoj Zizek and Stanley Fish. Zizek has argued that tolerance is a condescending term that unavoidably reproduces the hierarchy between those who tolerate (the majority) and those who are tolerated (the minority). He writes, for instance, that "multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' – it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position" ("Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" 44). Fish has similarly criticized both "strong" and "weak" forms of multiculturalism, claiming that the first are divisive and the second superficial and that neither can come to terms with deep-seated hatred ("Boutique Multiculturalism, or, Why Liberals are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech").

Several academics in Scandinavia and Germany have taken up this type of criticism. It has become legitimate to blame multicultural policy and "multicultural thinking" for having segregated immigrants in Europe. The Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan, for instance, presents an example of a dismissal of multiculturalism. In her

book *Generous Betrayal* (2002), she criticizes the multicultural policies of the Scandinavian welfare state, in particular that of Norway. Wikan argues that the generous benefits granted to immigrants by the Norwegian government risk sustaining an ethnic identity politics that subverts human rights, especially for women and children. In her book, she shows through numerous testimonies by women of Muslim background how this weaker group of immigrants in Norway remains unassimilated. She blames this failure, in turn, on an excessive Norwegian "multicultural" respect for the integrity of other cultures.

The Swedish anthropologist Aje Carlbom comes to a similar conclusion in his dissertation *The Imagined Versus the Real Other* (2003). This book, an anthropological study of the multicultural suburb Rosengård in Malmö, Sweden, argues that multiculturalism equals segregation. The author criticizes it as an "ideology" that hinders integration. It encourages immigrants' cultural difference while ignoring many other social factors in immigrants' lives. Carlbom also attacks a "political correctness," which, according to him, silences people's concern with Islamism and other conservative traditions cultivated in immigrant communities.

Like many critics of multiculturalism, Wikan and Carlbom can be commended for recognizing segregation as a serious problem. Their respective work is also a result of their personal encounters and interviews with many individual immigrants, whose daily lives are marked by unemployment and various forms of discrimination. By seeming to equate multiculturalism with conservative traditions and segregation, however, these writers can easily be interpreted as "anti-immigrant" and as exacerbating prejudice against already-targeted groups. Wikan's bias is especially troubling; in the introduction

to her book, she portrays herself as a benevolent academic who exercises her moral duty to "ordinary people." Wikan equates the immigrant population to "the ordinary run of people, who are not particularly clever or interesting… not highly educated, not successful or destined for success, in fact, nothing special" (19). By indirectly suggesting that immigrants need to leave their communities and their "archaic" cultures and "become" better Norwegians or Swedes, Wikan and Carlbom appear considerably biased against immigrants and their cultures. In many respects, these writers therefore risk perpetuating the "othering" they claim to criticize.

Another, more self-reflexive contribution to the debate is Magnus Dahlstedt and Ingemar Lindahl's book, unambiguously entitled *Det slutna folkhemmet: Om etniska klyftor och blågul självbild* (The closed people's home: About ethnic hierarchies and blue-yellow self-perception) (2002). In contrast to Wikan and Carlbom, these authors are interested in how the image of Sweden as a stronghold of tolerance, solidarity and democracy is sustained by public discussions of honor killings, Islamism and immigrant criminality. While Wikan and Carlbom blame policies of multiculturalism for a growing ethnic segregation, Dahlstedt and Lindahl understand segregation as a result of the system's discrimination against ethnic minorities. While Wikan and Carlbom call for a defense of liberal democratic values against immigrants' conservativism, Dahlstedt and Lindahl view the outsidership of immigrants in the context of a larger Western political and cultural dominance in the world. The literary texts that I have engaged in this dissertation suggest that both these perspectives on the multicultural European nation are valid – one emphasizing the democratic values of a Western democracy, the other emphasizing how closed this democracy is toward many of its new inhabitants. Since the

former perspective dominates public opinion about multiculturalism in Germany and Scandinavia, it is the latter perspective that needs to acquire greater legitimacy.

Multiculturalism in Literature

In this dissertation, I discuss four authors of immigrant extraction and their literary texts published between 1990 and 2005. I show that ethnic minority authors and their literature play a powerful, important and interesting role in the debate about how, exactly, multiculturalism affects German and Scandinavian society, culture and identity. I define these authors as ethnic minority authors even if they do not view themselves as representatives for a specific ethnic group. Neither are they necessarily particularly happy about being grouped in the same category. However, I argue that these writers of foreign background thematize ethnic minority experiences that are crucial for any understanding of the larger transformation of national identity mentioned above. These experiences include the negative realities of ethnic marginalization and racism, but also more positive ones such as multiculturality and multilingualism. The main question that has guided me--through my investigation of immigrant and minority voices in general, and in this dissertation in particular--is what specific challenges and enriching perspectives writers of immigrant extraction in Germany and Scandinavia pose to the dominant culture around the third Millennium.

The four quotes on the first page point to the four subjective perspectives that structure the respective chapters: the rebellious *Kanak* (Feridun Zaimoglu - Germany), the cultural and racial outsider (Bertrand Besigye - Norway), the ethnically and culturally mixed (Jonas Hassen Khemiri - Sweden), and the loving and playful migrant (Emine

Sevgi Özdamar - Germany). Despite these writers' various ethnicities, genders, and literary styles, they have in common their positions as "ethnic", "racial" or "cultural" others in Germany and Scandinavia.[7] Moreover, the status of these authors as not-quite German or Scandinavian is central to the themes of their texts. The writers were chosen on the basis of their visibility as ethnic minority writers who claim the national literary scene and use their work as an instrument of social critique. These writers spent most or all of their adult life in Europe. They are at least bi-lingual and they are noticeably self-reflexive and humorous about identity. They take the position of both insiders and outsiders to their respective national culture; for instance, they playfully infuse their texts linguistically with various "differences" that reflect their specific multicultural identities at the same time as they challenge any strict divide between majority and minority. In public discussion, they have been described as front figures or symbols of the "new" multicultural Germany or Scandinavia.[8]

I am primarily interested in the uniqueness with which each writer engages with both the discourse and the reality of multiculturalism. I will show that all four writers shed light on persisting social and ethnic inequalities in their respective societies. Informed by their individual ethnicity, class, gender, or personal experience, they also, however, assert liberating marginal perspectives on their national cultures. Whether they directly engage with discrimination and segregation or playfully assert their difference

[7] I use these terms to indicate the writers' differences according to how the writers themselves define them. While Zaimoglu, Khemiri and Özdamar frequently refer to their respective ethnic differences from the German and Swedish majority populations, Besigye mostly refers to his cultural and racial difference from the Norwegian majority population.

[8] There is a slight differentiation in the way these writers define themselves. While Zaimoglu and Özdamar appear comfortable with the term Turkish-German, especially Zaimoglu has also often insisted on his German identity. Besigye is also comfortable defining himself a hyphenated Ugandan-Norwegian or African-Norwegian. Khemiri, who, unlike the other writers, was born in Europe (Sweden), insists on the publics' acceptance of his Swedishness.

from the status quo, they reject externally imposed identities; they tackle and potentially subvert those powerful ethnocentric discourses that still assign otherness, cultural difference and sometimes inferiority to ethnic minority identities. While not representing attitudes toward multiculturalism that are merely celebratory, each of these writers envisions ethnic and cultural diversity as a more integrated and accepted part of German and Scandinavian identity.

*

Before moving on to more specifically introduce Zaimoglu, Besigye, Khemiri and Özdamar, and the key terms for their engagement with their respective multicultural worlds, I would like to clarify my own position in the ongoing discussion of multiculturalism in German and Scandinavian literature today. The impetus of this project, sustained by my own socio-cultural interest in literature and my readings of immigrants' texts, as well as by my experiences, friendships, conversations and interviews with refugees and immigrants in Germany and Scandinavia, has conflicted with a current academic trend. According to this trend, the 1990s signaled a definite shift in the way we must view the European multicultural world. Aligned with recent celebrations of hybridity and mixture, this trend suggests that the conceptual umbrellas under which immigrants' texts were studied in the 70s and 80s are outdated.

According to this argument, the paradigms of *Gastarbeiterliteratur* or *Ausländerliteratur* in German or *invandrarlitteratur* and *innvandrarlitteratur* in Swedish and Norwegian, respectively, prompt over-determined sociological readings of texts. Such a methodological bias further obscures or even negates the literary modes and discrete voices of individual writers and works. It also risks homogenizing and

victimizing a diverse group of immigrants, whose individual members are easily viewed as disadvantaged inhabitants in a society otherwise culturally homogenous and prosperous. Numerous critics in both Germany and Scandinavia have argued that this "discourse of the victim" objectifies and "ethnifies" the individual minority writer.[9]

In particular within German Studies in the US, Turks and other minority groups are now viewed by the most prominent in the field as part of German history, and German identity as opened to its multicultural and diverse richness. While those critics reading the immigrant literature of the 70s and 80s concentrated on social and cultural outsidership, racism, discrimination, the argument goes, critics today can focus on the subjective agency of the minority or culturally hybrid subject and the complexities of his or her different cultural attachments. Different literary styles are also often attributed to these different themes: earlier texts are said to have been faithful to a politically motivated social realism, while later texts are viewed as stylistically more experimental and politically ambiguous. After having approached the immigrant or ethnic other as "victim" of capitalism or cultural dominance, he or she can now, according to this perspective, be viewed as a "culturally hybrid" agent of the multicultural world.

[9] Marilya Veteto-Conrad speaks about the discourse of the victim and its function as catharsis in *Finding a Voice: Identity and the Works of German-Language Turkish Writers in the Federal Republic of Germany to 1990*. Arlene Teraoka, in "*Gastarbeiterliteratur*: The Other Speaks Back", has spoken of the politics of reading and promoting *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, and claims that the literary phenomenon *Gastarbeiterliteratur* is "a political battleground for recognition and control." Leslie Adelson has in numerous books and articles questioned the sociological positivism and ethnic binarism of Turkish-German discussions, in search for more productive ways to talk about the Turkish presence in Germany. See *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature*, "Touching Tales of Turks, Germans, and Jews: Cultural Alterity, Historical Narrative, and Literary Riddles for the 1990s," "Opposing Oppositions: Turkish-German Questions in Contemporary German Studies," and "Migrants' Literature or German Literature." A similar concern, primarily regarding the tendency to essentialize and ethnicize immigrant literature in its reception, is expressed in the introduction to Gröndahl's *Litteraturens gränsland* (The Borderland of Literature).

Andreas Schumann, at the University of Munich, provides a typical dismissal of the categories "guest-worker literature", "immigrant literature", or "migrant literature":

> Where have they gone, the literary characters eking out their miserable existence in Germany as guest workers and immigrants, begging for understanding and acceptance, struggling to maintain their identity in alien surroundings, defying their host country? […] By this point it seems inadmissible to speak of an "immigrant literature" in Germany; it has also ceased to be a "literature of the Other" or a literature of cultural mediation. It no longer requires an ideology, political or moral pretensions, historical continuity or national identity; it no longer needs to pass judgment on actions or mourn the failure of communication, it can focus on everyday life and create group identity […] thus emancipating itself from the traditions of immigrant literature and becoming "normal". ("Der Gast der keener mehr ist")[10]

Deniz Göktürk's recent work on Turkish-German texts also downplays ethnic discrimination and economic disadvantage in favor of both complex and playful approaches to new German identities. Göktürk argues in an online article (most likely a part of her current research project on ethnic film comedy) "Turkish delight – German fright," against earlier paradigms in both productions and readings of German film: "we can begin to talk about a development from 'cinema of duty' to 'the pleasures of hybridity'." In an introduction to an issue on Multiculturalism in *New German Critique* (2004), Göktürk and Wolbert expand on this necessary shift of focus:

> While minority studies was primarily concerned with the politics of recognition and dynamics of inclusion or exclusion *within* the nation state, the current era warrants thinking and feeling *beyond* the nation […] A common impetus among these very different studies lies in the challenge that they all advance toward

[10]"Wo sind sie hin, die Romanfiguren, die als Gastarbeiter und Zuwanderer in Deutschland ihr tristes Dasein fristen, um Verständnis und Akzeptanz bitten, sich um ihre Identität in der Fremde bemühen, dem Gastland trotzen? […] Es ist somit wohl mittlerweile unzulässig, von einer Migrantenliteratur" in Deutschland zu reden, auch ist es nicht mehr eine "Literatur der Fremde" noch eine kulturvermittelnde Dichtung. Sie braucht keine Ideologie, keinen politisch-moralischen Anspruch, keine geschichtliche Kontinuität, keine nationale Identität, keine Bewertung von Handlungen mehr, braucht scheiternde Kommunikation nicht zu betrauern, kann sich dem Alltag zuwenden, kann die Identität von Gruppen herstellen – und hat sich damit von den Traditionen der Migrantenliteratur emanzipiert und ist "normal" geworden."

> romantic celebration of minority voices from the "ghetto" as authentic expressions of marginal group identities. [In contrast, these new studies] unsettle polarities between margin and center. This is not an issue about minority identities, but about the "tropicalization" of mainstream post-wall German culture, seen from transnational perspectives. (3)

This dissertation acknowledges and engages the fresh perspectives on multicultural identities that Schumann, Gökturk and Wolbert here represent. Their critique rightly questions to what extent it is reasonable to separate majority and minority identity and majority and minority concerns. Why have I chosen writers with immigrant extraction for my project? Do I unrightfully insist on their marginalization and on their difference from the status quo? Despite my attraction to ideas of agency, mixture and ambiguity, I hesitate before partaking in this shift of focus too optimistically, especially when it suggests that the pioneering work done in the 70s and 80s by many politically engaged and progressive scholars and writers be offhandedly dismissed. Just as the institution of *Gastarbeiterliteratur* may have obscured the individual and creative dimensions of immigration, the current trend of postmodern ambiguity and pleasure risks obscuring the social and political facts that were the foundation of many of these earlier works, and which are still highly relevant to immigrant experiences and to the developing multicultural society. I think it is important, while pushing for an emancipating diversity and openness in our understanding of contemporary identities, also to acknowledge the merits of past scholarship and to ask to what extent the perspective of an institution such as *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, with its focus on social and cultural outsidership, economic exploitation, prejudice and racism, is still valid today.

Arlene Teraoka pointed out in "*Gastarbeiterliteratur*: The Other Speaks Back" (1987), that the significance of *Gastarbeiterliteratur* was that the Turks in Germany broke their silence by starting to speak *back* in German about their lives in Germany, often emphasizing the extent to which they both experienced and were assigned otherness (81).[11] Although Turks in Germany have been visible in German literature for a while now, and although many ethnic Turks now define themselves as "German", have immigrants and their children necessarily exhausted the opportunity to address the majority culture from minority perspectives? Or are these perspectives particularly valuable for a multicultural society of the 21st century? To view minority discourse in general as "a romantic celebration of minority voices from the 'ghetto'", as Gökturk and Wolbert do, appears unfair.

In this project, I establish that the new stage of multiculturalism after 1990 is more contradictory than these critics admit. Moreover, I caution against a one-sided focus on the "tropicalization," "hybridization" or "transnationalization" of formerly homogenous identities, since it risks obscuring the continued strength of national identity, the specific value of minority perspectives and the persisting social facts tied to immigration: racism, discrimination, ethnic segregation etc. One's ethnicity does not function merely as a bias influencing one's consciousness and experience. It is an integral part of one's identity and serves as a determinant of one's consciousness and one's experience. It is no more capable of being transcended than it is possible to step outside

[11] See Irmgard Ackermann and Harald Weinrich's anthologies from the 1980s: *Eine nicht nur deutsche Literatur. Zur Standortbestimmung der „Ausländerliteratur.*" (A Not Only German Literature: The Location of "Foreigners' Literature), *Türken deutscher Sprache: Berichte, Erzählungen, Gedichte von Ausländern* (Turks in German: Reports, Stories, and Poetry by Foreigners). *In zwei Sprachen leben: Berichte, Erzählungen, Gedichte von Ausländern* (To Live in Two Languages: Reports, Stories and Poems by Foreigners).

one's own skin. In this regard, there is no definite shift between writers who are immigrants themselves and writers who are immigrants' children. The texts in this project suggest that even if majority definitions of ethnicity are criticized as limited and limiting for the ethnic minority, ethnicity also remains an important determinant for how multiple generations of immigrants define themselves vis-à-vis the dominant culture.

Stuart Hall has defended "the multicultural question" as a national concern ("The Multicultural Question" 4): he claims that the multiethnic and multicultural British society must come to terms with the realities of marginalization and exclusion, that it must criticize and discuss this marginalization across ethnic groups and work towards a new shared sense of Britishness. In another essay, Hall emphasizes that this new sense of Britishness can emerge only when the experiences of postcolonials like himself are properly acknowledged as an indelible part of British identity:

> The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'. ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226)

Although Hall is describing the specific Caribbean postcolonial experience in Britain, he also talks more generally about the profound effects of cultural dominance. He suggests that one of the main obstacles that many non-European immigrants and their children experience in Europe today is that they continue to be categorized and treated as 'others' both by institutions and individual members of the dominant culture. Many feel targeted by circulating prejudice and misrepresentations. Even citizenship does not automatically suggest acceptance. Hall demonstrates that connected to the acknowledgement of an

ethnically and culturally diverse nation is the idea of sharedness as well as the traditional, humanist ideas often shunned by critics of multiculturalism: openness, tolerance, and respect.

A dismissal of this realistic perspective appears premature for many reasons. First, the emphasis on assigned and experienced outsidership by "ethnic others" that both Teraoka and Hall allude to above has by no means disappeared from immigrants' literary texts between 1990 and 2005. Second, such outsidership triggered even more radical responses from immigrants' children around the third Millennium than it did from immigrants in the 1970s. Third, there are many transnational perspectives on western global dominance and acute human suffering in literary texts written by immigrants and immigrants' children. Fourth, in line with Hall's concern in 2001 about a racially divided Britain, there are the disturbing social truths of division and ethnic hierarchy in Germany and Scandinavia as well. In increasing numbers of geographical areas in Germany and Scandinavia with large percentages of immigrants (primarily suburbs), 80-90% of the population is unemployed and lives on government assistance. Since the 1990s, employment opportunities for most refugees and economic migrants arriving from non-European countries have been practically non-existent. An increasing number of people without papers (or illegal immigrants) live outside the margins of these societies and have to resort to underground social services to survive. Sons and daughters of immigrants complain that they are, despite their language fluency or education, as subjected to discrimination as their parents and still objectified as exotic others. The fact that not all writers of immigrant background take account of these immigrant realities or want to be associated with them does not explain away the fact that many actually do.

In the context of a Scandinavian literature, Norwegian Professor Ingeborg Kongslien points toward a more complex and multicultural understanding of contemporary Scandinavian identity with a generous gesture toward the socially responsible categories and biases of the past. Kongslien admits that the term "immigrant literature" is problematic, especially since immigrated writers in general want to be respected as writers and therefore dislike to be put in a social category. That said, Kongslien also defends its initial usage as a way to draw attention to the relatively few texts that were written by non-natives and to the specific themes, experiences and other worlds that these texts brought to the literary landscape.

Kongslien's reasonable dialogue with past terminology may be a result of her own thorough dedication to literary texts by immigrants to Scandinavia. It may also be an expression of the fact that "immigrant literature" is a more recent and less explored phenomenon in Scandinavia than in Germany. Because of a highly educated refugee population in Scandinavia, the term immigrant literature has also evoked less victimhood and more diversity than it has in Germany, where it was often associated with the Turkish guest workers. On the other hand, these Turkish-German writers were always more diverse than critics allowed them to be.

Scandinavian responses to immigrants' literary work prove an interesting contrast to the institution of German *Gastarbeiterliteratur*. Alexandra Ålund and Carl-Ulrik Schierup note in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* (1991) that Sweden's immigration policy is known throughout Europe for its consistent *rejection* of a 'guestworker' strategy for

importing labor (2).[12] Immigrated workers were in general better off in Scandinavia than they were in Germany: they had better salaries and were better integrated into the local culture than the workers who came to Germany. Since they were largely southern Europeans and Christian, they assimilated more easily than most Muslim Turks did in Germany. Accordingly, the worker-phenomenon never took hold as a major literary theme among Swedish immigrant writers, although the most prominent of Sweden's canonized writers of immigrant background, Theodor Kallifatides, dealt with similar issues in his earlier works.

This did not mean, however, that Swedish critics did not 'other' these few writers in ways similar to the German critics. Kongslien points out that due to the scarcity of books written by immigrants to Scandinavia in the 1970s and 1980s, the Greek Kallifatides easily came to represent the entire immigrant population of Sweden, just as the Pakistani Khalid Hussein did in Norway ("Innvandrarlitteratur i Norge" 247). Swedish literature professor Lars Wendelius discusses how the Swedish literary establishment failed to accommodate the writings of immigrant workers partly because of their scarcity and partly because of biased expectations regarding their literary quality (36-58). In *Den svenska litteraturen* (Swedish Literature) (1997; ed. Lönnroth), a comprehensive anthology of Swedish literature since the Middle Ages, contemporary immigrant writers are represented on two pages, under the title "The New Swedes." Ten names are mentioned on these two pages, nine of which are European. Since the 1990s,

[12] Åhlund and Schierup writes that as multiculturalism became an important element in the Swedish model of welfare state politics, it was the Swedish government's ambitious quest to create equality among ethnic groups, respect immigrant cultures, and provide immigrants and ethnic minorities with resources with which to exercise political influence.

there have been attempts to integrate more recently immigrated writers in Sweden, and to translate and publish their work in anthologies.[13]

Like Wendelius, Kongslien compares the term "immigrant literature" with "women's literature" or "proletarian literature," which also help foreground specific experiences important to the modern nation ("New Voices, New Themes, New Perspectives" 198). In 2005, she points toward the future by proposing that the time is now ripe to get rid of the term "immigrant literature" in favor of a more complex "multicultural" understanding of Scandinavian culture: "a change in the literary paradigm, from the concept of a national identity of an idealized homogenous nature towards an appreciation of the multicultural discourses in a postmodern society" ("New Narratives in Norwegian and Nordic Multicultural Literature" 144).

As mentioned, however, there are many good reasons to remain somewhat skeptical to the readiness with which many now embrace the pleasures and complexities of postmodern discourses. Not only is it important to value and cherish the substantial work that Wendelius. Kongslien and others have done to make individual immigrant experiences more visible in the literary landscape, whether it was done under the labels of "guest worker literature," "immigrant literature" or some other category. It is also necessary to remind ourselves that many of the promoters of "immigrant literature" or "guest worker literature" were genuinely engaged, humanistically inclined public

[13] See the anthologies: *Världen i Sverige* (The World in Sweden). Ed. Madeleine Grive and Mehmet Uzun, *Flykten valde oss: Poesi om att fly sitt land* (Flight chose us: Poetry about fleeing one's country) Ed. Viveka Heyman and Siw Widerberg. Other Scandinavian anthologies with texts by immigrants that were published around 1990 are: *Roser i snø. Dikt og tekster skrevet av innvandrere i Norge, Sverige og Danmark* (Roses in snow. Poetry and texts by immigrants to Norway, Sweden and Denmark). Ed. Khalid Salimi, *Et dussin trekkfugler* (A dozen migrant birds), Ed. Halfdan Freihow and Michael Konupek, and *Ord i bevegelse. Dikt og tekster skrevet av kvinner innvandret til Skandinavia* (Words in motion. Poetry and texts by women immigrated to Scandinavia). Ed. Nita Kapoor and Fakhra Salimi. See an introduction to these writings in Kongslien's "Innvandrarlitteratur i Norge."

intellectuals. The Turkish-German Yüksel Pazarkaya is perhaps the most well known example from Germany, who, under the label "guest worker literature," discussed the situation of guest workers in a variety of different venues. What is clear from the multiple examples given by Kongslien in her articles between 2000 and 2007 is that many writers of immigrant extraction, including writers of mixed heritage, continue to thematize the reality of prejudice, discrimination, and social alienation or outsidership that came onto the academic agenda in the 1970s and 1980s, even if they may express such concerns more playfully or alongside positive celebrations of cultural mixtures.[14] All writers discussed in my project also show that along with their hybrid and mixed identities comes some attachment to marginalized, impoverished, or disadvantaged populations elsewhere, whose mere existence is an affront to any exaggerated celebration of "new" cultural mixtures in Europe.

I show in this project that optimistic and pessimistic perspectives on immigration and multiculturalism can be intertwined in the same narratives. The individual authors mix political belief and aesthetic play, realism and experimental style, seriousness and humor. One of my main findings is that the cultural production emerging from the multicultural borderlands in Germany and Scandinavia today attacks serious social problems such as segregation, poverty, racism, and sexism, and celebrates minority agency and liberating cultural mixtures at the same time. I show that there is no contradiction in these writers' pushing for political and social change and representing cultural change at the same time.

[14] See her articles, "New Voices, New Themes, New Perspectives. Contemporary Scandinavia", "New Narratives in Norwegian and Nordic Multicultural Literature, Or: 'Rewriting What it Means to be Norwegian'", and "Innvandrarlitteratur i Norge".

From Rebellious Outsiders to Loving and Playful Individuals

The first chapter will discuss the Turkish-German Feridun Zaimoglu and his portrayal of the socially, politically and ethnically disadvantaged *Kanaken*[15] in Germany. In his books *Kanaksprak* (1995) and *Koppstoff* (1998), a diverse group of second- and third- generation immigrants, all assuming the identity of *Kanaken,* are voicing their disillusionment with Germany and their resentment about their outsidership. Vulgarities, curses, and spiteful accusations are woven into a stylized language of this particularly humiliated and downtrodden German underclass. Zaimoglu's two projects about *Kanaken* can be defined as both sociological and literary. On the one hand, the texts were allegedly transcribed from taped personal statements based on the question, "What is life like as a *Kanake* in Germany?" (*Kanaksprak* 9).[16] On the other hand, Zaimoglu has clearly streamlined the language in his texts (in particular *Kanaksprak*) into a rather homogenous rap-inspired tirade against German society.[17] I read Zaimoglu's projects as a provocative intervention into the ongoing discussion of German multicultural identity. Rather than appealing to the majority culture's acceptance of its foreign population, Zaimoglu seeks to shock his readers into an acknowledgement of the socio-economic problems of many non-ethnic Germans in Germany.

The chapter on Zaimoglu and his texts highlights the problem of ethnic segregation around the turn of the 21st century, perhaps the most significant argument against any premature celebration of cultural mixture. Zaimoglu's texts draw attention to

[15] *Kanak* is a re-appropriation of the derogatory word for foreigner in Germany.
[16] "Wie lebt es sich als Kanake in Deutschland…"
[17] It has not been established to what extent Zaimoglu has "copied" the recordings of his subjects' and to what extent he has "translated" them into his own texts. Many critics have suspected that Zaimoglu's control over the material has been considerable.

class differences in German society and prompt readers to acknowledge the despair under which a large part of young Germans live. The *Kanaken* in his texts do not only reprimand a German society unable to embrace its lower-class, foreign-born or foreign-looking citizens, they also defiantly and proudly assert an independent, alternative German identity. Largely sympathetic to Zaimoglu's goals, I discuss this contradiction at the heart of his project.

The second chapter discusses the Ugandan-born Norwegian Bertrand Besigye's poetry and the author's humorous attack on the Norwegian status quo. More specifically, I discuss how Besigye playfully asserts his cultural and racial difference in order to criticize a dominant society lacking in cosmopolitan outlook and diversity of thought and behavior. While Besigye's life-affirming subjectivities can easily be interpreted on an existential level, I focus on the dichotomy that the author sets up between the mainstream and the individual outsider. I discuss how Besigye plays with what he considers "real" cultural differences between Norway and Africa, Norway and the European continent, as well as how he plays with stereotypical ideas about white and black cultures to ironically critique Norwegian society. In Besigye's texts, the margin is the place where people cultivate alternative life-scripts and visions from those sanctioned by the powers that be. The chapter on Besigye shows how the marginal can work as a chief asset in the creation of transformative visions of society.

The third chapter turns to the Swede Jonas Hassen Khemiri and his critique of an ethnically defined Swedish identity. Khemiri describes the young ethnically and/or culturally mixed men in his novels as part of a lost generation: they are born in Sweden but do not identify with Sweden. As a result, they resort to both ethnic fanaticism and

rebellious acts of non-conformism in their struggle to belong. I discuss in this chapter how Khemiri pushes for an understanding of Sweden as multiethnic and multicultural while he at the same time reveals a social reality marked by ethnic hierarchies and ethnic segregation. As a self-described un-definable cultural hybrid, Khemiri also plays with his own versions of "accented" or "immigrant Swedish" in his books in order both to emphasize the ethnic marginalization of many young Swedes and to critique common ideas about Swedish identity.

The fourth and final chapter engages with the Turkish-German Emine Sevgi Özdamar's optimistic, playful and loving migrant voices. A self-described Turkish-German cosmopolitan, Özdamar migrated between Germany and Turkey in the 60s and 70s; first she came as a guest worker and later she started working as a playwright, actress and writer. The fourth chapter discusses the agency of the migrant and her (or his) ability to cultivate independence from dominant discourses in society. I discuss how Özdamar challenges elitism, patriarchal traditions, and injustices in general, and how she dedicates her whole work as a writer to defusing existing tensions between Turks and Germans. I explore how her literary characters creatively resist dominance by engaging lovingly, openly and humorously with people of different social and cultural worlds. I also discuss how Özdamar contributes a global perspective on the problems of poverty and social marginalization, and how this perspective complements and tempers her otherwise optimistic and humorous perspective on the multicultural world. Although she writes primarily about a less privileged group of migrants in Germany--the Turkish guest workers--rather than focus on their victimization, she bestows creativity, knowledge and humor upon her characters. By defining themselves positively instead of negatively, and

by viewing Germany in a positive light, Özdamar's characters challenge dominance and injustice by refusing to internalize the culturally dominant perspectives as *their* perspectives.

The focus on a humorous and loving subjectivity in the fourth chapter serves a definite purpose. Not only does she show protagonists from less privileged backgrounds who are successful in resisting class-, gender- and ethnic- prejudice, she also lends integrity to other minority identities and displays how they draw strength from their specific differences. Because Özdamar's texts are filled with serious perspectives on the least privileged people, the disenfranchised and the poor, she manages to lend agency to the migrant without only making her or him into an example of the cultural mixture of Germany.

*

It is possible to distinguish a progression from Zaimoglu's resentful, mostly male, identities to Özdamar's peaceful and affirmative, mostly female, ones. Any such simple division between pessimism and optimism, male and female, however, is contradicted by the complexities of each writer's texts. While Özdamar appears to be the one writer who consistently creates truly inspiring characters in her texts, I want to stress that the more provocative voices of Zaimoglu's *Kanaken*, Besigye's expressive outsiders and Khemiri's rebels also have important lessons to convey. The four authors' perspectives should thus fairly be viewed as valid minority perspectives. Although these four chapters reflect that the categories "immigrant" or "minority" must be broken down into a multitude of social identities, and that these categories must remain contestable, they also show that there are certain common denominators to the experiences of immigrant

minorities and their children. These writers all establish that German, Norwegian and Swedish majority societies, respectively, are only slowly accepting the ethnic and cultural diversity in their midst, and they each provide a necessary and rich counter-perspective on the dominant culture in these societies. Together, they show the fundamental value and importance of (often neglected) minority perspectives to the development of a less conflict-ridden, more open, and more socially just multicultural world.

Although I will focus more on the thematic tendencies of these writer's texts than on their formal characteristics, some formal features affirm the particular multicultural or minority identities and perspectives that I want to foreground. One could easily argue that these writers assert their multicultural identities through style and performance, and that language is an important tool for their representation of their unique identities. Most importantly, each writer marks the language of his or her texts with a particular "difference" from standard language. The result of these aesthetic choices is not only strikingly unique texts, but also texts that are accented and linguistically heterogeneous for specific purposes. Here, it helps to think about how cultural productions by minorities have traditionally been evaluated: as lagging behind the dominant culture, as unaware of aesthetic theory, always on its way toward becoming "more like" the cultural production of the dominant culture. By consciously deviating from the norm, marking their texts with their own bi-lingualism or their own linguistic inventions, these writers assert their difference from the status quo rather than only aspire to a sophistication in line with established conventions.

Beyond "Ethnic Others": Imagining New National Identities

Zaimoglu, Besigye, Khemiri, and Özdamar appear particularly suited to insert both realistic and forward-looking perspectives on German and Scandinavian identity. They are metropolitan writers based in the increasingly multicultural urban communities of Kiel, Oslo, Stockholm, and Berlin. Their main concern is not to cultivate their belonging to a specific minority group (as opposed to some of their fictional characters or narrators). Rather, they are open-minded and self-critical about their national and ethnic identities. Homi Bhabha has described this type of open minority identity as "the other within," that has been obliged to adopt "shifting, multiple or hyphenated positions or identifications" (qtd. in Hesse 227). According to Bhabha, such identifications are a characteristic feature of all contemporary multicultural nations, whose histories are increasingly being narrated from the margins.[18]

Zaimoglu, as an example of an "other within," defines himself as both German and Turkish, as belonging to both the Turkish lower class and the German middle class, often making the point that he is *both* at the same time, and that both matter for his self-perception. Khemiri, as another example, claims the individual right to remain free of any externally imposed ethnicity and culture. In public discussions, these writers also promote the principles of dynamism, ambiguity, imagination and humor in the life of nation and diaspora alike, thus disturbing any rigid self-recognition that either nationals or minorities may cultivate. The educational privilege of these writers does not prevent

[18] Bhabha is otherwise skeptical towards common invocations of multiculturalism and diversity because these terms assume that cultures have pre-given cultural contents and customs. Instead, he proposes the expressions "cultural difference" and "hybridity" to indicate that cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation to self and other. For Bhabha's idea on hybridity as opposed to multiculturalism, see his articles "Culture's In-between" and "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference."

them from engaging with dire social realities such as poverty, unemployment, or racism; they have all been personally affected by these realities.

One can align these writers both with those minority critics who have engaged in a radical criticism of identity, asserting that identities and cultures are not essential, unchanging or unitary but rather continually produced within social contexts. In fact, multicultural theory appeared at a time when intellectual skepticism sought to deconstruct concepts like "identity" and "cultural identity." Reminiscent of Hall's words on black identities in Britain, Henry Luis Gates argues in his article "'Ethnic and Minority' Studies" that

> the threat to the margin comes not from assimilation or dissolution – from any attempt to denude it of its defiant alterity - but, on the contrary from the center's attempts to preserve that alterity, which result in the homogenization of the other as, simply, other. (298)

Clearly, minorities may very well participate in the preservation of their differences as well. It is clear from my readings that there is always a tension between the significance that these writers attribute to their particular ethnic or racial identity and the urge they have to criticize any strict definition of this ethnic or racial identity. This dilemma may explain that there is an important element of playfulness to these writers' engagement with identity and difference, indicating that it is never really clear to what extent the writers thematize "real" differences or sentiments and to what extent they invent them as part of their social critique.

If many individual immigrant writers were influenced by the "political" climate of the 1970s and 1980s, and critics therefore focused on these writers' place in the larger social and political order, both writers and critics have met other challenges in the more

"multicultural" and "identity-fixated" 1990s and 2000s. One such challenge is the "cultural bonus" writers experience as exotic outsiders. Zygmunt Bauman argues in his essay "The Making and Unmaking of Strangers" that "strangers" are not shunned by the dominant culture anymore: excluded from the modern experience, they have become incorporated into the postmodern experience:

> While modern strangers were earmarked for annihilation […] the postmodern ones are – by joyful or grudging, but common consent – here to stay. To paraphrase Voltaire's comment on God: if they did not exist, they would have to be invented, zealously and with gusto. […] They are useful precisely in their capacity as strangers: their strangerhood is to be protected and lovingly preserved. (54)

The more intimate and complicated relationship between native and foreigner, self and other, that Baumann tries to explain here suggests that writers of immigrant extraction may now very well invent their own strangerhood in order to remain interesting as "others." Particularly in the chapter on Besigye, but also in the other writers' texts, I show how differences are exploited, exaggerated and humorized by the minority writer.

*

In this historical juncture when increasingly more immigrants and their children are claiming (or at least trying to claim) the German and Scandinavian national identities under new premises – Turkish-born, black, ethnically mixed - many feel urged to defend the status and strength of the nation-state and the value of national identity and national culture. To illustrate the importance of these authors' literary texts as new, multicultural national imaginaries, I turn to a Swedish article from 2006 entitled "Att hata sitt land" (To Hate Your Country), an example of the tendency to dismiss multiculturalism in favor of a spurious notion of rooted national identity.

Cecilia Sjöholm argues in this article that national identity defines people at the core of who they are. She attributes Europeans' celebration and affirmation of multiculturalism to their inability to deal with their own national identity. She diagnoses European intellectuals with a sickness that, in her mind, has not befallen non-Europeans, namely, hatred towards one's own nation. She argues that the nation will continue to haunt everyone in a cosmopolitan world as the antithesis of everyone's feeling of homelessness (56-61). Sjöholm argues that multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are banal, that they signify soft invitations to a colorful world of new possibilities to be enjoyed only by a professional elite. No one in reality, she contends, can move beyond the conditions of the nation or of "belonging to a people." In Sjöholm's mind, hatred toward one's own nation is a far greater problem than primitive nationalism (57).

I dismiss neither the value and strength of national identity nor the fact that the national identities of Germany and the Scandinavian countries profoundly affect all who come to live within their territorial boundaries. In this regard, national identity is less imagined than it is concrete, directly upheld by legislation, public institutions, and language. Still, I take issue with Sjöholm's cynical ridicule of the European multiculturalist and with the common argument that contemporary multiculturalism is necessarily antagonistic to national identity. Instead, I suggest that it is more productive to view multiculturalism as a force *behind* a developing pluralistic European democracy, not the least with regard to the need to end discrimination and "open up" ethnically-defined national identities.

While Sjöholm makes the strange argument that the affirmation of multiculturalism reveals "the inability to represent one's own imaginary homeland," I see

such affirmation as a concrete concern with both institutional discrimination and cultural prejudice toward minorities and immigrants. Sjöholm concludes her article as follows: "The nation is a part of us just because it defines us through that which is foreign to us, through that which we do not understand, that which we do not see as part of ourselves" (61).[19] But who are "we"? Can an immigrant take part in Sjöholm's nation? Or are immigrants and ethnic minorities destined to be foreign forever? Just because Sjöholm and I both identify as Swedish, do we necessarily share enough identity *not* to be foreign to one another?

In my experience, those who are willing to defend multiculturalism generally agree that the integrity of *people* is more important than the integrity of *one's people.* These same people are also most likely comfortable with the fact that their nation is an ethnically and culturally differentiated community. In contrast to Sjöholm's strict defense of the nation as identity marker, many critics now evoke that other term that Sjöholm shuns in her article - cosmopolitanism - in their descriptions of a contemporary society marked by more open and ambiguous national identities. Anthony Appiah, for instance, notes in the foreword to his 2006 book *Cosmopolitanism* that the original use of the term "cosmopolitanism" signaled skepticism toward custom and tradition, a rejection of the view that a person belonged to a community among communities in favor of the view that she belonged instead to a community of human beings (Appiah xiv).[20] Appiah's

[19] "Nationen är en del av oss just därför att den definierar oss genom det som är främmande för oss, genom det som vi inte förstår, det som vi inte ser som en del av oss själva."

[20] The term is usually traced back to the Cynics of the 4th century BC and to the paradoxical but complementary meaning of its two constituent words *cosmos*, referring to the universe, and *polis,* referring to the city in which the citizen lived (Appiah xiv). In the context of contemporary multiculturalism, there are two common uses of cosmopolitanism: while it can be shunned as an expression of cultural elites' detachment from local cultures, it can also be celebrated as a form of border-crossing humanism in an increasingly globalized world.

cosmopolitanism is not banal. On the contrary, he suggests we identify also with people beyond those we are related to, those we speak like or those we look like. Appiah suggests that we engage in "vigorous conversation" to shape "collective values". The word cosmopolitanism comes up in interviews with Besigye and Khemiri as well. They identify it with a worldly openness towards the foreign, the different and the self: an attitude that both of them seek to encourage through their literary projects. Without going into detail as to what cosmopolitanism has meant and can mean, my point, and that of Besigye and Khemiri, is that the idea of cosmopolitan openness signals a positive opening up of Scandinavia to ethnic diversity and cultural difference, and that this "opening up" is preferable to developments in the opposite direction. The recent proliferation of terms for different types of "new" identities –multicultural, transcultural, transnational, hybrid– also testifies to the fact that an increasing number of people do not prioritize their nation in their identification. Recalling Özdamar's words in one of the opening quotes – "to speak without judging" - estrangement is a result not only of ethnic, cultural or national difference but also, maybe even primarily, of a human climate lacking in generosity and openness. As the Iranian-Swedish Marjaneh Bahtiari writes in her 2005 novel *Kalla det vad fan du vill* (Call It Whatever You Want), "Home is where you feel welcome. Not tolerated, not integrated or assimilated […] His home was not in his own heart, but where he had a place in other people's hearts" (124).[21]

Is Sjöholm's Sweden my Sweden? Does Sjöholm's Sweden compare to Jonas Hassen Khemiri's Sweden? One thing common to all the writers in this project is that none of them is ready to defend the values of national identity as confidently as Sjöholm

[21] Hemma är där du känner dig välkommen, inte tolererad, inte integrerad eller assimilerad […] Hans hem var inte i hans hjärta, men där han hade en plats i andra människors hjärtan."

does, especially as long as this identity excludes them. They may be more attracted to a more open and ambivalent position on identity closer to that of Appiah above, or to the Mexican-American Maria Lugones, whose ideas of open identities will be discussed in chapter 4. Lugones says:

> But then I ask myself who my own people are. When I think of my own people, the only people I can think of as my own are transnationals, liminals, border-dwellers, "world"-travelers, beings in the middle of either/or. ("Purity, Impurity and Separation" 469)

The principal goal of this dissertation is to engage with a discourse of multiculturalism through the texts of four writers of immigrant extraction in Germany and Scandinavia today. The writers discussed in the following chapters strongly suggest that we all need to properly acknowledge the economic, social and ethnic disadvantage of many immigrants and their children. They also strongly, often provocatively, oppose the outsidership they are assigned by virtue of their ethnic or racial difference from the majority. The multicultural question, Hall said, is the question of how we can create a sense of shared national identity amidst proliferating differences. Rather than directly answering this question, Zaimoglu, Besigye, Khemiri and Özdamar vitally contribute perspectives on this question within his or her particular national context. They criticize and resist culturally dominant practices and ideas, they assert their specific minority sensibilities, and they reach out for more inclusive and diversified German or Scandinavian national identities.

CHAPTER 1.

Feridun Zaimoglu, Germany: The Rebellious *Kanaken*

Kanak Attak offers a platform for Kanaken from the most different social areas who are sick of that same old song of sitting between two chairs and who think that this talk about casual zapping between cultures is lame postmodern rubbish. Kanak Attak wants to break the assignment of ethnic identities and roles. do away with "we" and "they" […] We are here to bring a new attitude of migrants of all generations on stage, independent and without compromise and conformity. Whoever believes that we celebrate a Potpourri of Ghetto-HipHop and other clichés will be surprised. […] Kanak Attak doesn't ruminate over culture conflict or complain about lacking tolerance. We express ourselves. […] This song is ours. [22]

- Kanak Attak's Manifest

Kanaken – An Urban Tribe

Berlin, the German city with the largest population of non-Germans, is sometimes called "Germany's integration workshop." The annual Carnival of Cultures in Berlin exemplifies this fact. Promoting a future multicultural German identity to be achieved through dialogue, mutual respect and joyful sharing, this festival brings together people and cultures from 80 nations around the world, all represented within a multicultural Germany. Symbolic of a politically, culturally and demographically "new Germany," and simultaneously of a similarly "new Europe," the festival purports to be a sign that the city

[22] "Kanak Attak bietet eine Plattform für *Kanaken* aus den verschiedensten gesellschaftlichen Bereichen, denen die Leier vom Leben zwei Stühlen zum Haus raushängt und die auch den Quatsch vom lässigen Zappen zwischen den Kulturen für windigen Pomokram halten. *Kanak* Attak will die Zuweisung von ethnischen Identitäten und Rollen, das "Wir" und "Die" durchbrechen. […] Wir treten an, eine neue Haltung von Migranten aller Generationen auf die Bühne zu bringen, eigenständig, ohne Anbiederung und Konformismus. Wer glaubt, daß wir in Potpurri aus Ghetto-HipHop und andere Klischees zelebrieren, wird sich wundern. […] *Kanak* Attak sinniert nicht über Kulturkonflikte, lamentiert nicht über fehlende Toleranz. Wir äußern uns. […] Dieses Lied gehört uns" (http://www.*Kanak*-attak.de/ka/about/manif_deu.html. 7 March 2007).

of Berlin is taking its minority inhabitants seriously. Moreover, the carnival symbolizes multicultural mixture as 21st-century German reality.

This common framing of multiculturalism has come under heavy attack by the Turkish-German writer Feridun Zaimoglu. Zaimoglu criticizes positive invocations of multiculturalism for failing to engage with the social problems of racism, poverty and unemployment. He believes that the rhetoric of liberal multiculturalism objectifies, rather than empowers, individual minorities and immigrants. Zaimoglu's alternative to multiculturalism is not assimilation but a forceful, independent identity that is at once joyful and resentful - a rebellious urban tribe - constructed around the formerly derogatory term for foreigners in Germany: *Kanaken*. Zaimoglu's *Kanake* signifies an identity meant at once to personify and criticize the inequalities and pathologies created by German cultural dominance.[23]

In this chapter I will engage with the individual identities in Zaimoglu's texts *Kanaksprak* (1995) and *Koppstoff* (1998). These books, representative of Zaimoglu's most interesting and provocative work on Turkish-German identity, are based on interviews with self-identified *Kanaken*, born in Germany but denied German identity. Although I disagree with Zaimoglu's downright dismissal of celebratory multiculturalism, I view Zaimoglu's two books as an interesting form of documentation that claims individuality and uniqueness for the *Kanaken*, both lower- and second-class citizens in Germany. On the one hand, in the words of one critic, Zaimoglu "fights

[23] The origin of the word *Kanake* is ambiguous. As Elisabeth Loentz writes in her article "Yiddish, Kanak Sprak, Klezmer and Hip-Hop," the word may derive from Hawaiian, where it means human being (34). Others have claimed it has long been part of Berlin dialect, equivalent to "Hanake," which is a derogatory term for a Slavic ethnic group. Before the word was appropriated by those targeted by the slur, its meaning was entirely pejorative and carried the meanings: "uneducated," "simple person," "foreign worker," "Turk." In this chapter, I will refer to *Kanake* and *Kanaka (pl. Kanaken/Kanakas)* for the male and female individuals in Zaimoglu's book and also use the adjective Kanak when appropriate.

forcefully against racism and against attempts to fit migrants into stereotyped identities" (Akkaya, "Ausdifferenzierung" 91).[24] On the other hand, he exploits and exaggerates the stereotyped image of the foreigner, in particular the foreign man (the dangerous, criminal, and sexual ethnic outsider), to attack the very social problem he is criticizing.

My argument in this chapter enfolds around this contradiction at the heart of Zaimoglu's *Kanak* project. I will discuss the merits of Zaimoglu's provocative and anti-racist engagement with multicultural Germany. I also discuss what I view as the negative sides of Zaimoglu's project. Since the identity of the *Kanaken* in Zaimoglu's work is dependent on extremely negative portrayals of Germans, the two identities – *Kanaken* and Germans – are in Zaimoglu's texts locked into a co-dependency that appears both unrealistic and pessimistic. I view the *Kanake* identity in Zaimoglu's books as a transitional identity: a first stepping-stone on the way towards a more diverse and inclusive German national identity. Zaimoglu's texts suggest that before diversity and pluralism can become reality in Germany, the nation needs to take the experiences and outsidership of its immigrant communities seriously.

I also discuss an aspect of the texts that has been overlooked by critics. Although the majority of the *Kanaken* in Zaimoglu's two books rely heavily on stereotypes of Germans in the securing of their various identities, there are moments in each work in which the individuals express unique visions and conciliatory attitudes and thereby deviate from the stereotypical image promoted by Zaimoglu. This is particularly true

[24]"[Zaimoglu] setzt sich dem Rassismus und den Versuchen, Migranten in Identitätsschablonen hineinpassen zu wollen, kämpferisch entgegen."

about Zaimoglu's second book about female *Kanaken*, who both diversify the Kanak identity and confront the negative male image in Zaimoglu's first book.

*

The sociologist and writer Zaimoglu was born in Turkey in 1964 and came to Germany a year later with his parents, who were guest workers. Often seen as the founder of the Kanak- movement, an organization addressing the social outsidership of many young Turkish-Germans and other "hyphenated" Germans, many of whom are children of guest workers, he has become known as a provocative cult writer. Despite his frequent claims that his working-class background determines his literary activity, Zaimoglu reveals in the introduction to his book *Kopf und Kragen* (1997) that his guest- worker father was an educated man who was fond of the arts. Zaimoglu himself studied medicine and art before he turned to journalism and writing. Nevertheless, since writing his first book *Kanaksprak* in 1995, he has engaged in debates about immigration and multiculturalism with a special dedication to doubly marginalized identities, especially those of poor Turkish-German youth. The author of six novels, two nonfiction books and two collections of short stories, Zaimoglu has received several German literary prizes.[25] While most of Zaimoglu's work thematizes the Turkish-German experience, Zaimoglu's portraits of Turkish-Germans in *Kanaksprak* and *Koppstoff* are, he claims, different in kind from the benevolent representations of Turkish-Germans in "immigrant literature." In his books, "Kanaken [are] speaking themselves" (*Kanaksprak* 18).

[25] *Leyla* (2007), *Rom Intensiv: Mein Jahr in der ewigen Stadt* ((2007), *Zwölf Gramm Glück: Erzählungen* (2005), *German Amok* (2004), *Liebesmale, Scharlachrot* (2002), *Leinwand* (2003), *Kopf und Kragen* (2001), *Abschaum* (2000).

Re-appropriating the derogatory label "*Kanake*" for Turkish and other "non-German" Germans who were either born in Germany or raised there but who were still treated as outsiders, Zaimoglu took it upon himself to become a spokesperson for these marginalized masses. After the success of his first book, he made talk-show appearances, appeared in newspaper features, and traveled extensively around Germany on reading tours. His appearances were always considerably provocative and intended to challenge Germans to grasp the extent of the outsidership experienced by these young people. At readings, he was often viewed as performing the role of the stereotypical Turkish male outsider, corresponding to the German's picture and fear of him.

According to Zaimoglu, the feelings of many Turkish-Germans were aggravated not only by cultural xenophobia and intolerance, but also by the old citizenship law of 1913, according to which many children born in Germany to Turkish parents still had to have their residence permits renewed regularly. As Leslie Adelson points out, this law, which was not amended until 2005, made it possible for an ethnic German from an Eastern European country without knowledge of German to obtain German citizenship**,** whereas a person born in Germany to Turkish parents could easily be denied naturalization (Senocak, *Atlas* xx). The new 2005 law, although belated, became symbolic of a wider acceptance of immigrants in Germany. Although this law has been widely criticized for being too restrictive, it granted rights of citizenship to more individuals of foreign background who were born in the country. It also allowed for dual citizenship. Based on the experiences of lower-class Turkish-Germans – "an offended generation," the Kanak identity in Zaimoglu's words - later developed into a widespread subculture that attracted young people across ethnic borders. Several Kanak anthologies

were published and various anti-racist grassroots Kanak networks have been self-organizing all over Germany around the questions of ethnic discrimination and political injustice.[26]

*

In *Kanaksprak* (1995), Zaimoglu constructs 24 forceful monologues from taped interviews with second-generation immigrant Turks. Most of Zaimoglu's subjects are identified as working-class men, others as unemployed, some as working in the sex industry. There is also a poet, an Islamist, a junkie, a couple of rappers, a refugee and a sociologist. Zaimoglu claims to take a documentarist's realist approach to his project and calls the monologues "protocols." The texts are based on immigrant rap-like street talk, commonly known as *Kanaksprak*, which includes vulgar, obscene and offensive expressions and direct translations of archaic Turkish turns of phrase. The results are forceful, provocative, and occasionally poetic texts that are challenging in terms of both content and language.

Zaimoglu criticizes the objectification and exoticism to which immigrants are subjected in Germany. "As a self-aware self, the Kanake exists only on the passport-photo" (11), says one of his subjects.[27] Explaining his project in the foreword to

[26] See the anthologies *Kanaksta: Von deutschen und anderen Ausländern,* ed. Joachim Lottman, *Morgenland: Neuester deutsche Literatur,* ed. Jamal Tuschik. The German director Lars Becker made the film *Kanak Attak!* in 2000 from Zaimoglu's 1997 novel *Abschaum: Die wahre Geschichte des Ertan Ongun* (Scum of the earth: The true story of Ertan Ongun), revolving primarily around the life of a Turkish-German drug addict. The genre of the *Kanaksta*-comedy also became popular. These comedies played on ethnic stereotypes and aimed at loosening the racial tensions between Germans and Turks. Those who feel that the political messages of the original movement are still highly valid have criticized the comedies for promoting a stereotyped and commercialized image of the Turk. Furthermore, the 'Kanak-Chic' movement, as Cheeseman notes ("Akcam – Zaimoglu – 'Kanak Attak'" 180) - the media's discovery of interesting, hybrid young Germans - as well as the Kanak-comedy, took the anger out of the original project for the purpose of entertainment.

[27] "Als Selbstbewußtes Individuum aber existiert der Kanake nur auf dem Paßfoto."

Kanaksprak, Zaimoglu characterizes the Kanake as the child of guest workers, neither German nor Turkish, born into Germany only as member of the "ethnic" or "multicultural zoo" (11). In his introduction to *Kopf und Kragen* (1997), he explains that his engagement in the German multicultural reality should be understood in terms of social, not cultural, politics:

> Whoever speaks of collision and incompatibility has to accept sooner or later that the lines of conflict are not running between cultural blocks but rather within cultures. A pack of sheep stays together because the sheepdogs push them together (11).[28]

According to Zaimoglu, the Germans construct Turkish "cultural difference" as an expression of their nostalgia and longing for feeling and warmth. Zaimoglu here echoes other cultural critics' concern with a contemporary primitivism or exoticism, which bell hooks, for instance, has called "the commodification of Otherness." hooks has explained, for example, that white Americans find pleasure in their consumption of African-American culture, that black culture adds "spice" to white American culture (*Black Looks* 21-23). Correspondingly, according to Zaimoglu, white Germans look to the Turks to add spice to the "dull dish" (also hook's term) that is mainstream German culture. While Bertrand Besigye, whom I will engage in chapter two, plays with this idea of difference as enriching - he humorously asserts his "spicy otherness" as a compliment to Norwegian culture - Zaimoglu often expresses cynicism and resentment about exotic representations of the ethnic other.

Zaimoglu furthermore blames the promoters of "guestworker literature," both German and Turkish, for contributing to the image of the Turk in Germany as a different,

[28] "Wer von Zusammenprall und Unverträglichkeit spricht, muss sich früher oder später mit dem Umstand abfinden, dass die Konfliktlinien nicht zwischen den Kulturblöcken, sondern vor allem innerhalb der Kulturkreise verlaufen. Eine Schafherde bleibt zusammen, weil die Hirtenhunde sie zusammentreiben."

incapable, inferior and pitiful being. In reference to Günter Wallraff's famous book *Ganz Unten* (On the bottom) (1985),[29] he writes:

> Since the end of the 70s, a "guestworker literature" that is whiny and ingratiating has been spreading the legend about the "poor but good-hearted Turk Ali." It reproduces a "trash-collector prose" that typecasts the Kanake in the role of victim. (11-12)[30]

In contrast, Zaimoglu has called his project "a new realism" (*Kanaksprak* 17). The *Kanaken*, he writes, seek freedom from all past representations:

> They wish neither to turn to the supermarket of identities, nor to be taken up in the egalitarian herd of exiles. They have their own inner character and very clear ideas of self-determination. They form the real generation X, who has been refused its own individuation and ontogenesis (13).[31]

Most critics have focused on the provocative side of Zaimoglu's project. Petra Fachinger, for instance, places Zaimoglu in a tradition of marginal writing that endeavors to "resist marginalization while simultaneously experiencing or even celebrating the margin as a site of empowerment" (*Rewriting Germany* 18). Tom Cheeseman, who has written several articles on the Kanak project, likewise views Zaimoglu's project as successful cultural politics. Compared to Fachinger and Cheeseman, I am more interested in the marginal voices within Zaimoglu's project at large and in the female voices in his

---

[29] *Ganz Unten*, a reportage written by the German journalist disguised as a Turk, has become heavily criticized for stereotyping the Turk. Although I understand the criticism of the stereotypical image of the Turk that Wallraff presented and the way he "used" this stereotype for his political project, I also think that some credit must be given to Wallraff, who aimed to expose the harsh conditions that many guest workers encountered when they came to Germany. As I mentioned in the introduction, Wallraff's project is today often dismissed together with many leftist cultural projects of the 70s and 80s (including *Gastarbeiterliteratur*) not only by Zaimoglu but more generally by scholars oriented toward postmodern identities.

[30] "Eine weinerliche, sich anbiedernde und öffentlich geförderte "Gastarbeiter-literatur" verbreitet seit Ende der 70er Jahre die Legende vom 'armen, aber herzensguten Türken Ali'. Sie verfaßt eine 'Müllkutscher-Prosa', die den Kanaken auf die Opferrolle festlegt."

[31] "Sie möchten sich weder im Supermarkt der Identitäten bedienen, noch in der egalitären Herde von Heimatvertriebenen aufgehen. Sie haben eine eigene Prägung und ganz klare Vorstellungen von Selbstbestimmung. Sie bilden die eigentliche Generation X, der Individuation und Ontogenese verweigert worden sind."

less famous second book. While Zaimoglu himself defines the *Kanaken* as a group of discontented lower-class ethnic outsiders, there are those in his texts who deviate from this popular image in interesting ways. Fachinger and Cheeseman both fail to engage sufficiently with the differences among the voices in Zaimoglu's projects as well as with the positive attitudes that exist in the texts. However, Cheeseman admits at the end of his article "Talking '*Kanak*': Zaimoglu contra Leitkultur," that Zaimoglu's project is ambiguous: it introduces "proliferating differences" into German culture, and these differences represent a potentially positive development (99). [32]

Speaking Back to German Society

The demand of ethnic equality is expressed through the anger explicit in most of the monologues in *Kanaksprak* and *Koppstoff*. It is as if the young men and women are knocking violently on the closed door of German society, wishing to have their individual voices and their individual identities acknowledged. Resisting the sentiment of being invisible and objectified at the same time, Büjük Ibo, 18, a meatpacker, says, "The first problem: identity, to be a person" (44).[33]

As indicated, the voices that come to be heard in these two books are generally resentful toward Germans and German culture. They are disillusioned with life and resigned to "living the stereotype" of the uncultured, angry, sometimes criminal Turkish-German. The poet Memet, 29, for instance, explains the life of Turkish-Germans

[32] Apart from Cheeseman and Fachinger, the German critic Manuela Günther wrote an article on Zaimoglu that focused on the performative aspects of the Kanak identity. Günther also neglected to acknowledge those voices that resist Zaimoglu's script, that express difference or "perform differently." See Manuela Günther, "Wir sind bastarde, freunde…: Feridun Zaimoglu's *Kanak Sprak* und die performative Struktur von Identität."

[33] "Erste sorge: identität, ne person sein."

pessimistically. He defines this lost generation as "bastards," who have come to reflect the worst of the different worlds they know. Memet has seen his old-fashioned father sacrifice his soul for a middle-class life in Germany that never fit him. He has seen the women of his culture become isolated victims of their husbands' failures and aggressions. Memet envisions the *Kanake* identity as a no-man's land in-between their parents' culture and German culture, signifying both loss and a potential freedom from a too-strong cultural attachment. The extent of his outsidership, however, refuses him any sense of freedom. Memet concludes: "As long as we are not allowed to really become a part, we will absorb the anomalies and perversions of this country as if we were sponges, and then spit out the shit." (114).[34]

Hostility and xenophobia appear in Zaimoglu's texts as defining characteristics of German culture. The four-page monologue of Akay, 29, who is identified as "from the flea-market," is a fuming diatribe directed toward an ungenerous and closed German culture unable to embrace its immigrants and foreigners:

> The Germans hate themselves and everyone who comes in their way, and at some point some will choke on such a disturbed attitude, since their goddamn souls are trapped in such a lump of shit, and then there is revenge, you can count on it… (25)[35]

The portrayals of Germans also indicate that there exist fundamental cultural differences between mainstream German culture and its Turkish immigrants; that there are specific German cultural traits with which the Turkish-Germans cannot identify. Some such traits stressed in these diatribes include emotional distance, love of rational

[34] "Solange dieses land uns den wirklichen eintritt verwehrt, werden wir die anomalien und perversionen dieses landes wie ein schwamm aufsaugen und den dreck ausspucken."
[35] "Die alemannen hassen sich und jeden, der ihnen über'n weg läuft, und irgendwann kriegen welche so ne störung reingewürgt, weil sie ihre gottverdammte seele in so nem batzen schiß baden, und da kommt die rache, du kannst die uhr danach stellen."

reasoning, and inwardness. Other times, German culture is represented through an imperial mindset inherently prejudiced against its others – Jews, Russians and Turks - and the Germans as a people aggressively moving around the world without shame or reserve.

According to Hakan, 22, for instance, Germany's relation to the Third World is one of domination. Germans are traveling around the world, "behaving like broken Gullivers," stuffing themselves with folklore while bawling out loud and chasing everything "foreign" away (85-86). By using epithets like "Aryans," "blond devils" and "pogrom swines," Hakan holds present-day Germans accountable for the crimes of the past, and insists that the racist history characteristic of both German Nazism and German colonialism is a determinant for the way contemporary Germans relate to their foreign inhabitants. In several of the monologues, German culture is even described as perverse and mentally unhealthy. Ercan, 24, who is a gigolo, gives testimony to some of his clients' sexual desires, one of whom asks for a "Jewish performance." He further claims that such sexual perversity is only another reflection of a damaged culture, a culture haunted by the dead (71-72).

The insistence on the determining meaning of the Nazi and colonial past for the contemporary German multicultural world is more than a simple strategy through which the outsiders can "get back" at the Germans and express their disillusion with their lives. It appears also to be a way to deal with everyday racism in Germany. The Turkish-German writer Zafer Senocak has suggested in several books and articles that the Turkish-German experience should be compared to the history of Jews in Germany. In an interview reprinted in his *Atlas des Tropischen Deutschlands* entitled "May one compare

Turks and Jews, Mr. Senocak?", he argues that minorities remain considerably marked with their "foreignness" in Germany, and that this fact mirrors the failures of an earlier German society to acknowledge a Jewish-German symbiosis. "In reality," Senocak wrote in an earlier article from 1991 with the characteristic title "Wann ist der Fremde zu Hause" (When is the Foreigner at Home?), "the German culture is not […] prepared for a multicultural society" (74). A telling indication of the lack of integration is Zaimoglu's decision to close the book with the voice of Yüksel's, an Islamic fundamentalist. With a sense of prophetic force, Yüksel's monologue suggests that if too long frustrated, *Kanaken* may become the subjects of destructive ideologies.

*

Many of Zaimoglu's subjects construct a dichotomy between a German culture marked by distanced intellectualism and the culture of its outsiders, characterized by more intimacy and feeling. As a shield against a culture in which they feel unwelcome, they invert the ethnographic gaze usually directed at them. Rather than viewing their representation of German coldness as *only* as a stereotype, considering its frequent appearance in migrants' literature, one might consider it also a criticism of the modern German welfare state. Indirectly, such accusations criticize the modern welfare state and its inability to embrace others in terms other than rational or organizational ones. Lars Wendelius, who writes about a diverse group of immigrant writers' texts in Sweden in his book *Den dubbla identiteten* (The Double Identity)(2002), shows many favorable descriptions in this literature of the humanitarian welfare state – "a good society," concerned with the wellbeing of the whole. He also points to the opposite, however, the impersonality and anonymity of the welfare state: "The individual […] is violated in the

rational welfare state that does not understand the inner needs of humans" (77).[36] Wendelius fails, however, to question whether the coldness thematized by immigrant writers is a coldness specific to the modern welfare state, and whether it is a coldness that specifically targets immigrants. By focusing on coldness, loneliness and estrangement as definite traits of the modern welfare state, which affect insiders and outsiders alike, Wendelius eludes the question of racism or xenophobia (81).

One of Zaimoglu's female subjects in *Koppstoff* expresses the paradox of living in a society that rationally *could* or *should* be a paradise for an immigrant like herself, but that is not. The 27-year-old student Cagil, who upon her arrival in Germany anticipated that such an organized and clean country would indeed become her paradise, explains that her experiences of German racism has made her disillusioned with German society and the German people. Her response is a gradual and voluntary self-segregation from mainstream society (56-57).

Zaimoglu also suggests that a "German" over-emphasis on rationality as a guide to life affects immigrants negatively. Many *Kanaken* explain that such rationalism targets them; they are intellectually distanced as a group by the German rational mind and seen as "different outsiders," rather than encountered as unique individuals or engaged intimately. Fikret, "unemployed," humorously describes the rational German as an archeologist with a "pick-axe reason" (*Spitzhackenräson*) who produces the *Kanake* from his or her compulsion to explain and rationalize:

> But, brother, the German likes to be a lecturer (*dozent*) and likes to shit one wisdom after the other into the world, only when it comes to opening up his own personal position and letting out the swarming mass of worms, he does not want to take part anymore. The German, brother, eats crisis, shits crisis, and gives to

[36] "Individen […] kränks i den rationalistiska välfärdsstat som inte förstår människans innersta behov."

> you that little microbe of brooding too, so that also in you there is crisis and it rattles until Doomsday. (83)[37]

Fikret's analysis is not merely a mockery of the rational fool who can only relate to the world by thought. It is also a lower-class attack on an educated and intellectual middle class. Indirectly, Fikret comments on how cultural dominance works. On the one hand, he criticizes how immigrants have become hate-objects of a hostile German majority, and on the other he warns about the knowledge that the authoritarian German's "lectures" impose upon migrants or ethnic others. Through such attacks on German rationalism, Zaimoglu's subjects are commenting on the intellectual or "discursive" violence committed against marginalized groups. The German intellectual acts as the authority even with respect to the very identity of the *Kanaken*. "I am fed up with this shit about two cultures," (96)[38] says Hasan, 13. The poet Memet likewise criticizes the way a split or troubled identity is imposed on migrants by intellectuals:

> The bastard is told that he feels unwell because within him live two souls and two cultures. That is a lie. You want to convince the bastard that he only must decide which soul he wants, as if it were some technical operation, in which the gears interlock, as if the psyche were like a malfunctioning mechanism. (110)[39]

By asserting his "wholeness" and his subjective agency, Memet rejects the split identity promoted by intellectuals. Such imposition is for Memet only another form of "othering" that aims to make the *Kanake* weak and invisible as an autonomous

---

[37] "Aber, bruder, der alemanne ist ja gern dozent und mag ne weisheit nach der andren in die welt scheißen, nur wenn's drum geht, mal die eigene personhaltung aufzuknacken und's mal madengewimmel rauszulassen, ist er nicht mit von der partei. Der allemanne, bruder, frißt krise, scheißt krise, und steckt dich mit ner grübelmikrobe an, daß es auch in dir kriselt und scheppert bis zum jüngsten tag."
[38] "Diese scheiße mit den zwei kulturen steht mir bis hier…"
[39] "Man sagt dem bastard, er fühle sich unwohl, weil zwei seelen bzw. zwei kulturen in ihm wohnen. Das ist eine lüge. Man will dem bastard einreden, er müsse sich nur für eine einzige seele entscheiden, als ginge es um einen technischen handgriff, damit die räder sich verzahnen, als sei seine psyche ein lahmgelegter betrieb."

individual. Memet's indictment is reminiscent of Zafer Senocak's statement in 1991, that the time was not yet ripe for the desired *metamorphose*, that still, Germans and Turks remained too much apart and too dependent on their negatively defined identities to truly meet and create a common future (*Atlas* 112). Zaimoglu's texts, also from the 1990s, testify to a very early stage of this metamorphose.

The Differentiation Within the Turkish-German Community

The *Kanaken* are not merely responding to a hostile and "strange" majority culture; they are also constructing their identity against the integrated middle-class Turks, who have found ways to fit successfully into German society. By doing this, they stress that the achievement of ethnic diversity on terms set by the dominant culture is not equivalent to the achievement of true social equality. Reminiscent of the American coinage for blacks who adapted to white culture - "Uncle Toms" - the "sweet little Alis" in *Kanaksprak* are ridiculed, for instance, by a rapper with the name Ali, who accuses them of serving the Germans in their anus and carrying the chocolate coating as a kind of identity and mark of subjugation (32). The integration-friendly, mostly educated Turks are not only mocked for their "betrayal" of their true identity; they are also scorned for their lack of solidarity with their less educated and less successful countrymen. Zaimoglu writes in his foreword to *Kanaksprak*:

> Many Turks have learned to imitate the German bourgeois and have been transformed into the nice colleague "Ali," whom you sometimes bring to the pub after work. Others have made the leap to the university or they have become part of a circle of international academics. For true intellectuals, interculturality has always been something self-evident. Those who are integrated in this way have

> clearly made it into German society. They are socially manageable, have no societal explosiveness. In this book, you will look for them in vain. (18)[40]

Not completely in vain, actually. Among Zaimoglu's Kanak subjects, there is one academic. Kadir, 32, is a sociologist, who testifies to the differentiation that exists within the Turkish-German community. Rather than setting up a difference between rebellious *Kanaken* and integrated middle-class Turkish-Germans, however, he points to another divide: the gap between secular and religious outlooks on life. Kadir, a middle-class Turkish-German cosmopolitan, does not show much sympathy with the representatives of the older Turkish generation or with the religious young. Rather, he criticizes their religious piety and their inability to break away from their past. Kadir, one of the more forward-looking and optimistic voices in Zaimoglu's texts, puts his hopes in a younger generation of *Kanaken* that has broken with the backwardness of their parents' generation and cultivated a positive attitude towards modern life and German society.

Kadir is an unusual *Kanake* in Zaimoglu's *Kanaksprak*. Unlike most of the voices, he contradicts Zaimoglu's description in the beginning of his book of the non-integrated *Kanake*. On the other hand, he still echoes the wish of many to turn away from the past and create an independent identity for the future: an identity that is neither traditionally Turkish nor traditionally German but something different. He even expresses shame at those of his countrymen who in his mind are uncultured, blindly religious, and filled with nostalgia for their past. He makes fun of the way they dress, the kitsch with

[40] "Mancher Türke hat gelernt, es deutschen Kleinbürgern gleichzutun und ist zum netten Kollegen "Ali" mutiert, den man mal nach Feierabend zum Stammlokal mitnimmt. Andere haben den Sprung zur Universität geschafft und verkehren in deutschen oder internationalen akademischen Kreisen. Für wirklichen Intellektuellen war Interkulturalität immer etwas Selbstverständliches. Dergestalt Integrierte haben es unbestritten in der deutschen Gesellschaft zu etwas gebracht. Sie sind "sozial verträglich", haben keine gesellschaftliche Sprengkraft. In diesem Buch wird man vergeblich nach ihnen suchen."

which they furnish their homes, and their trust in proverbs and sayings rather than in rational reasoning. Moreover, he makes fun of their broken German or their heavy Turkish dialects, and he ridicules the macho men and their submissive wives, who walk seven steps behind their men. They will never, he asserts, arrive in Germany or in modern life:

> They are children of a false orthodoxy, and they live without participating in life; they are waiting for the mystical sign that will lead them to pack up their tents and return home. (103)[41]

Even if Kadir's tone may appear negative and spiteful, his different perspective is important. He contradicts those *Kanaken* who view an oppressive and hostile German majority society as the single cause of their problems. Kadir explains that neither the resentful *Kanake* nor the parent generation have taken the proper steps to integrate. Both have remained focused on their disadvantage and their difference from Germans. In Kadir's mind, both the past-oriented identity of his parents and the resentful rebelliousness of many *Kanaken* are incompatible with the secular and modern life of contemporary Germany.

The author Zaimoglu positions himself in his foreword to *Kanaksprak* as a participant-observer ethnographer, an insider-outsider among the *Kanaken*. Just like Kadir, he is one of those integrated "German" Turks toward whom many of his subjects express resentment. The author has in interviews explained his own in-between position. In one interview, he says:

> I love the lower class, after all that's where I come from. And I love the bourgeois decadence, this little freedom that gives you the opportunity of working with

[41] "Sie sind kinder einer fehlerhaften orthodoxie und sie leben ausgerechnet ohne rechte beteiligung, sie warten auf das mystische zeichen, das ihnen anzeigt, ihre zelte abzubrechen und heimzukehren."

> culture (In that regard, I am a little distanced from that which is called collective and collective characteristics). (Söhler "Zaimoglu: Faule Aprikosen")[42]

Zaimoglu's ambiguous position as an outsider to the world of his interviewed subjects and as the "author" of the texts makes him an easy target for those who view him as an opportunist. His own role in the project is easily undermined by the fact that he is an intellectual speaking *for* his subjects. While it is true that this frustrated group of individuals that he interviews probably approve of an ally who speaks for their interests, Zaimoglu's provocative and polemic appearances have not sat well with some Turkish-Germans. Those who are critical of Zaimoglu argue that he has benefited professionally from his intellectual project while the subjects of his projects have remained stigmatized outsiders. As Tom Cheeseman points out, the Kanak-Attak movement created after the publication of Zaimoglu's *Kanaksprak* suffers from a divide between intellectuals and activists, the latter of whom assert the absurdity of university-educated intellectuals "teaching" working-class youth how subjugated they are by global capitalism and how misled they are by multiculturalism ("Talking 'Kanak'" 192-193).

While there is clearly something commendable about Zaimoglu's intention to give voice to an excluded Turkish-German underclass, his raging polemic against German society can easily be interpreted as counter-productive to the emancipation of the Turkish-German community. Zaimoglu risks appearing as a privileged outsider, speaking *for* the *Kanaken*, giving them an identity, just like those intellectuals of "guestworker

[42] "Ich liebe die Unterschicht, da komme ich schließlich her. Und ich liebe die bürgerliche Dekadenz, diese kleine Freiheit, die einem die Beschäftigung mit der Kultur gibt (Insofern bin ich von allem abgerückt, was Kollektive und Kollektiveigenschaften sein sollen)."

literature" he so heavily criticizes. What is the difference, in the end, between the institutions *Gastarbeiterliteratur* and *Kanak Literatur*? Aren't both drawing attention to economic hardships and ethnic marginalization in Germany? Zaimoglu is not unaware of this contradiction, however. In the end of his book *Abschaum* (1997), in a moment where there is little hope for the young Turkish-German protagonist to improve his life (he has just come out of prison and has relapsed into drug-use), Zaimoglu makes his protagonist reflect on his situation. His words – spoken by someone who is not an intellectual but who still sounds like one – can be interpreted as symptomatic of Zaimoglu's own position of negotiator between the intellectual and the downtrodden social outsider:

> Now I'm sitting here trying to shock our intellectuals, trying to terrify our assimilated ones, to fascinate certain people: fascination with the criminalized subject, with the wild Other, fascination with those who come from the lowest of the low [*ganz unten*], and I'm glad about it or what, I dunno, fascination with misery. It might be fascinating for you all, but for me it's just shit, everything's shit. (180)[43]

While appearing to dismiss the intellectual position as unethical compared to the sheer misery of the protagonist, the statement may also reveal a certain self-reflexive irony on Zaimoglu's part. It can be read as a negative evaluation of gangster life; it can also be read as a comment undermining Zaimoglu's own role of authority in a literary project aiming to capture the experience of "low life."

[43] "Jetzt sitze ich da, und versuche unsere Intellektuellen zu schockieren, unsere Assimilierten in Schrecken zu setzen, gewisse Menschen zu faszinieren: Faszination mit dem kriminalisierten Objekt, mit dem wilden Anderen, Faszination mit denjenigen ganz unten, und ich bin froh darüber oder was, ich weiss nicht, Faszination mit Misere. Es ist vielleicht faszinierend für Euch alle, aber für mich isse's Scheisse, alles's Scheisse."

Unique and Individual Visions

A not sufficiently explored topic is the discrepancy between the individual *Kanaken* in Zaimoglu's *Kanaksprak* and the caricature that Zaimoglu has become famous for promoting. Alongside the vulgar, disillusioned and resentful *Kanake* expressed in the majority of the monologues in *Kanaksprak*, some voices stand out as especially unique and forward-looking. In these passages, the *Kanake* appears as a more visionary and conciliatory figure than the one described by Zaimoglu in the foreword. Instead of allowing the force of the vulgar, resentful and disillusioned voices to overshadow the more optimistic voices, I wish to highlight them and show how they undermine a too simple interpretation of the Kanak identity.

One of those voices is the 27-year-old transsexual (before a man, now a woman). Under the subtitle "fraugeworden" (to have become a woman), Azize talks about her transformation. Azize claims that it was about authenticity, that she failed to live "like herself" in a body that did not feel like hers. Azize does not prioritize the division between Germans and non-Germans, or, religious and secular, in her monologue; instead, Azize's quest for her true identity follows a course more uniquely individual. After having tried a host of "performances" as a man that resulted in two suicide attempts, she concludes that everyone must "live according to her own style" (36). Although Azize's struggle for authentic identity is different from and in certain ways more complicated than that of other *Kanaken* in Zaimoglu's book, her example comes to represent a variation on the claim of authenticity that underlies the rebellious attitude of the *Kanaken*. Azize feels her authentic identity is being violated both by pressures to conform and by prejudice against the deviance that is her "difference." Azize's monologue serves as a

reminder that cultural dominance and cultural prejudice work on many levels. Her identity problem – living in the wrong body – becomes a metaphor for the entire *Kanak* project, suggesting that the urban tribe, consisting mostly of immigrant youths, inhabits a German body in which it feels alienated. Figuratively, it suggests that a transformation of this body is underway as a step to facilitate identification between it and its diverse contents.

One of the more optimistic voices in *Kanaksprak* is Ali, 23, a rapper. In Ali's monologue, it becomes clear that the Kanak project is indebted to an imported hip-hop and rap culture from the US, embraced by young people from urban areas, especially immigrants, as a means of positive self-expression and social critique.[44] Zaimoglu explains his project in the foreword as a free-style sermon of rap, analogous to the Black-consciousness movement in the USA (15, 17). This urban subcultural tradition holds that the pathologies of the ruling "white" class – including racism – are responsible for denying urban youth their subjecthood and self-respect. Starting his monologue with a short lesson in the history of rap, Ali gives credit to African-American rap for enlightening and reinforcing the pride and identity of lower-class urban youth outside the US. Ali's monologue continues as a defense of the positive and affirmative aspects of rap music. With the emergence of the American rap group "Public Enemy," Ali claims, *their culture* began.[45] The *good* morals derived from this culture, Ali explains - which include

[44] See for instance Elisabeth Loentz, "Yiddisch, Kanak Sprak, Klezmer, and HipHop: Ethnolect, Minority Culture, Multiculturalism, and Stereotype in Germany," and Tom Cheeseman, "Akcam – Zaimoglu – Kanak Attak: Turkish Lives and Letters in German."

[45] Public Enemy is a New York-based hip-hop group, considered the pioneers of political rap. They are known for their politically charged lyrics and their active interest in the concerns of primarily African-American inner-city youth.

a "proud heart, free spirit, and unclouded vision" - are a means to survive in downtrodden neighborhoods:

> I adopted the good code of honor that said: don't throw your life away, when you want to be truly Bronx, stay away from that which will make you and the community weak, no drugs, no crime, and strength and respect for sisters and brothers, and only protect those in the community who remain clean out of pure conviction […] We are something like head-hunters, we chase the kids on the streets, we fish after them, we drag them from the haze and fog, we must use hard language with them, since day and night they are surrounded by human waste, we must scream at them, that they give up these god-damn syringes and the miserable gangster-talk, we must offer them clear guidelines, we must shout louder than pimps and dealers and car-thieves and druggies and blackmailers and gamblers and other violent actors […] You can only do that if you are a role-model and if you make that old-fashioned word virtue attractive like a strawberry-cake. […] And I tell you, brother, I'd rather let myself be called a son-of-a-bitch, if I can keep one *Kümmel* [Turk] away from the streets. (28-30)[46]

Ending his monologue with the words: "raw shell with a soft heart, that is a must,"[47] Ali's text is a surprisingly moralistic attempt to bring hope and prospect to places and people that have little of either. By using words such as virtue (*Tugend*), conviction (*Überzeugung*), and strength (*Stärke*), Ali's monologue comes to call for social responsibility rather than mere rebellion.

Not surprisingly, critics have been very interested in the vulgarity in Zaimoglu's texts and how it comes to represent an oppositional consciousness both in terms of class

[46] "Ich nahm gleich auch den guten kodex an, der da heißt: wirf dein leben nicht weg, wenn du echt bronx sein willst, pfoten weg von dem, was dich und die gemeinde schwächt, no drugs, no crime, und stärke und respekt vor schwestern und brüdern, und schutz nur in der gemeinschaft derer, die sich clean halten aus purer überzeugung. […] Wir sind so was wie kopfgeldjäger, wir jagen die kids auf den straßen, wir angeln sie, wir zerren sie aus dunst und nebel, und wir müssen ihnen mit der harten sprache kommen, weil sie tag und nacht umlagert sind von menschlichem müll, wir müssen sie anbrüllen, dass sie diese gottverschissenen spritzen und das elende banditengegockele sausen lassen, wir müssen zuhälter und dealer und autoknacker und kiffer und drücker und glücksspieler und die gewaltbereiten überschreien […] Das geht nur, wenn du vorbild bist und dieses altmodische wort tugend schmackhaft machst wie ne olle hostie mit erdbeergeschmack. […] Und ich sage dir, bruder, da lass ich mich sogar als hundesohn beschimpfen, wenn ich dafür einen kümmel von der straße wegkriege."

[47] "Rauhe Schale mit weichem herz, das muß."

and ethnicity. Leslie Adelson, for instance, characterizes the world of *Kanaken* as "that slangy netherworld of male figures that neither a Turkish nor a German mainstream would accept […] a discourse of transgressive bodies that privileges *Dreck*" (Adelson, "Touching Tales" 115). Above, however, is an example of a young man not privileging *Dreck* but dedicated to dragging others out of it. While Zaimoglu in general preaches against the moral authority of the majority, the emancipation envisioned above is a truly moral project, emphasizing the importance of virtue for the individual wishing to escape his or her social misery. Ali's vision remains one of the more powerful, forward-looking voices that have been neglected both by critics and by Zaimoglu himself in his promotion of the Kanak identity. Ali rejects Zaimoglu's thesis that German hostility must be met by hostility. While most men in the book appear to agree with Mehmet, the poet, who characterizes them as the "rotten proletariat…. ugly, full of hate, lowly and filled with emotions" (109), Ali suggests, without any unrealistic optimism, that it is possible to seek a higher moral ground. Although the downtrodden identity that Mehmet describes exists, Ali suggests, each Kanak can still rise from the downtrodden with help from his community.

In a few other monologues, there is further evidence of a generous communitarian spirit among the young men. Fikret, 25 and unemployed, for instance, makes many observations about German culture and concludes that what it truly lacks is community, feeling and compassion. In his monologue, called "Erbarmen is's wahre Vitamin" (Compassion is the true Vitamin), he says:

> When my poor fellow neighbor is hungry, I want to feed him and be the door of his house, when my heart is moved by one of God's creatures out in the cold, I am straw under his feet, and I also give him the last rags in my wardrobe, if I see how

> an Africa-brother feels distressed by those assholes of white trash, I change the color of my skin on the spot and become his fighter, even if someone should put the screws on me. Brother […] compassion is the true vitamin that you have to produce out of your own body, and distribute whenever you see an outstretched hand, that I call the first fact of the dog-life that man always lives, it does not matter where you take a closer look. (80-81)[48]

Almost religious in his defense of justice and generosity, Fikret speaks of a compassion and social responsibility that acts in the world without too much calculation or program. The social code of one's community is here deeply connected to the pride one takes in protecting the needy and the responsibility one feels towards others. The fact that Fikret uses the phrase "God's creatures" about people indicates that religiosity can very well be part of such a code. Primarily, however, Fikret talks about an ethical identity that acts in the world. By describing how he acts spontaneously and out of compassion for the hungry and the cold, how he is urged to identify with any black person afflicted by racism, he suggests that the *Kanake* is motivated not by hate but by love and compassion. When Fikret says "the German thinks he has too much of something, but he has too little of something" (80-81), he suggests that lack of such spontaneous compassion is the greatest shortcoming of a secularized, rational and modern society such as Germany.

The longing to escape hardness and antagonism and the vision of a more compassionate German society are in Fikret's protocol combined with an assertion of

[48] "Wenn der olle nachbar hungert, will ich ihm ernährer sein and ihm seine haustür, wenn mir's herz bebt, weil da'n gottesgeschöpf inner lausekälte bibbert, bin ich stroh unter seinen füßen, und geb ihm auch den letzten fetzen innen garderobe, wenn ich seh, daß'n afrikabruder drangsal spürt wo die man von weißarschmotzern gezeugt, wechsele ich mir auf der stelle die farbe von der pelle und bin ihm sein streiter, auch wenn ich denn genommen werd in ne unwohlige eisenzange. Bruder […] erbarmen is's wahre vitamin, daß du man schön vonnem körper hauseigen produzieren mußt, und dort verteilen, wo sich ne hand streckt, das nennich ersten fakt vonnem hundeleben, daß das mensch ja immer führt, egal, wo du eine lupe hinhältst."

individuality. Bayram, 18, a breaker, expresses the possibilities for a different and better future as follows:

> If you are a lamb, they will eat you, if you are a little fish, they will eat you, if you are without honor they will eat you, and since the standards are shitty, since they say: live or die, since only few remain with a clear head, you must say: where we are, by the breakers and the rappers, by the brothers and sisters, no more nonsense, we are not swimming with the current, we are making our own strict current, where everyone is a river and stops being a goddamn rivulet (41-42).[49]

Bayram's Kanak-hood is here predicated on a strong sense of individualism. In this passage, it is also obvious that the *Kanake* does not see his identity as flowing *with* the mainstream culture but rather as existing independently from the mainstream culture.

Emancipation or Defeat

As Tom Cheeseman claims, the label *Kanake* is "a flagrantly artificial construct" meant to provoke a German culture unable to embrace its foreign influences ("Akcam" 187). A close reading of *Kanaksprak*, however, shows that the text is a more differentiated project than critics have acknowledged. Whether *Kanaksprak* as a project represents an emancipatory step forward or a defeatist step backward for young Turkish-Germans is a matter of perspective.

Not surprisingly, attempts to create a dialogue between representatives of the Kanak movement and representatives of the German political establishment appear to have failed because of the inability of each side to acknowledge the legitimacy of the

[49] "Bist du'n lamm, fressen sie dich, bist du'n kleiner fisch, fressen sie dich, bist du ohne kodex, fressen sie dich, und weil die beschissensten tarife gängig sind, weil's heißt: friß o stirb, weil die allerwenigsten klaren kopf behalten, mußt du sagen: hier bei uns, bei den breakern und rappern, bei den brüdern und schwestern, ist schluß mit dem stuß, wir schwimmen nicht mit dem strom, wir machen nen eigenen strikten strom, wo jeder'n fluß ist und aufhört 'n gottverschissenes rinnsal zu sein."

other's stance. This is very well exemplified in an article by Cheeseman, where he defends the merits of Zaimoglu's project. In this article, Cheeseman recreates in detail a conversation that took place on May 8 in the program "Drei nach neun" on Channel N3 (Bremen) between Zaimoglu and a few invited guests from the political and cultural establishment. Cheeseman's purpose is to show the failure of the establishment to take Zaimoglu's project seriously. In the following, I will show that this failure is partly the responsibility of Zaimoglu himself, who failed to acknowledge the valid points of those who criticized him.

In this appearance, Zaimoglu reads a piece from his work, and two politicians (Heide Simonis and Norbert Blüm) and a famous songwriter (Wolf Biermann) respond to his readings. According to Cheeseman's reading of this event, Simonis, Blüm and Biermann all fail to grasp the political meaning of the abusive language used by Zaimoglu. They cling to a notion of a universal code of language, and to a notion of German culture as unitary. In the end, Cheeseman writes, they want the *Kanaken*, as well as all migrants, to become "normal bourgeois citizens, subjects of German *Leitkultur,* such as themselves" (98). When Blüm and Simonis compare Zaimoglu's language to that of the neo-fascist DVU (*Deutsche Volksunion*), Cheeseman interprets this as "fixing" the *Kanaken* as fascist, and when Simonis doubts that any Turkish woman speaks like the vulgar Kanak in Zaimoglu's text, Cheeseman says she is "stating the patronizing position of German feminism on Muslim women" (95). Cheeseman accuses the Germans in this program of having culturally dominant attitudes and of failing to understand the political aesthetics behind Zaimoglu's project.

I believe Cheeseman fails to give these Germans due credit for their quite understandable and very valuable reactions to Zaimoglu's provocative speech. Cheeseman suggests that the language of the *Kanaken* cannot be criticized in the same way one can criticize the language of the neo-Nazis. He refers to Zaimglu's own response to this accusation, who rightly defends the *Kanaken* by saying, "these people are a bundle of experiences that they've had, the social reality of Germany is involved here…" (96). But should the hateful speech of the *Kanaken* only be endorsed, as Cheeseman suggests? Isn't it also fair to question how effective it really is? Norbert Blüm tellingly criticizes the Kanak language, in the name of humanism, for its hostility towards people (*Menchenverachtung)*: "In this language, there is an enormous amount of contempt for human beings. That is, this language is also a loss of inhibition; the Other is really just material for my aggression" (96). Heidi Simonis' suspicion that Zaimoglu's abusive talk is considerably "male" and unlikely to apply to Turkish-German women is likewise worthy of consideration. While Cheeseman claims that one cannot criticize Zaimoglu on grounds of decency (as Blüm does), and that Simonis' criticism of a masculinized Turkish culture is stereotypical and thus useless, I read both Blüm's and Simonis' arguments as imperative contributions to the dialogue about a German multicultural identity.

In the end, Blüm, Simonis, Zaimoglu and Cheeseman all fail to acknowledge the limited reach of their respective arguments. Because of insufficient openness and understanding, they each fail to create a constructive dialogue. Although Blüm, as a representative of the German establishment, rightly stresses the ethical responsibility of everyone living in Germany, he wrongly fails to acknowledge that the negativity of

Zaimoglu's project is deeply intertwined with the negative experiences of ethnically disadvantaged Turkish-Germans. And although Zaimoglu rightly argues that the hostility is a vital part of his political aesthetic, which mirrors a discriminating German mainstream culture, he fails to admit that they may be other, more productive ways to question or subvert German hostility. Keeping in mind the compassion, moral integrity and social responsibility promoted by Ali and Fikret in their respective monologues in *Kanaksprak*, it is clear that Zaimoglu in the program fails to portray the stark contradictions and ambiguities with which the *Kanaken* in fact engage with their social outsidership in Zaimoglu's books. In this regard, he makes the same mistake as those scholar and critics who focus exclusively on the adversarial aspects of his project.

*

Professor Michael Dyson of Georgetown University engages productively with very similar contradictions and ambiguities in the politics of rap. Dyson argues that those who disapprove of all hostility in rap fail to distinguish between the ideological hostility of majority groups and the experience-based hostility of those who have been the targets of that ideological hostility. Dyson, who has taken part in recent discussions among African-Americans about transgressive versions of blackness, warns against an easy dismissal of rap-music as hostile. In a video-recorded lecture from Boston College in 2005, Dyson, who defends urban youth culture and rap against those who criticize "ghetto-centrism" or those who claim that "the wrong negroes got the microphone," claims that the moral content of rap-music lies beyond the evaluation of rap-music as positive or negative. Without endorsing the sexist, prejudiced or otherwise hostile aspects of rap-culture, Dyson strongly emphasizes that rap is an expression of *ressentiment*, a

response to the pathologies already existing in American society, such as racism, classism, and sexism. Dyson criticizes those who request legislation against hip-hop culture and its abusive language (including misogyny), urging them to see the larger social context of hip-hop and the ability of this musical genre to articulate certain truths about society:

> We understand why these black women are insulted by a hip-hop culture that calls them bitches and *hos* and [other] nefarious things, let's not pretend that we don't know why that is problematic, but it is problematic to suggest that the most vicious forms of misogyny appear in hip-hop, the most visible ones do, but not the most effective. The most effective are the ones that are invisible. […] In America, real misogyny is up in the higher institutions of education, in the churches, the Catholic church, the black Baptist church, the fundamentalist church. They all have their own varieties of vicious misogyny, even as they are the seedbeds for so much that is beautiful and powerful. […] So there is no doubt that the cutting of the tongues symbolically, the silencing of the voice symbolically, and sometimes even literally, is a foot in a culture that focuses on the undeniable pathology that generates from the culture but not the pathology to which that culture responds. So what are they responding to? What are they speaking against? Out of what cauldron of misery and coerced suffering do they articulate their vision? (Dyson, *Rethinking* 56:00-58:41) [50]

Dyson urges those who are critical of the violence in rap-music or of its commercial aspects to ask where the true enemies of democratic change are located. He also emphasizes that identity is always diversified and differentiated. Some rappers are poetic, others are hostile, most are both.

A fair appreciation of the Kanak identity must include, just like Dyson does in his argument about rap music, the question of power inequality and the question of diversity.

---

[50] See Michael Eric Dyson's talk on "Rethinking Black Identity" at Boston College, Jan 31 2005. http://www.frontrow.bc.edu/program/dyson/. In this talk, Dyson endorses a differentiated view of black identity in the US, including the political messages of rap-music. He also strongly emphasizes that what are perceived as prejudiced, sexist and racist rap-lyrics by critics of rap are in reality rather harmless responses to the dangerous and oppressive state-sponsored prejudice, sexism, and racism in the dominant sectors of US society.

While Zaimoglu focuses on the power relations between the Germans and Germany's immigrant communities, he fails to emphasize the diversity within this particular culture to the same extent. His exclusive focus on provocation in his performances in general easily backfires as Germans feel offended and unfairly accused of indifference or hatred. In the end of the program discussed above, the Germans accused Zaimoglu of simply lacking morality and decency, and Zaimoglu accused the Germans of not acknowledging the hardships befalling many young Turkish-Germans. This failure of communication indicated a lack of openness and understanding on both sides. This, in turn, meant that the complexity and ambiguity of both German and Kanak identity were not sufficiently acknowledged by either side.

The *Kanaka* and the Female Perspective

Almost certainly in response to the accusation that there were no women in *Kanaksprak* (except the transsexual), and that the young men in his first book appeared to be speaking a particularly male language and depicting specifically male worlds, Zaimoglu wrote the book *Koppstoff* in 1998. Initially, by adding the voices of *Kanakas* to his larger project, Zaimoglu wanted to prove that his concerns were not gender-specific (*Koppstoff* 9-10). The 26 monologues in *Koppstoff* are more varied than those in his first book, both in style, tone and content, possibly again in response to criticisms of *Kanaksprak* by women. In terms of occupation and age, the women individuals in *Koppstoff* are a more diverse group of individuals than the men in *Kanaksprak*. There is a rapper, a salesperson, a hairdresser, an anarchist, an artist, several students and several professionals; their ages range from 17 to 63. In the beginning of each text, Zaimoglu

reveals where or how he met the woman in question and sometimes why she wanted to take part of the project. Zaimoglu claims in the introduction that it was the women themselves who initiated *Koppstoff*: they came to him spontaneously with their stories and urged him to publish a book on female *Kanakas*.

The women's most apparent contribution to Zaimoglu's project is a strengthening of his criticism of everyday racism in Germany. Just like the men in *Kanaksprak*, the women in *Koppstoff* express their anger and frustration with German xenophobia. They also mock the peculiarities of German culture and conformist Turks. Here, the integrated Turks are "Assimil-Fatmas" or "Assimil-kümmels"; they sell their souls for a cheap visit to the local bar and blush out of joy when a blond German praises them (59). However, a significantly larger number of women acknowledge positive aspects of both Turkish and German culture, and they also elaborate to a greater extent than the men on their own individual approaches to living "differently" and "individually" in German society. These perspectives, which taken together paint a more diverse picture of the Turkish community in Germany, include the female, the religious and the spiritual, perspectives on the *Kanak* identity that are largely absent in *Kanaksprak*. Rather than presenting a specifically female perspective on Germany deviating from the male perspective, the women's voices attest to the diversity of Turkish-German identity and orientation. Their voices also convey a more differentiated understanding of social inequality; many women in *Koppstoff* consider Turkish patriarchy an equally significant obstacle to their emancipation as German xenophobia.

*

The most striking and disturbing element of *Koppstoff* is the extent of the divide – both in terms of class and culture - that exists in Germany between Turkish and German communities. There is also the perception that xenophobia has become an accepted attitude in German society. Zaimoglu suggests in his foreword that the situation for Turkish-Germans and other "foreigners" has worsened in the three years – from 1995 to 1998 – that have elapsed between his two projects:

> Meanwhile violence from the extreme right, verbal as well as physical, is an everyday occurrence, like going to the bakery. Protests are scarce because people are accustomed to it […] Boot-Nazis are just a part of political reality. The real agitators are a few prominent representatives of the political class. The cues have come from mainstream society for a long time. […] When it comes to the political reality in this country, gloom and fury are spreading from many different sources, which I, myself, could not have imagined a few years ago. (10)[51]

There is an overwhelming consensus among the *Kanakas* that "Germany has taken a shit on you," as the student Ferah expresses it (19). Others define German society as, for example, "a grave full of *Kanaken*," "a house that needs restoring" and as lacking in sensitivity and flexibility (19, 33, 57). Corresponding to the overall negative rhetoric in *Kanaksprak*, the women in *Koppstoff* both chastise and ridicule the Germans and their culture. Apart from "the Faschos," the rich "society-bebes" and the capitalists, it is primarily the liberal multiculturalists – as one *Kanaka* expresses it: "Liberalultramild" (13) - who are scorned. The female voices here ridicule, even more strongly than do the male voices in *Kanaksprak*, the benevolent German "multicultural" interest in the other,

[51] "Inzwischen ist rechtsradikale Gewalt, verbal wie körperlich, eine Alltagserscheinung wie der Gang zum Bäcker. Proteste sind ob der Gewöhnung selten geworden. [...] Stiefelnazis sind nur ein Teil der politischen Wirklichkeit. Die eigentlichen Aufwiegler sind einige prominente Vertreter der politischen Klasse. Die Stichworte kommen längst aus der Mitte der Gesellschaft. [...] Bezüglich der politischen Verhältnisse in diesem Land hat sich eine Düsternis und eine Wut breitgemacht, die aus vielen Protokollen spricht und die ich selbst vor ein paar Jahren nicht für möglich gehalten hätte."

which indirectly denies the Turkish-Germans their subjectivity and normality. "I really think we are a kind of entertainment for these people," says Mihriban, 30, salesperson:

> For us it is normal, how we are. But for them, it is interesting, how we make tea or from what glasses we drink tea, how we speak to one another. Everything is new. Maybe like vacation. […] Only a few meters from their house there is a completely different world. I don't think that they want to belong to it. It is perhaps too different. (45)[52]

Zaimoglu's criticism in his introduction of the racism represented by the "Boot-Nazis" on the one hand and by the mainstream society on the other suggests that both groups epitomize dominant attitudes that are unacceptable in a modern multicultural society.

One criticism that Zaimoglu easily attracts is that he, and to some extent also his interview subjects, neglect to make any clear distinction between different types of hostility. This failure to clearly differentiate between differently oriented Germans or to include positive representations of Germans or examples of cross-cultural communication in the texts appear counter-productive to the project. By placing Germans, liberals, fascists, integrated Turks, and capitalists under the same umbrella, Zaimoglu risks presenting a simplified and stereotyped picture of German reality.

That said, the female perspective both complements and questions the Kanak-identity as portrayed in *Kanaksprak*. It presents a way, for instance, to engage productively with Simonis' criticism of Zaimoglu's "masculine" and "male-oriented" discourse. This criticism is echoed in several of the women's stories in *Koppstoff*. In fact, in many of their protocols, Turkish patriarchy appears a more significant obstacle to their

[52] "Ich glaube wirklich, daß wir für diese Leute eine Art Unterhaltung sind. Für uns ist es normal, wie wir sind. Aber für sie ist es so interessant, wie wir Tee kochen oder aus welchen Gläsern wir Tee trinken, wie wir mit einander reden, wie wir uns unterhalten. Alles ist neu. Vielleicht wie Urlaub. Nur ein paar Meter von ihrem Haus entfernt gibt es seine andere Welt. Ich glaube nicht, daß sie dazugehören wollen. Dafür ist es vielleicht zu anders."

integration into German society than does the lack of openness and generosity of the dominant culture. In Zaimoglu's introductory description of Suzan, 29, a translator, he reveals that she wrote to his publishing company, accusing Zaimoglu of glorifying the "typical Turkish machismo" in *Kanaksprak* while ignoring the struggles of women of Turkish background (36). In Suzan's protocol, she criticizes the patriarchal Turkish culture for disallowing women individual freedom: for marrying off daughters to relatives they have never met; for laying the burden of honor on the women's shoulders; for shunning those women who break the traditional rules of the community. Reside, 34, is a German teacher, who describes how she used to watch the lovemaking of her devoutly religious parents through the keyhole and wonder why it seemed more like rape than love-making. She explains how she was unfairly punished whenever she was unwillingly exposed to obscene language or behaviors considered inappropriate for the eyes of girls and women.

Gül, 21, an anarchist living in a squat house, says that she refuses to stand by the stove as a typical *Türkenmutti*, the property of a man (33). Banu, 33, a bartender and now divorced, recounts how she was taken out of school and married off when she was 17. She relates that her uncle, who married a German woman when he came to Germany, never brought his wife and children from Turkey. These women are all resentful towards a Turkish society where women's subordination—even men's unfaithfulness to their wives--is culturally accepted.

*

Many feminists have argued that minority women often risk becoming objects of the racial gaze in discussions of gender equality. Particularly within feminist theory in the

US, non-white women have questioned the authoritarian tendency of white feminism to victimize women of color by assuming that they are victims of patriarchy and that they lack the agency to fight oppression. Leslie Adelson points to this problematic aspect of cross-cultural engagement in the Turkish-German context when she criticizes the "patronizing position of German feminism on Muslim women" ("The Price of Feminism" 310). Deniz Göktürk is also careful to endorse pessimistic German perspectives on Turkish women's lives. In her most recent work, she promotes ethnic comedy as a "departure from the ghettoizing discourse of social problem films" that only generates "compassion fatigue" ("Strangers in Disguise" 112, 121). Moreover, it has been argued that depressing films such as Tevfik Baser's *40qm. Deutschland* (1986) perpetuate stereotypes of oppressed Turkish women. This film, in which a Turkish woman is locked into a small apartment and abused by her guest-worker husband, was one of the first of its kind in Germany, thematizing the isolation of many Turkish women in Germany. The Turkish-German Saliha Scheinhardt, whose books engage with Turkish or Turkish-German social milieus that are oppressive to women, has also been targeted and criticized for portraying a "too bleak" Turkish-German reality. Quite tellingly, the title of her first book indicates the vulnerable, even trapped, position of women in typically patriarchal societies: *Frauen, die sterben, ohne dass sie gelebt hätten* (Women who Die without Having Lived). [53]

In line with Suzan's, Reside's, Gül's and Banu's testimonies from *Koppstoff* above, I take a slightly different approach to this issue. I am inclined to feel more

[53] Saliha Scheinhardt, who came to Germany from Turkey at the age of 17 in the late 1960s, was one of the first Turkish-German women whose literary works were published in German. Many of her books are set in rural areas of Turkey or thematize the difficult aspects of migrant life. Her book above was filmed by Tevfik Baser and received the title *Paradies kaputt: Abschied vom falschen Paradies* (1989).

sympathy with Baser's and Scheinhardt's projects than with scholars' dismissal of them. The abundance of women shelters in Germany and Scandinavia and the increasing number of young Muslim women who go into hiding to avoid victimization by their families cannot simply be ignored. While the above arguments by Adelson and Göktürk are well taken - it *is* important to have a nuanced view of both Turkish and German culture – their criticisms risk ignoring the most victimized for the sake of a more optimistic academic discourse. As I argued in the introduction, the more idealistic, humorous and optimistic approaches to the multicultural reality have their definite merits. But these fashionable arguments are also one-sided. To the extent this fashion entails dismissing books and films about social problems as irrelevant to present-day Germany, it is disturbing, arrogant and untrue. When Göktürk implies that migrants can perform and role-play their way to the German academy (122), she disregards the social realities that stop many from such free role-playing.[54]

*

It is possible to see in Zaimoglu's *Koppstoff* a more productive position in-between heavy pessimism and blind optimism. While *Koppstoff* generally keeps German culture and Turkish culture apart as separate and considerably different entities, by no means does it represent Turkish women's culture in Germany in a one-sided way. While many of the women lament the limitations imposed upon them by the older generation, others relate that they value religion or tradition or that they were brought up "freely" in

[54] My reading of Göktürk is a free interpretation of the conclusion to her article "Strangers in Disguise: Role Play beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy" (2004). She refers to Kafka's ape in his story "Report for an Academy" as follows: "Like the ape Rotpeter, the clever migrants know that they are always already performers, so why not turn it into a strength, play the perfect monkey and address the Academy. After all, there is no easy solution in returning 'back to the roots' or in retreating into a supposedly stable identity beyond role-play" (122).

modern families. Some appreciate the strong family ties in their culture as a contrast to the individualism prevalent in German society and defend other distinct cultural differences. Banu, the bartender, for instance, discloses that even though she considers German women more equal to their men than Turkish women, and even though her bad experience of an arranged Turkish marriage left her deeply disappointed, she is unable to cross the cultural line and understand "German love": a love, in her mind, without sacrifice and jealousy (54). She also reveals that as a Turkish-German female bartender, she feels more respected by foreign men than by German men.

One protocol that stands out in *Koppstoff* is that of Hatice, a 22-year-old law-student. Hatice is a conservative, religious Muslim. Her testimony offers resistance to the dismissal of religion and tradition represented by many other men and women in the two books. It also presents a significant challenge to German society: how should a secular, liberal society relate to communities of conservatively religious people? Hatice first dispels stereotypes by claiming her independence as a Muslim woman. She relates that wearing a headscarf and becoming a believing, practicing Muslim were choices of her own. She relates how her educational experience in German schools has been marked by language problems and outsidership, and how the *Hadja*[55] of her community persuaded her reluctant father to allow her an education. She emphasizes the peacefulness of the Muslim religion – "the most tolerant religion," and considers her religious identity of higher priority than her professional identity. Alluding to the frequent media discussions

[55] The word "Hadja" is Arabic and signifies a woman who has completed a pilgrimage to Mekka.

about the headscarf, she says that she would give up her career before taking off her headscarf.[56]

Hatice regards Germany as actively discriminating against its Muslim community. She laments the absence of Muslim religious rights, the difficulty, for instance, of attaining permission to build mosques and Islamic slaughterhouses. She defends Muslim communities' right to announce Muslim prayers over a loudspeaker – the so-called *Ezan* – something they have not yet been granted anywhere in Germany, she says, not even in a large Muslim community such as the one in Duisburg (69).

Hatice's multicultural claim presents a significant challenge. One easily suspects by the end of Hatice's monologue that Zaimoglu's choice to include a conservative Muslim in his book serves a definite purpose. As a staunch secularist, Zaimoglu may have wanted to reveal and thus criticize the conservatively religious position and its incompatibility with modern secular democracy. On the other hand, Zaimoglu is also known for criticizing feminist former-Muslims for demonizing young Muslim women. Regardless of the extent of Zaimoglu's authorial intervention, and regardless of how representative Hatice is of Muslims in Germany, the multicultural claims she makes in her monologue can be interpreted as legitimate. By claiming the right to practice her religion and reproduce her way of life within Germany, she makes a modern liberal claim.

---

[56] European countries have different approaches to this issue, which is seen as a contested question of religious freedom, female equality, and secular tradition. Although there exists no federal law in Germany that bans headscarves, four German states have introduced bans on headscarves in schools. In one state, Hesse, the ban applies to all civil servants. In the Scandinavian countries, no such bans apply nationwide, but individual companies may specify that their employees cannot wear head-garments to work. In Turkey, headscarves were banned in all civic places, including universities and schools, until the recent election in 2007, when the Islamist party took power.

The contradiction with Hatice's claim is that she appears very unmodern in her provocative disregard of German culture. Her conservative position is revealed in her refusal to see herself as part of German culture; she believes German culture endorses that which is forbidden in her culture. Hatice's idea of a multicultural Germany is far from the humanist vision that Yüksel Pazarkaya promoted in the early 1980s (in the context of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*), which urged Turks in Germany to actively make Germany their second home and German culture their second culture ("Ohne die deutschen" 317). Pazarkaya believes that the key to integration is the willingness of both Germans and Turks to understand and appreciate one another's cultures. Hatice's reason for remaining distant from everything German is different from the reasons given by most other *Kanaken* in Zaimoglu's texts. While the latter deem a "humanist" position hypocritical and align Pazarkaya with the *Liberalultramild*, whose dabbling in foreign cultures proves nothing but their own privilege, Hatice's refusal of such a position is based on her strong religious beliefs. It is her conviction that her Muslim identity requires seclusion rather than inclusion, purity rather than mixture.

More than any other voice in Zaimoglu's texts or in this dissertation, Hatice's voice represents a true multicultural dilemma. The most difficult question raised in Hatice's monologue is whether the fragmented German multicultural world she suggests is a satisfactory and workable model of a future German society. On the one hand, it is Hatice's individual right in a pluralist democracy to practice her religion and to remain as detached from the German mainstream culture as she deems appropriate. On the other hand, from a liberal perspective, it appears both unrealistic and arrogant to cultivate detachment from a majority culture within which one lives. Ironically, considering

Hatice's prejudice against Germans and liberal Turks, she does not practice the tolerance at the core of her religious faith. In the end, Hatice must be criticized for not admitting that she is already part of German society and identity. What she deems a lack of German respect for her Muslim faith neither explains nor entirely excuses her failure to view German society in a more favorable, nuanced and pluralistic light. Hatice's protocol may give some answer to why increasingly more people in Europe, many of whom are liberal Muslims or former Muslims, now insist that all immigrants must be expected to take some cultural risk when they move to a different country.[57] Hatice's complete yet peaceful self-distancing from German culture may not be negative per se, but her prejudice against German culture and her patronizing moralistic judgment of those Turks who have "left their religion and their culture" reveal her intolerance toward difference and diversity. For many, it will also appear conceited of her to claim the minority rights of a country whose majority culture she otherwise does not tolerate.

The youngest participant in the project envisions a very different form of German multi-culture. Nilgün, 17, despises those religious women "who run around in headscarves," who "think they are better than others," and who expect to go to paradise while condemning modern girls like Nilgün to hell for wearing jeans (127). She cannot identify with those women whose lives revolve around cooking, bringing up children and gossiping (127). Nilgün is a typical teenager who has friends of different ethnic origin, and she finds more similarities than differences between herself and German teenagers. She claims that the German and Turkish "middle-class need" to exaggerate cultural differences between German and Turkish culture only reveals what boring, superficial

[57] I am thinking in particular of prominent voices such as Salman Rushdie, Ayyan Hirsi Ali and Taslima Nasreen, who have been at the forefront of the critique of conservative Islam in Europe.

and unhappy lives they all lead (129). Nilgün's wants to find a middle ground between the individual freedom she desires and the part of her tradition that she respects and needs. Having experienced how the rebellion of one of her female friends only resulted in tragedy for all involved, she ponders less drastic ways to emancipate herself:

> I want to assert myself somewhere between soft and hard. I want to feel myself, and I want others to feel me. I want to make a difference. How, I don't know yet. I only know that I can't do it here. I will get away, slowly but surely, I will get away. (130)[58]

Nilgün's perspective on her Turkish-German identity is less antagonistic and more optimistic than most *Kanaken* and *Kanakas* in Zaimoglu's books. Although Nilgün as a woman feels limited by tradition, she wants to find expression for her own individual identity without completely denying this tradition.

Although Nilgün's middle-class position may be a more fortunate place to be than the lower-class position of many other subjects in Zaimoglu's books, Nilgün's security in that regard does not make her oblivious to the condition of other classes. Neither is she attracted to the typical middle-class life that she has seen (she characterizes it as marked by materialism, self-indulgence and boredom). Nilgün's curious, adventurous and searching mind is a stark contrast to the insularity and antagonism exhibited by Hatice and various other *Kanaken*. The last paragraph in the monologue, which reveals that Nilgün perceives her own identity as one in the making, becomes a metaphor for an open, cosmopolitan and flexible identity, never complete, yet dedicated to "being different" in the sense of being yourself.

*

[58] "Irgendwo zwischen weich und hart will ich mich durchsetzen. Ich will mich spüren, und andere sollen mich auch spüren. Ich will etwas bewegen. Wie, weiß ich noch nicht. Ich weiß nur, daß es hier nicht geht. Ich seil mich ab. Auf Wiedersehen. Langsam, aber sicher seil ich mich ab."

Many critics have contrasted Zaimoglu with his writer-colleague Zafer Senocak, who tackles the question of Turkish-German identity from an intellectual, middle-class perspective. Senocak's books have been the objects of considerably more analysis than have Zaimoglu's. They have appeared better suited for making arguments about the hybridity and ambiguity of contemporary German identity.[59] Generally, the refreshing thing about Zaimoglu is that, in contrast to Senocak, he is unambiguous about his message: Turkish-Germans need to be acknowledged as legitimate citizens of Germany. There is honesty in his engagement with the depressing sides of Turkish-German reality. *Koppstoff*, as I have attempted to show, lends itself better than *Kanaksprak* to an argument stressing the diversity of Turkish-German identity. The women appear more creative in their approaches to their identity, which is expressed as a matter of "playing the game without getting too attached" (43), through images such as the building of one's own tent to live in (60) or the finding of one's own stone to stand on (57). That said, if the intellectual fashion is mixing and hybridity – quite fitting for identities like Nilgün's - Zaimoglu also warns against assuming that that such mixing and hybridity alone characterizes the multicultural reality in Germany. While many critics today argue that Turkish-Germans and other minorities need to be represented as something *other* than victims, Zaimoglu maintains that as long as victimization is part of many Turkish-Germans' reality, it needs to be represented as well.

[59] In *Atlas des Tropischen Deutschlands*, Senocak elaborates on how to conceptualize and conceive of a new, more hybrid German culture. In essays with titles such as "Dialogue on a Third Language: Turks, Germans and their Future" and in his own novels and poetry, Senocak promotes the idea of an identity that is both/and or neither/nor instead of posing Turkish and German identity against one another. Critics have established Senocak as a forward-looking writer whose engagement with Turkish-German reality is more ambiguous and complex than Zaimoglu's.

It is easy to see how productive Zaimoglu and Senocak would be in dialogue with one another. Zaimoglu's provocative project, in which he accounts for and resists identity at the same time, represents a first stepping-stone toward the recognition of ethnic inequality and segregation in Germany. However, Zaimoglu also risks perpetuating the majority-minority divide because of the overwhelming negativity with which many individuals in his books define and express themselves. In my mind, the greatest mistake that Zaimoglu makes in these initial stages of his Kanak project is emphasizing resentment and hatred when defining and promoting the *Kanaken* as a group. He thereby leaves little room for the possibility that Germans might ever be allies or friends in the Turkish-German struggle for justice. The total insularity that easily ensues from such an approach to identity also appears as considerably unrealistic. As some of the protocols in Kanaksprak shows, however, and as Zaimoglu begins to show in *Koppstoff*, a future German identity needs to be founded not only on the acknowledgement of social outsidership but also on the plurality and diversity of identity. Even if Zaimoglu risks perpetuating stereotypes about Germans, Turks and lower-class people with his projects, there are many voices in his texts that resist such stereotypes and point the way toward a more differentiated understanding of the Turkish-German community. It is therefore possible to extract from Zaimoglu's texts both a deep concern with class difference and ethnic discrimination, and a picture of a diverse, multicultural Germany, whose members confidently insist upon the integrity of their particular identities.

CHAPTER 2.

Bertrand Besigye, Norway:
A Play with Cultural and Racial Difference

Face to face with this man who is 'different from himself,' he needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify the Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires.[60]

- Frantz Fanon

Cultivation of Difference

Sometime in 1993 at the *Theaterkafeen* in Oslo, a popular venue for cultural events, three young men announced the formation of their anarchist group *den nye vinen* (The New Wine). These men—the photographer Per Heimly and the writers Ari Behn and Bertrand Besigye— became something of a rebel trio in the Norwegian artistic and literary world. In ways sometimes reminiscent of Zaimoglu's attitude towards the German establishment, these three Norwegians claimed to have a bad relationship to the Norwegian cultural elite, the academy, middle-class culture and the Jante-law.[61] They promoted themselves as new visionary bohemians and as the Renaissance-men Norway needed for a cultural face-lift. The Ugandan-born poet Bertrand Besigye writes about the announcement of The New Wine in his second collection of poetry, *Krystallisert sollys* (Chrystallized Sunlight)(2003): [62]

We were three young dreamers. We had infiltrated the most reputable coffeehouse in the city. We seized the moment and screamed, at the top of our lungs: 'We are the new

[60] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* 170.
[61] A phrase coined by the Danish writer Aksel Sandemose, the Jante-law refers to the unwritten law of humbleness, often claimed to be something "typically Scandinavian." According to Sandemose, this code, which prescribes that people should be humble and not arrogant, reserved and not extravagant, conventional and not eccentric, served to preserve social stability and conformity in small rural communities.
[62] This poetry collection will be referenced as *Krystallisert* and *KS* (after quotations) in this chapter.

power! We are the new breath! We are the new wine! And the new wine will blow up the bottles!' The air in the coffeehouse was still like in a grave. We climbed up to the balcony. From there I shouted an anarchic text by Proudhon. When we came back down the bouncers stood ready. In pretentious red uniforms. We were thrown out of the coffee house. For life, they said. (*KS* 25)[63]

The speaker of the poem "Livsopptegnelser i rødt og blått" (Life Remarks in Red and Blue), from which the above passage is taken, praises life in that expressive, life-affirming and unreserved temperament that is Besigye's trademark. The poem contains many of the themes that characterize Besigye's vital universe: sunlight, moonlight, colors, sex, and urban nightlife. The speaker is a person who is affirming, confident and un-bashfully expressive, attracted by the natural and cosmic perspective of human life. He is "in love with physical life" and puts life before art (26).

It may at first seem peculiar to view Besigye in the context of multiculturalism and minority identity, especially because his texts do not directly thematize any immigrant experience or 'other culture.' Nor does Besigye identify himself, as Zaimoglu does, as a representative voice for any group of disadvantaged minority individuals. Upon a first reading of Besigye's texts, he appears to provocatively affirm a powerful, authentic and optimistic individual self across social and ethnic boundaries. As I will show in this chapter, however, there are definite and important links between Besigye's expressive texts and his minority identity, primarily his cultural and racial difference from mainstream Norwegian identity.

---

[63] "Vi var tre unge drømmere. Vi hadde infiltrert byens / Mest velrenommerte kafé. Vi kuppet øyeblikket / Og ropte av full hals: "Vi er den nye kraften! Vi er den nye pusten! / Vi er den nye vinen! Og den nye vinen skal sprenge flaskene!" / Kaféluften ble gravstille. / Vi gikk opp på kafeens galleri. / Derfra ropte jeg ut en anarkistisk tekst av Proudhon. / Da vi kom ned fra galleriet, stod utkasterne klare. / I prangende røde uniformer. / Vi ble kastet ut av kafeen. / På livstid, sa de."

Besigye has often blamed a Norwegian provincialism for Norway's intolerant attitudes towards racial outsiders and eccentrics like himself (Levin 18).[64] In an interview in *Dagbladet* in 2003, he says:

> I am happy to live here. The low rate of criminality gives *Lebensraum* [room to live]. [However], I don't feel Norwegian. I don't identify with the Norwegian behavior. Nor with the Norwegian food habits or how you relate to your language. The language would blossom if Norwegians learned how to love it […]. The Norwegian language shrinks because of lack of love. (qtd. in Sørensen "Nattas ridder")[65]

Here, Besigye implies that he is a different kind of rebel than Heimly and Behn, who are white and who were born in Norway. He suggests that his genuine cultural difference is imperative for his creative activity, and that he, as a cultural outsider, has something important to offer Norwegian culture.

In this chapter, therefore, I argue that Besigye's texts can be read as a challenge to the Norwegian status quo. Primarily, I view Besigye as a provocateur, who resists and criticizes all forms of cultural dominance by means of mockery and exaggeration. I show how Besigye sets up a contrast between a homogenous and dull middle-class Norwegian culture and a vital and life-affirming marginal culture. I discuss the way Besigye combines his "un-Norwegian" affirmation of life with a humanistic call for racial equality and social justice. I contend that Besigye exaggerates existing cultural stereotypes about Norwegians and Africans, Norwegians and Europeans, and whites and blacks as a form of cultural critique. Besigye also includes in his texts a forceful criticism of a white-

---

[64] Norway has been the Scandinavian country most critical of the European Union. Norway's population voted against membership of the EC in 1974 and against the EU in 1994. Jens Stoltenberg, the present prime minister (from The Labor Party), who took office in October 2005, has said that Norway will not apply for EU-membership during his time in office.

[65] "Jeg er glad for at jeg bor her. Den lave kriminaliteten gir Lebensraum. […] Nei, jag føler meg ikke norsk. Jeg identifiserer meg ikke med den norske væremåten. Ikke med de norske spisevanene eller måten dere forholder dere til språket på heller. Språket ville blomstret hvis nordmenn lærte seg å elske det […]. Det norske språket krymper av mangel på kjærlighet."

dominated western culture that resists the demands of equality posed by its racial or ethnic others.[66] I also ask whether Besigye's playful exaggerations risk alienating readers. While aiming to confront the racism inherent to Norwegian society in particular and western society in general, especially Besigye's later texts can also be interpreted on a literal level as perpetuating essentialist stereotypes of Norwegians and ethnic outsiders, of whites and blacks.

*

Bertrand Besigye was born into a Christian family in Uganda in 1978.[67] He and his family came as refugees to a town in northern Norway in 1984. His parents were educated – his father was a doctor and his mother a nurse – but Besigye has revealed in interviews that it was challenging to grow up with the mark of being 'different:' a black man in an entirely white Norwegian community. While stressing the privilege of knowing two cultures, Besigye maintains that his temperament remains different than the Norwegian. His expressive and humorous poetry and prose poetry, as well as his loquacious personality, have established him as a distinctly "un-Norwegian" writer. Besigye has described the crucial importance of his literary activity to his "different" identity:

When you are Norwegian, you take your identity for granted. But if you are of a different

[66] I use the terms "ethnic" and "racial" here because Besigye himself often refers to the term "race." I consider both to be constructions signifying difference, with an emphasis on physical appearance, cultural attachment and ancestry. When Besigye refers to "race," he does it to signify the difference between white Norwegians and a black Norwegian like himself.

[67] Uganda, which had been colonized by the British, achieved its independence in 1962. In January 1971, the army officer Idi Amin promoted many of his enlisted military personnel and officers to command positions. Amin soon unleashed a reign of terror against Uganda that lasted almost until the end of the decade, and which included the persecution of many ethnic groups including Hindus and Christians. Besigye does not write about the specific meanings of his cultural heritage in his texts and seldom talks about it in interviews. He often refers to his identity as "Ugandan" or "African," however.

> skin color and live in a society as homogenous as Norway, it is different. You realize you have to create your identity, build it yourself. This acknowledgement is one of the reasons behind my collection of poetry. By writing, I have given myself an identity. (qtd. in Moestue Bugge, "Refser velferdsapati" 16)[68]

As an adult, Besigye moved from the north to the south, to the capital of Oslo. In 1993, he published his first collection of poetry, *Og du dør så langsomt at du tror du lever* (And you die so slowly that you think you are alive).[69] A decade later he published a collection of poetry and prose poetry, *Krystallisert sollys* (Chrystallized sunlight) (2003), and one novel, *Swastikastjernen* (The Swastika star) (2004). While his publisher has marketed Besigye as a Norwegian Walt Whitman or William Blake, the professor and critic Hadle Oftedal Andersen places Besigye at the margins of the literary world, identifying his poetry as "maximum poetry" (*maximumlyrik*) in contrast to contemporary Norwegian poetry such as that of Tor Ulven, which he calls "anorexic minimalism".[70] He also compares Besigye's poetic temperament to the Norwegian 19th century-poet Henrik Wergeland and to more contemporary Scandinavian poets who are "flirting with vitalism," like the Danish punk generation's Michael Strunge ("Endelig Besigye"). Other critics have been less interested in comparison or the demands of literary history. Ingeborg Kongslien, for example, contends that Bertrand Besigye writes about modern Norwegian urban life, including marginalization and racism. She argues with regard to his first collection of poetry that he is primarily "a poet with an individual voice,

---

[68] "Når man er norsk tar man sin identitet for gitt. Men er man av en annen hudfarve og lever i et homogent samfunn som det norske, stiller saken seg annerledes. Da blir man klar over at man må skape seg en identitet, bygge den opp ved egen hjelp. Denne erkjennelsen er noe av bakgrunnen for at diktsamlingen ble til. Gjennom å skrive har jeg gitt meg selv en identitet."

[69] I will refer to this book as *Og du dør* and *OD* (after quotations) in the text.

[70] Tor Ulven (1953-1995) was a highly acclaimed and influential Norwegian poet in the 1980s and 1990s until he took his life in 1995. His poetry is often considered formally as a type of cryptic modernism characterized by the sentiments of existential pessimism.

linguistically creative and innovative, with surprising imagery, with sensuality and vitality" ("Dei nye stemmene" 7).[71]

Besigye's first collection of poetry was regarded similarly by other critics and was immediately considered a success. Besigye received the debut prize from the Norwegian Association of Writers (*Tarje Vesaas debutantpris*), and his book quickly became a bestseller. Besigye's second collection of poetry was praised for some of the same reasons as was the first, but it also attracted considerable criticism for what many considered a trite obscenity and a tendency to glorify physical and masculine strength. Fartein Horgar, for instance, who sees no ironic distance in Besigye's provocations, has described the author as a young, pretentious, self-aggrandizing moralist: "Here is a narrator who constantly poses with his difference, his exclusivity, with his feeling of being unique – as opposed to the crowd" ("Den nye vins martyrer" 20).[72] Besigye's third book and first novel, *Swastikastjernen* (The Swastika Star) (2004), was correspondingly praised for its refreshing and powerful language but criticized for its dense style and its violence. Ultimately, the novel was deemed to be lacking in quality to be printed in 1000 copies.[73] This chapter will focus exclusively on Besigye's poetry and prose poetry, since I regard it as sufficient material with which to establish Besigye's unique minority

[71] "ein poet med ei eiga stemme, språkleg innfallsrik og nyskapande, med overraskande bilete, med sensualitet og vitalitet."
[72] "Her er et diktjeg som ustoppelig poserer med sin annerledeshet, med sin eksklusivitet, med sin fornemmelse av å være unik – til forskjell fra røkla."
[73] Since art is heavily subsidized in Norway, the so-called "nollning" (zeroing) is a mechanism that limits the publication of books. The government agency "Innkjøpsordningen" buys 1000 copies for libraries of books that publishers have nominated. Then, a committee evaluates these books and some end up being "nullet", i.e. considered not good enough to be bought in 1000 copies. This practice serves to promote a diverse literature while at the same time limiting the editions of books considered of lesser quality or interest. It is also a problematic practice: those books that are first printed in 1000 copies may never be bought.

perspective.[74]

Surprisingly few critics mention Besigye's racial and cultural difference or comment on his best and most powerful poems about racial discrimination. Giving him epithets like "vitalist," reviewers interpreted Besigye's aesthetics in the context of "Norwegian" or "modernist" literature. In contrast, I regard Besigye's cultural and racial difference as fundamental to a fair appreciation of his texts. Aesthetics, writes the African-American critic bell hooks, "is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming" (*Yearning* 104). These words by hooks capture an essential aspect of minority discourse in general and of this project as a whole. In this chapter, they mirror the emphasis Besigye puts on the struggle that has accompanied his own marginalization in Norway.

The Norwegian: The Provincial and Conformist Materialist

Interpreting Besigye's texts in the context of Norwegian society, Besigye constructs both his public persona and his literary alter egos against the backdrop of Norwegian homogeneity. I see in Besigye's texts a tendency to exaggerate and mock Norwegian characteristics and values in order to assert the value of difference and diversity. Through his exaggerations and mockery, Besigye questions to what extent a rational welfare-state society characterized by cultural protectionism, material comfort (including consumerism) and middle-of-the-road-ness represses other important qualities

[74] Besigye mixes traditional forms of poetry with prose in his two collections. While some texts have stanzas, alliteration, rhymes, etc. and must therefore be called poems, other texts are more "prose-like." I refer to the latter texts as prose poetry.

of life. Besigye then seeks to reinsert those lost and scorned values—vitality, joy, openness and expressivity—into Norwegian literature and culture. Besigye pushes the limits of Norwegian identity in order to open it up to outside influences.

The most negatively portrayed characters in Besigye's texts are middle-class guardians of respectability, moderation and conformity. Besigye is probably ridiculing both a western, transnational (and mostly white) middle class, and the specifically Norwegian middle-class culture. Besigye's representations portray a particularly Norwegian "welfare apathy" (*verlferdsapati*) and "provincial mentality" (*fjøsnissementalitet*) (Jacobsen "Bertrand Besigye") that is particularly receptive to American popular culture and commercialism ("consumer humiliation"). This popular culture is described as the garbage with which the materialistic and American-friendly Norwegians uncritically fill their bodies (*KS* 50). Rich West-Osloans[75] in Hugo Boss suits and artificial-looking blondes with breast implants running in the park represent a generally affluent and artificial culture. Besigye also ridicules hypocritical members of the middle class (Christian politicians visiting brothels abroad, for instance (*KS* 82)), who on the one hand promote and uphold the values of conformity and decency, but on the other fail to live up to their own moral precepts.

These negative portrayals of the well-to-do yet provincial everyman are meant to reveal the emptiness of material prosperity and the homogenizing effects of capitalism and consumerism. They also reflect a Norwegian society lacking in openness to diversity. In the poem "Verdighet" (Dignity), for instance, Besigye assigns different colors to people worthy of those colors: only those explosive like the sun are worthy of the color

[75] The division between east and west is a division marking on the one hand the traditionally working-class, now more multicultural eastern Oslo, and on the other the more affluent, upper class areas of western Oslo.

yellow, only those who are open like the sky are worthy of the color blue, only those with blood warm like wine are worthy of the color red, etc. He then assigns the color grey to ordinary people and the boredom and false humility they represent (21). Although this poem is a humorous invitation to assert one's inner color, i.e. uniqueness and individuality, it is also a self-serving irony, in which the outsider (and the writer himself) claims his own colorfulness by contrasting himself with the colorless natives.

In the poem "Gipsplater" (Plasterboards) in *Krystallisert*, Besigye characteristically combines cultural observation with playfulness:

> So many faces in the subway are dead-pan and pale-grey As Plasterboards. And all thought patterns in their heads are square Like Plasterboards. And they *can't stand* being stared at, for they are fragile and porous Like Plasterboards. And if you stare right into their eyes, you only see a grey compact mass in there without any streak of light, something as static As Plasterboards. And they *weigh heavily upon one another* with their faces pale as death, as if they were *piled on top of one another*, in bundles high, Like Plasterboards. And when you try to speak to them, it is like talking to a wall, a wall Of Plasterboards. (85)[76]

In various other poems, this same undifferentiated, fragile, and anemic grey majority might belong to the "thought tyranny of the decent," who are "half dead of emptiness" and "excuse themselves for living" (*KS* 13,16). It will become obvious later that Besigye's portrayal of grey People and Plasterboards can be applied also to a larger critique on a whole western civilization in decline. He can be interpreted as playing with the idea of a sick "whiteness," for instance, stereotypically characterized by spiritual and emotional poverty.

---

[76] "Så mange ansikter på undergrunnsbanene er døde og flate og matte og grå Som Gipsplater. Og alle tankevanene i deres hoder er firkantete Som Gipsplater. Og de *tåler ikke* å bli iakttatt, for de er lettbrekkelige og porøse Som Gipsplater. Og stirrer man dem rett inn i øynene, ser man bare en grå kompakt masse der inne uten den minste lysstrime i seg, noe like statisk Som Gipsplater. Og de *tynger hverandre ned* med sine dødsansikter, som om de er *stabla oppå hverandre*, i bunkevis, Som Gipsplater. Og når en prøver å komme i snakk med dem, er det som å snakke til en vegg, en vegg Av Gipsplater."

On one level, Besigye's mockery of native northerners and white westerners alike is an interesting reversal of how the hierarchy between Norwegians and immigrant outsiders is generally perceived. Like Zaimoglu, Besigye turns his ethnographic gaze on the mainstream dominant culture. By playfully "othering" the Norwegian culture, and making it seem deficient, poor and uninteresting, he asserts both the value and superiority of those who are different from the mainstream. On another level, if one views Besigye as the Norwegian writer he also is, he is taking on the role of the worldly intellectual who urges his own countrymen to challenge their own comfort-zone and open up to the world and "other ways" of being, thinking and doing things. Besigye both grieves over and exaggerates Norway's cultural protectionism and its reluctance to embrace more international influence, both culturally and politically. He says in an interview:

> After the separation from Denmark, we have not had cultural contact with the European continent, which is so important for a culture to be alive, for the language to develop. It is not possible to say no to Europe and at the same time believe that we can say 'yes' to the rest of the world. In the absence of a strong literary foundation and a broad, cultural contact area it is only singular individuals, the geniuses, who manage to find the rich veins. (qtd. in Jacobson "Bertrand Besigye")[77]

By being able to appropriate both a Norwegian (he says "we") and a non-Norwegian voice, Besigye places himself in a productive in-between position. By promoting a less protective Norwegian attitude vis-à-vis Europe, Besigye asserts his pro-EU political stance. He also indicates that "new Europeans" like himself will only be able to identify with a Norwegian identity that is less protective and more open to outside influences.

[77] "Etter atskillelsen fra Danmark har vi ikke hatt kulturell kontakt med kontinentet, det som er så viktig for at kulturen skal leve, for at språket skal utvikles. Dett nytter ikke å si nei til Europa og samtidig tro vi kan si ja til resten av verden. I mangel av et sterkt litterært fundament og en bred, kulturell kontaktflate er det kun enkeltindivider, geniene, som klarer å finne de rike årene."

"We consider ourselves provincial," writes Stig Sæterbakken in an article titled "Mitt hjärta tillhör Europa – mitt hjärta är krossat" (My heart belongs to Europe – my heart is broken) (2006), written as a response to the negative results of the last referendum on Norwegian membership in the EU.[78] Sæterbakken criticizes what he perceives a Norwegian self-importance, arrogance and national pride and claims that these attitudes are the result of a provincial lack of confidence. Sæterbakken attributes this lack of confidence to Norway's short national history,[79] the short time-span of its independence and the history of German occupation during the Second World War. Sæterbakken and Besigye both consider Norwegian integration with Europe (by joining the EU) the only proper way for small countries to escape the trap of exceptionalism. Discussing the example of Ibsen, "the" national writer of Norway, Sæterbakken writes:

> Norway didn't produce Ibsen. A conglomeration of influences and impulses, and not the least a whole world of literature, produced Ibsen (including, I have to stress, a Norwegian influence, Norwegian literature). Just as our specific Norwegian values, as we like to think of them, have been created not in periods of isolation and autonomy, but in periods of massive influence, forced as well as chosen. Our Norwegianness, if such a thing exists, is something that has developed in the meeting of external influences, right from the very start. (65)[80]

[78] This article was originally presented in English, published first in Hungarian and then translated into several languages. I read the Swedish version, from the Swedish journal *Glänta*.

[79] The area that is Norway had been a provincial northern part of a dynastic union with Denmark since 1380, under the control of Copenhagen. The union lasted until 1814, when Norway was ceded to Sweden as a result of the defeat in the Napoleonic wars. This union was peacefully resolved in 1905, which counts as the year of Norway's independence. Norwegians are often described as more patriotic and nationalistic than other Scandinavians, and this is mostly attributed to Norway's short history as a nation-state.

[80] Norge skapade inte Ibsen. En blandning av influenser och strömningar, inte minst en hel värld av litteratur, skapade Ibsen (det innefattar, måste jag understryka, norska influenser, norsk litteratur). På samma vis som våra specifikt norska värderingar – vi vill gärna se dem som specifikt norska – har skapats, inte under perioder av isolering och självstyre, utan under perioder av stark påverkan, påtvingad såväl som självvald. Vår norskhet, om något sådant existerar, är något som har vuxit fram ur mötet mellan olika influenser utifrån, ända från första början.

Sæterbakken is adamant about the benefits that Norway's membership in the EU would have on Norwegian culture and self-perception. In the end of his article, he emphasizes that there is something liberating about the literary, even fictional, aspects of identity:

> In the same way that I see Europe as something negative [for my Norwegian identity], I regard literature as something destructive, in the sense that it makes it more difficult for us to be ourselves fully and completely, that it destroys our chances to establish once and for all, that this is who we are, this is us. […] To write (and to read) is to change identity all the time, to remind oneself constantly of the possibilities of all the others we might have been, or still may turn out to be. (67)[81]

The discrediting of identity suggested here, both on an individual and a collective level, suggests that the speaker (and the writer/reader he refers to) enjoys a certain economic and educational privilege. Nevertheless, Sæterbakken's critique of a narrowly and falsely conceived, "fixed" national identity serves the same purpose as Besigye's mockery of conformity. Both Sæterbakken and Besigye envision a change in the narrow way many Norwegians conceive of their national identity.

Another example analogous to Besigye's critique of the provincial is that of the Danish-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose, who loved to hate the small-mindedness and conformity of his Danish hometown. In the book *En flykting krysser sitt spor* (The refugee crosses his tracks) (1933), Sandemose satirizes the negativity and narrow-mindedness of the Scandinavian small-town mentality. The protagonist in his novel, who commits a murder, blames the social norms of his childhood village for his crime. The social code, or "law", outlined as ten commandments in the book, has become somewhat

[81] "På samma vis som jag ser Europa som något negativt, betraktar jag litteraturen som något destruktivt, i det att den gör det svårare för oss att vara oss själva fullt ut, att den förstör våra chanser att en gång för alla fastställa att *så här är vi, detta är vi*. […] Att skriva (och att läsa) är att ständigt skifta identitet, att ständigt påminna sig själv om möjligheterna hos de andra som vi kunde ha varit, eller fortfarande kan komma att bli."

of a Scandinavian myth that explains a specifically Scandinavian mentality and sometimes even serves as explanation for the success of the welfare model. Sandemose, who criticizes this cultural code, thought that its prescription of reticence and reserve had less to do with egalitarianism than with restrictiveness and repression: it concealed arrogance, self-importance and a closed attitude to the outside world.[82]

In his texts, Besigye ridicules this traditional provincialism and shows how compatible it is with a homogenizing consumer culture. Besigye's portrayal of the "newly rich" (*de nyrika*), suggests that young Norwegians uncritically embrace a materialistic lifestyle. In the poem "De unge døde" (The Young Dead) in *Krystallisert*, for instance, the decadent youth, afflicted by both "welfare apathy" and "consumer humiliation," are described as passive and lethargic. The following three stanzas reveal a both playful and moralistic accusation:

> Have you seen The Young Dead? They have a veil of welfare apathy cast over their eyes, which they disguise with the most fashionable sunglasses of the day. They are cliques of clucking hens that sit around table after table in clubs and only when *a celebrity* enters do they twist around their bodies like snakes *to see*.
>
> […]
>
> Have you seen The Young Dead? They swarm like young mosquitoes that live off the shining blue-violet blood of the TV-screens, and the filthy shoddy men from TV talk shows, who blow a green-rotten death into their faces right through the thick TV-screen…
>
> […]
>
> Have you seen The Young Dead? […] they slide their credit cards through one another's butt cheeks as payment for all their therapy appointments and all the sex

[82] Lately, it has often been suggested that this cultural code is a significant feature of many other national cultures as well, for instance those of Australia, Canada, Chile and Japan.

> services and all other services in an existence where *all relationships* are about buying and selling. (89-90)[83]

In this poem, Besigye illustrates the dehumanizing dimension of capitalism, materialism and technology. The uncreative youth, whom he also describes as having "their hearts in wheelchairs" and "thoughts that walk with crutches out of resignation" (89), are understood as the products of a conformist society that blindly embraces capitalist values.[84] By repeating the question "Have you seen the young dead?" in each of the 21 three-line stanzas of this two-and-a-half-page prose poem, Besigye also adds a uniform appearance to the poem. It is as if each stanza represents one of these "dead" young people that Besigye ridicules. Not surprisingly, Besigye posits in the last stanzas of this poem the opposite of the young dead - the warrior - who in contrast to the crowd breaks out of lethargy, passivity and conformity by virtue of his own individuality and godlike powers (91).

Unlike the racial outsider, who needs to be a warrior, the majority in Besigye's texts can depend on its culture and its conformity for its identity. However, this global privilege, Besigye suggests sarcastically, leads not to happiness or insight but rather to inertia and triviality. He writes in the poem "Ubehagets store byggmester: byen" (The

---

[83] "Har dere sett De Unge Døde? De har en hinne av velferdsapati over blikket, som de skjuler med øyeblikkets hippeste solbriller. De er hønsekakkelklikkene som sitter rundt bord etter bord på utestedene og bare når *en kjendis* gjør entré ormevrir de seg rundt for *å se*. […]
Har dere sett De Unge Døde? De er myggsvermungdom, som lever av det lysende blåfiolette blodet fra fjernsynsskjermene, og dreitteimen av tarvelighet fra pratefjernsynsprogrammene puster en grønnråtten død i deres ansikt tvers gjennom det tykke tv-skjermglasset… […]
Har dere sett De Unge Døde? […] de drar sine kredittkort ned mellom rompeballene på hverandre som betaling for alle samtaletjenester og alle sextjenester og alle andre betalingstjenester i en eksistens der *alle relasjoner* er kjøp og salg."

[84] "Tankebanene deres går med krykker for resignasjon, med oldingeskrøplighet i sinn og hjerte. Hjertene deres sitter i rullestol for å ikke bli revet med av livet!"

Constructor of Discomfort: The City) in *Og du dør* about the contemporary city as a receptacle for in-authenticity and alienation:

> I rushed into volcanic-gigantic malls where the shopping-diseased / and the newly-rich pompously rotting in their shopping-spree orgies were waving their credit-card booklets / as if they were flags of victory while they bought more and more chastity belts / that fit their souls about to be ripped apart like a hundred-dollar bill and I heard the sounds / of ripping! The sounds of ripping behind the money-babbling voices... (14)[85]

Besigye's cultural pessimism exposes the ugliness of economic privilege in a world of suffering. He suggests that modern development has brought spiritual emptiness and existential alienation to those who have benefited from it the most. It is as if he is exposing that this global imbalance is unnatural, and that it is detrimental for all, albeit in different ways. At times, Besigye appears to be addressing his "spoiled" readers and challenging them to re-connect to some deeper truth about life, both on an existential and a social level: "Have you ever shed tears of thankfulness for your two fit legs, your hearing clear and open, your heart vigorous and strong, have you?" (*OG* 85)[86]

The first volume's title poem, with the paradoxical and humorous title, "Og du dør så langsomt at du tror du lever" (And you die so slowly that you think you are alive), must be read as another pun on a well-faring society, a society in which material security equals boredom, meaninglessness, as well as lack of life or stimulation. This poem describes four minutes in the day of a person who is completely powerless to act. The person studies a fly that is sitting on the windowsill and later flies onto the speaker's ear.

---

[85] "jeg bruste inn i vulkanveldige kjøpesentra der handlesyke / og nyrike pompøst råtnende i handleorgier vifta med kredittkort- / hefter som seiersflagg mens de kjøpte flere og flere kyskhetsbelter / for sjelen iferd med å revne som en tusenlapp og jeg hørte / rivelyden! Rivelyden under stemmenes pengeplapring…"

[86] "har du noensinne felt / Takknemlighetstårer for dine to friske bein, din hørsel klar /
Og åpen, ditt hjerte friskt og sterkt, har du det?"

The anemic speaker falls asleep, wakes up, and feels interchangeably alienated, empty and fearful. The speaker's life is described as one lived in circles, and he or she notes every minute that goes by on the digital clock next to the bed. In the hope of regaining a spark of life, of feeling anything, s/he masturbates. But instead of feeling, there is only emptiness, boredom, a death wish even. At 5:57 p.m., these negative feelings threaten to destroy the once vital body: "If nothing exciting happens before six o'clock, you will cut your wrist…" (73).[87]

Even though the motif of exile is here expressed in existential terms, it is possible to extend the metaphor to the social context of a comfortable Norwegian society lacking in stimulation. In the paragraphs that follow, I will outline some of the ways in which Besigye brings life, energy and stimulation to such a social context.

"And I Will Reshape You […] Make You Wild of Openness…"

On the cover of *Krystallisert Sollys* (2003), a blonde woman with a red T-shirt and a red scarf around her wrist stretches her arms towards the blue sky: a visual representation of the affirmative energy that characterizes Besigye's poetry. In contrast to the poem "Og du dør" above, many of Besigye's poems teem with a youthful enthusiasm about life, and the reader is exhorted to embrace life without intellectual reservation. In poems with names like "You in the wind and the wind in you," "Power song," "The rain falls to free you," and "The invisible power," nature and human nature are made potentially the same, and this revelation is a source of ecstatic pleasure.[88] Characters with a thirst for life embrace trees out of sheer joy, or exclaim: "Here, there is life!" (*KS* 50).

[87] "hvis ingenting oppløftende skjer / innen klokka seks / snitter du pulsåra over…"
[88] "Du i vinden og vinden i deg," "Kraftsang," "Regnet faller for å frigjøre deg," "Det osynliges kraft."

In the title poem of Besigye's second collection *Krystallisert*, we learn that "stars are boiling in mercury," and that the strength of humans rivals the overflowing energy of the sun. The human is a center of creativity and sensual power:

> And it struck him: The sight *radiates* from the eyes! The voice *radiates* from the mouth! The sense of smell *radiates* from the nose! The sense of hearing *radiates* from the ears. The sense of taste *radiates* from the tongue. The sense of touch *radiates* from every single nerve! My own being is one of radiation! I am crystallized sunlight!" (36).[89]

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries such appeals to sense and body were seen as a reaction against the growing mechanization and industrialization that were alienating the human from nature. The idea of vitalism in philosophy, poetry and art was crucial to early modernism and expressionism; it was understood as a response to the rational ideas central to modernity. Besigye's poetry can be read as a revival of such a life-affirming reaction to the rational modern society. However, rather than describing Besigye as swooping into the world of Norwegian poetry as a vitalist modernist, as most critics have done already, I am interested in the connection between Besigye's affirmative subjectivity and his playful cultivation of difference. As I have mentioned, Besigye sets up a definite contrast between a comfortable but anemic middle-class Norwegian culture and a vital, life-affirming margin. He cultivates his difference from Norway, his adopted country, seeking to express it through a forceful poetic voice. When Besigye asks, "Are we here to live or to die?" (*OG* 49), or when he writes, "You have wandered so long […] looking for one single genuine and exalted person that you imagine a longing for freedom

[89] "Og det gikk opp for ham: Synet *stråler* ut av øynene! Stemmen *stråler* ut av munnen! Luktesansen *stråler* ut av neseborene! Hørselen *stråler* ut av ørene! Smaksevnen *stråler* ut av tungen! Berøringsfornemmelsen *stråler* ut av hver eneste nerve! Jeg er et bestrålingsvesen! Jeg er krystallisert sollys!"

in people's eyes…" (*KS* 22), he expresses not only existentialist sentiments but also a culturally specific experience.[90]

In many ways, Besigye explores the creative potentials of the margins of Norwegian culture, aiming at something similar to what Stuart Hall in the British context calls "styling [one's] way into British culture":

> For the first time being black and Asian is a way of being British. It is also sexy, and cool—all things that the Puritan English culture has both reviled and desired. In London especially, young blacks and Asians have turned marginality into a creative life force. They have styled their way into British culture—which is not hard because it was very unstylish. They have made it their own. (qtd. in Alibhai-Brown, 32)

Although easily interpreted as cultural bigotry, it is precisely this type of "reversed" provocation – always bordering on prejudice toward the white dominant culture - that fuels Besigye's outsider identity. Besigye explicitly discusses the social fact of living as a black man in Norway in a few important poems, but in most of his poems, he is more interested in expressing a general "difference": those specific qualities he deems missing or at least underrepresented or undervalued in Norwegian mainstream culture, such as extroversion, expressivity, fearlessness, generosity, sexual and sensual openness. Ironically, of course, these are also the differences that ethnic others often come to represent, as objects of desire, in dominant white discourses.

Rather than simply dismissing such objectification as stereotypes, I want to emphasize that the line between the authentic and the artistic or performative aspects of Besigye's texts is impossible to draw. Besigye's goal is to emphasize the value of that which he thinks is missing in Norwegian mainstream culture and thus to change

[90] "Er vi her for å leve eller er vi her for å dø?"; "Du har vandret så lenge […] på jakt etter et eneste genuint Og eksaltert menneske, at du hallusinerer en frihetslengsel i folks øyne…"

Norwegianness by inserting these differences into it. Besigye knows that his untraditional texts have a "different" flair from most contemporary Norwegian poetry. "Maybe [I] fill that need for poets who have something to say," he says in an interview in *Aftenposten* in 1993, "who dare to use feelings and colors. [I am] not afraid of the banal or the high strung." He also attributes his own style and poetic energy to something other or outside "the Norwegian." "Outside Norway," he says, "to the south in Europe, the exaggerated, the theatrical, the expressive, is not something inferior" (qtd. in Levin "Å dikte det er å leve…" 18).[91]

In the last poem of *Og du dør,* "Ildsangerens ankomst" (The Arrival of the Fire-Singer), what appears to be an energizing life spirit visits a human body in order to awaken it from its slumber. In the three parts of the poem, the poetic "I" moves from the energizing power to the body in a symbolic struggle between life and death, more specifically between lightness and heaviness, will power and powerlessness, divine insight and existential meaninglessness. The poem, as well as the entire poetry collection, ends with the words "And everything dead-still and lifeless will dance," underlining that transformation is a condition of all forms of existence.

In the context of Besigye's portrayal of a settled Norwegian culture, I therefore interpret this poem to be about transformation also on a cultural level. I see it as an allegory of a vital margin (the immigrant) reviving the creative energies of a homogenous settled body (Norway). Besigye starts the poem "I have come to inhabit your body," and continues to describe the energizing powers of the singer thus:

[91] "Kansje […] fyller vi et savn etter poeter som har noe å si, som våger å bruke følelser og farver. Vi er ikke redd det banale og det høyspente. […] Utenfor Norge, sørover i Europa, er ikke det overdrevne, det teatrale, det ekspressive noe mindreverdig, sier Besigye."

> I have stormed through a thousand gates to be able to set upon you, sung / a Hundred songs to be able to flow into your ear. And I will / In a choir of sunrays radiating from smiles, re-shape you / Re-shape you always. So be proud, cry out of joy, for a gigantic yellow squawk of birds will hum through you. / And everything dead still and lifeless will dance! / I am the fire-singer / And I will make you wild of openness, put a fire to your will, your voice, in your eye, in your wishes. I will burn / you right down to your interior again and again with my Fire-song. And the day you are ready for the flame I will give you the magic words that coax the wind / to whistle a new language to you so that your fate finds / New sail, for he who changes a language changes fate […]. Don't push me away, in fear for the health of your soul. (78-79)[92]

The purpose of the energizing spirit is to invigorate a body characterized as "an ice-cube shut in by its own cold" (81), to rescue it from its sensual disconnectedness from the world and to reconnect it to its deeper energies, granting it the courage to embrace the richness of life. While the speaking voice in the above excerpt comes from the energizing power, in the last two sections of the poem the narration shifts to the body that is being re-vitalized. It is a heavy body overcome by meaninglessness and weighted down by the knowledge of death (87).

As a metaphor for the immigrant outsider's relationship to the Norwegian "body", the poem becomes a representation of the immigrant's power to breathe life into Norwegian society and culture. Even if the words "don't push me away" indicate that the immigrant experiences rejection, the immigrant still contributes to the shaping of a new Norwegian identity that will operate by norms different from those of the past. The emphasis on transformation, a new language and a new fate indicates that this new

[92] "Jeg har gått gjennom tusen porter for å kunne ta på deg, sunget / Hundre sanger for å kunne renne inn i ditt øre. Og jeg skal / I et kor av himmelstråler blåst ut gjennom smil, omskape deg / Omskape deg alltid. Så vær kry, gråt av glede, for en storgul / Oppstandelse av fugler skal nynne gjennom deg. / Og alt dødt skal bli dans! / Jeg er Ildsangeren! / Og skal gjøre deg vill av åpenhet, sette fyr / På viljen, på stemmen, i øyet, i ønskene. Jeg skal brenne / Innover og innover i deg med min Ildsang. Og den dagen du er / Rede for ild skal jeg gi deg trolldomsordene som frister vinden / Til å plystre deg et nytt språk slik at din skjebne får et / Nytt seil, för den som bytter språk, bytter skjebne... […] Så ikke forstøt / Meg, i redsel for ditt sinns sunnhet."

identity will cultivate a new openness, even a new truth. The poem builds toward an affirmation of a universal human vulnerability: the acknowledgement of people's equality before death. And this knowledge, in turn, motivates a life lived fully in the present moment. In the end of the poem, a life worthy of its name exists in those who love without restraint, who share their last bread with their neighbors, and who embrace innocence as the essence of life (87).

Does Besigye suggest that this life-affirming, generous and close-to-life subjectivity is closer to those living on the social margins than to those who are socially privileged? Yes. In the context of Besigye's criticism of capitalism and consumerism, and his attack on homogeneity and conformism, Besigye posits the margin as a site of creativity and renewal. Even if Besigye's outsider forces have ambiguous identities, and even if his celebration of difference is significantly romantic, the positive marginality he proposes is an attractive complement to the social marginality thematized by Zaimoglu and many others.

*

Placing Besigye's texts within the framework of multicultural theory, I assume that Besigye's racial and cultural difference, as well as his status as an "Other" in Norway influence the way he writes. As many minority and postcolonial critics have shown, the more benevolent side of colonialist discourse was romantic. It constructed the ethnic and racial other sympathetically, similar to the modernist primitivist search for inspiration and escape in utopian and romantic landscapes far away. The other became an object of utopian desire. Edward Said, for instance, shows in his groundbreaking work *Orientalism*

(1978) that stereotypes of the non-Western can be both positive and negative.[93] It is this utopian aspect of difference that Zaimoglu criticizes when he refers to "the multicultural zoo," claiming that the benevolent interest in the cultural other by the well-meaning westerner often includes the failure to recognize the cultural other as subject and instead fixes her or him as an object of desire. For example, if the immigrant or ethnic other is represented as generous, spiritual and un-capitalist, this represents a nostalgia or longing for something lost within a (capitalist) society perceived as promoting the opposite: selfishness, cynicism and materialism. The immigrant becomes a representative of the longed-for (lost) world.

Besigye takes a brazen and irreverent view of Orientalism. Instead of avoiding Orientalist representations, he playfully exaggerates cultural differences in his texts in order to make them productive for both literature and life. It is to be expected that Besigye takes no account of criticism of his depictions of Norwegians and Africans, thereby showing his ironic distance to established discourses. If the immigrant, in particular the black immigrant, is easily constructed as that which the native is *not*, that is, not only as dark, different and dangerous in a negative sense, but also as warm, generous and vital, Besigye plays with this 'othered' position.

The energizing powers of the vital other are often framed in sexual metaphors, such as in the poem "Ut av en dum natts dør" (Out from a dumb night's door). In this

[93] In one of the foundational texts of postcolonial studies, *Orientalism* (1978), Said outlines the groundbreaking argument that the knowledge production about non-Western societies in the West was deeply intertwined with the actual physical subjugation of the colonized. Said also argued that such Orientalism, primarily a construction of the non-West as that which the West is not, lives on in contemporary life in the way non-western cultures and peoples are represented and constructed.

poem, the energy of the speaking voice serves to defeat a wintry mental (and human) climate. The speaking voice addresses his lover as follows:

> gigantic bells of concrete / that echo through your body / my limb / that echoes between your butt-cheeks / my life / that pierces your life, my life lived / against your boundaries, your boundary of heavy body and heavy head / against your body of memories, memories seeking / refreshment in my freshness, sugar in my sweetness! (OG 37)[94]

Even if the specifically Norwegian other is not directly suggested here, the extended allegorical interpretation I suggest gives Besigye's texts an interesting double meaning. The life-affirming identity of the outsider here gives life to the heavy, past-oriented identity of the insider, suggesting metaphorically that a settled Norwegian identity too dependent on the past is being substantially energized from the life-affirming margin.

Besigye's Anti-Racism

In some of Besigye's most powerful poems, the author attacks capitalism and empty materialism for standing in the way of democracy and racial equality across the globe. When the poet connects capitalist exploitation and racism with spiritual impoverishment, and foresees an apocalyptic destruction of humanity, he also calls out for the vital and affirmative actions necessary for democratic change and spiritual renewal. In a poem called "Ned i verdens berg" (Down into the mountain of the world) in *Og du dør*, Besigye writes that

[94] "veldige bjeller av betong / som runger gjennom kjøttet, mitt lem som runger / mellom dine rompeballer, mitt liv / som spidder ditt liv, mitt liv levd / mot dine grenser, din grense av tung kropp og tungt hode / mot din kropp av minner, minner som søker / forfriskning i min friskhet, sukker i min sødme!"

> Against all odds [we must] dance ourselves free / from this deadly, depressing, and humiliating pact / Where we are doomed to live by the ideas / That serve this civilization / Where it is expected that we, without the slightest protest / Should give all our selves to a civilization / Based on the endless exploitation of other races / To a civilization that litters and consumes and stupefies / That does not know where it is going or what it wants / That without interest in any alternatives / Self-confidently works for the destruction of humanity. (55)[95]

Other times, Besigye reveals the effects of these destructive ideas on the subjective experience. When a resilient individual vitality is called upon as a response to the realities of racial discrimination, for instance, one of the basic tenets of Besigye's life-affirming texts emerges. In the poem "I håpløsheten har jeg det bedre" (I am better off in hopelessness) in *Og du dør,* an individual of color asserts himself against both the indifference and the hatred of white society:

> Sometimes I see us all / carry the indifference through the throngs of people / like a bullet-proof vest – discomfort / Jaywalkers wagging their asses like ducks / who shout "Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!" – discomfort / TV-preachers onion-induced tears / and sch sch- attitudes / towards all themes that are taboo – discomfort / Neo-nazi red-necks[96] who say that it is their dream / "to shove the nasal bone up into the brain" / of every single black person / swastika-grim, with just as much common sense / in their brains as a blackfly / threaten me with a knife, make menacing phone calls / shout "Sieg Heil!" with their / tiny dicks and their fear – discomfort! (OD 45)[97]

---

[95] "Mot alle odds danse oss løs / Fra denne inntill dødsdepresjonen krenkende pakt / Hvor vi dømmes til å leve under de ideer / Som tjener sivilisasjonen / Hvor det forventes at vi uten den minste protest / Skal gi hele vårt liv til en sivilisasjon / Basert på endeløs utplyndring av andre folkeslag / Til en sivilisasjon som forsøpler og forbruker og fordummer / Som ikke vet hvor den vil eller hva den vil / Som uten interesse for noen alternativer / Skråsikkert arbeider for menneskets undergang."

[96] This is a free translation of the Norwegian word "gokk." According to Ingeborg Kongslien, this word appears to originate from the expression "langt borti gokk", which means "far out in the province." The noun gokk would then potentially have the association of a provincial, un-sophisticated and uncouth person, similarly to the word "redneck" in American English.

[97] "Noen ganger ser jeg oss alle / bære likesælheten gjennom gatemylderet / som en skuddsikker vest – ubehag / Rågjengere med andestjertsveis / som roper "Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!" – ubehag / TV-predikanters løkframkalte tårer / og hysj-hysj-holdninger / til alle tabutemaer – ubehag / Nynazist-gokker som sier de drømmer om / "Å slå nesebeinet opp i hjernen / på hver jævla svarting" / hakekorsharske, med like mye folkevett / i knollen som en knott / truer meg med kniv, ringer trusseltelefoner / roper Sieg Heil med all sin / hengepikkhylende angst / ubehag!"

While condemning the racists for their hatred, the speaker is also able to satirize them. The speaker turns to a lyrical appraisal of nature in order to neutralize the effects of the violence done to both him (or her) and others. In response to the hypocrisy and indifference of the masses, and to the racial harassment of extremists, the speaking voice exclaims that the more "natural" energies in the universe have the power to eliminate social discomfort, not by giving hope but by eliminating hope and neutralizing negative energies. Even if this appraisal of nature and the natural may appear like a defeatist or romantic escape into another dimension of life by this speaker, it serves the purpose of restoring health to the individual:

> Come closer you half-moon / that cuts my hope in half! Clean out all hope / I am better off in hopelessness / come closer to this fool / who sings - kvirrevirrevitt! / Through the fall air and its one-time museum of leaves that whirl to the ground / Through laughter / heavy thoughts vanish into thin air! / Come umbrella-twisting wind! / Undo the bow of protection I carry above my head and in my soul / come rain-whipped wind, send the angel of presence through my senses, smooth the wrinkles on my brooding forehead (OD 45).[98]

*

While openly racist groups in Scandinavia have in general remained relatively small, many argue that anti-immigrant sentiments have been on the rise since the 1990s. Marianne Gullestad, for instance, points out in "Blind Slaves of Our Prejudice" that recent minority protests against racism are challenging what she calls "the innocent national self-image of Norway." Gullestad notes that Norway is often praised for spending more money per capita on foreign aid than any other industrialized country, that

[98] "Kom nærmere du halvmåne / som halverer mitt håp! Rensk ut alt håp / i håpløsheten har jeg det bedre / kom nærmere denne dusten / som traller – kvirrevirrevitt! / Gjennom høstluftas engangsmuseum / av løvblad som snurrer ned mot bakken / Gjennom latter / går tunge tanker opp i røyk! / Kom paraplyvrengende vind! / Vreng beskyttelsesbuen / jag bærer over mitt hode og inni min sjel / kom regnpiskende vind / send Nærværelsens Engel gjennom sansene / glatt ut rynkene på grublingas panne."

Norway seems innocent with regard to colonialism, that Norwegians have been outspoken in their support for the civil rights movement in the US and the ANC in South Africa, and that Norwegian negotiators have been active in peace negotiations in many parts of the world. Gullestad then challenges this innocent image of Norway and claims that instances of racism are seldom discussed in Norwegian public life while denials of racism are expressed openly (182). The racist murder of the bi-racial Hermansen by neo-Nazis in 2002 was only one in a series of racially motivated attacks that seemed encouraged by the prevailing political attitude towards immigrants. The Ghanaian-Norwegian 15-year old was killed with a knife in a car park close to his home in Oslo by several neo-Nazis. After this incident, which was considered the first of its kind, the Labor government called for tougher laws against the country's neo-Nazis.

Besigye is one of an increasing number of non-ethnic Norwegians who openly satirize and challenge the existing neo-Nazism in Norway. He has also, consequently, received many threats from openly racist groups.[99] In "Lugg dette håret svart som synd!" (Pull this hair black as sin!), a poetic defense of personal dignity is provocatively addressed to openly racist groups and other destructive social actors:

> All haters of races, haters of truth / All endlessly irritated about everything and nothing / All eternally revenge seeking drunks and others roaming about in danger zones / All psychiatrists, cannibals of souls and men in power / pull this hair black as sin / I will still rise / pinch this chin, fleshy from smiles / I will still rise /

[99] One can read Besigye's poems on racism as a response to the increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in Norway (and generally in Scandinavia and Europe) from the early 1990s onwards. The victim of the racist crime mentioned above was not an immigrant but one of a growing number of bi-racial Norwegians. As an indication of increasing xenophobia in Norway, the right-wing populist party "The Progressive Party" (*Fremskrittspartiet*), known to be fiercely anti-immigration, grew considerably. From winning 6 % of the citizens' votes in 1993, it won 20 % in 2005 and thus became one of the largest parties in Norway. The Norwegian Anti Racist Centre, recorded 1,300 incidents between 1987 and 2000 that could be classified as racist. They included cross burnings, shootings and incidents of arson, vandalism, violence and harassment. In 1999, the Norwegian Supreme Court endorsed a decision allowing private landlords and accommodation agencies to choose as tenants "Norwegians only." An anti-discrimination law has been suggested; such a law has come into effect in the member states in the EU but not yet in Norway (James, "Mass protest against racist murder in Norway").

> Strangle this throat slender and young / break this leg, long and brown / I will still rise / take this hand worn out from being a hand / these eyes, searching all around / this sleep that soon slept / take this shelter of optimism / thrown in from the coldness of the world […] and consume it / I will still rise! / and come trust, in the future / pause in this my head / come hope / tighten in this my fist… (OD 39)[100]

Besigye's poem is reminiscent, both in form and content, of religious Negro spirituals, the poetic force and reiterated refrains of which served to counter the deep humiliation that African-Americans suffered during slavery. As a song of survival and courage, it promises a rise to prominence of the victimized. Besigye is also, however, ironizing those who have a benevolent yet ultimately selfish interest in the racial other. The victim of discrimination comes to stand for certain optimism, an optimism that the "not afflicted" can only enjoy by a redemptive objectification of the victimized. By addressing those "who roam about in danger zones" in order to "consume" the other, Besigye suggests that racial prejudice has many disguises, including benevolent ones.

This poem is reminiscent of what bell hooks calls "the commodification of difference," according to which a white or privileged majority in its "longing for pleasure" (and knowledge) seeks transgressive contact with the dark other without respecting this other as an equal (*Black Looks* 31). Consequently, the neo-Nazis are not the only ones guilty of racism in Besigye's poems; those whose desires are served by the victimhood of others, be they psychiatrists, academics, artists, or others, are also guilty. The commodification of difference, according to hooks, represents a disguised form of

[100] "Alle rasehatere, sannhetshatere / Alle endeløst irritert over alt og ingenting / Alle evig hevnlystne drankere og faresonevankere / Alle sjelskannibalistiske psykiatere og maktmenn / lugg dette håret svart som synd / Jeg skal likevel reise meg / klyp dette kinnet kjøttfullt av smil / Jeg skal likevel reise meg / kvel denne halsen slank og ung / brekk dette beinet langt og brunt / Jeg skal likevel reise meg / ta denne hånd sliten av å være hånd / disse øyne søkende utover / denne søvnen snart utsovd/ ta dette krypinn for optimisme / slengt inn fra verdenskulden […] og fortær den / Jeg skal likevel reise meg! / og kom framtidstro / hvil i dette hodet / kom håp / knytt deg i denne neven…"

violence against the other.[101] hooks quotes Langston Hughes—"You've taken my blues and gone"—in order to illustrate how black experience and black identity have been and continue to be appropriated into the commodity culture.[102]

There is an interesting parallel to Besigye's poem in the poetry collection "And still I rise" (1978) by the African-American poet Maya Angelou. Similarly to the resilient and humorous subject in Besigye's poem, Angelou repeats the lines "Still I rise" throughout the poem as a call for the assertiveness and pride of black people, here the African-American descendants of slaves. Angelou writes:

> You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies, / You may trod me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I rise. […] Does my sassiness upset you? / Why are you beset with gloom? / 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells / Pumping in my living room. […] Did you want to see me broken? / Bowed head and lowered eyes? / Shoulders falling down like teardrops, / weakened by my soulful cries? […] Out of the huts of history's shame / I rise / Up from the past that's rooted in pain / I rise / I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide. Leaving behind nights of terror and fear / I rise / Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear / I rise / Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, / I am the dream and the hope of a slave. / I rise / I rise / I rise. (163-164)

Just as in Besigye's poem, the victim of discrimination here develops positive and affirmative characteristics and rises out of victimhood against the nihilistic gloom of the privileged. While the dominant class still wants to see the victims broken, wants them to

---

[101] bell hooks, who writes primarily about U.S. racial relations, calls this type of colonizing "eating the other." She contends that the resurgence of black nationalism and black essentialism is a response to the invasion and violation of black culture. hooks writes: "black nationalism surfaces most strongly when cultural appropriation of black culture threatens to decontextualize and thereby erase knowledge of the specific historical and social context of black experience from which cultural productions and distinct black styles emerge" (*Black Looks* 30).

[102] Langston Hughes' entire poem reads: "You've taken my blues and gone / You sing 'em on Broadway / And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl / And you mixed 'em up with symphonies / And you fixed 'em / So they don't sound like me / Yep, you done taken my blues and gone. / You also took my spirituals and gone / You put me in *Macbeth* and *Carmen Jones* / All kinds of *Swing Mikados* / And in everything but what's about me / But someday somebody'll / Stand up and talk about me / Black and beautiful / And sing about me / And put on plays about me! / I reckon it'll be / Me myself! / Yes, it'll be me."

accept their inferiority with bowed head and lowered eyes, Angelou's speaking subject reclaims her independent subjectivity. In Angelou's poem, the black person rises like air and dust from its disadvantaged position in history by means of affirmative energy; the black person is an "optimistic," "humorous," "sassy," "haughty," "sexy," and "happy" person (164).

Poems such as "Pull this hair black as sin" unavoidably connect a Norwegian member of the African diaspora with the African-American experience, to the optimism, resilience, aspiration, and humor inherent in its culture, as in Hughes' or Angelou's poetry, as well as to the appalling horrors of its past. In the prose poem "Plystre" (Whistle) from *Og du dør,* Besigye depicts the lynching of five African-American men in the American South:

> I saw an American documentary once: five black men were hanged because they had whistled after white women. Somewhere in the southern states sometime in the 50s. A white crowd had gathered around the gallows, they smiled, they were happy, they had lit a bonfire, they celebrated the hanging with dance and song and they filmed it. On the film, it looked for a moment as if *death itself celebrated* too: even if it was real, the hanged men were dangling *theatrically* from the gallows, and this created an unforgettable squeaking sound; I assume it was the way that *death* whistled a melody. And the hanging dangling bodies were drawing in the air with the tips of their shoes an invisible half-circle just above the ground: It was the *smile* of the gallows, the gallows *smiled* with the hanged ones. (30) [103]

Besigye marginalizes the event of the hanging in this last section of a longer prose poem. He subordinates it to a playful improvisation on the word "whistle." Instead of being mere victims, the hanged men in the poem become players in Besigye's black

[103] "Jeg så en amerikansk dokumentarfilm en gang: fem svarte menn hengt for å ha plystra etter hvite kvinner. Et sted i sørstatene en gang på femtitallet. En hvit forsamling stod rundt galgene, de lo, de var glade, de hadde tent bål, de feira henginga med dans og sang og filma det hele. På filmen så det ut, et øyeblikk, som om *døden deltok* i feiringa: de hengte mennene dingla nesten *teatralsk* i galgene selv om det var virkelig, og det skapte en uforglemmelig knirkelyd; det var vel *dødens måte* å plystre en melodi på. Og de hengtes dinglende kropper tegna med skotuppenes spisser, en usynlig halvsirkel i lufta like over bakken: Det var galgenes *smil*, galgene *smilte* med sine hengte."

comedy, in which the speaker appears spiteful both of death and of the distasteful attitudes represented by the white crowd. The main function of Besigye's irreverent use of humor, as earlier examples also show, is that it disallows false and sentimental responses. One suspects that the ability to render cruel events into bitter humor is what, according to Besigye, distinguishes a vital subject from the subject ready to cut his wrist in the poem "Og du dør…." Rather than minimizing the effect on the reader, Besigye's dark humor unsettles and even exacerbates the cruelty of the event depicted.

Besigye creates a similar effect in the poem with the ironic title "Rasist, jeg tar imot deg!" (Racist, I will accept you) in *Og du dør*. In this poem, Besigye challenges racism and cultural dominance through an ironic plea to the racist to express his pure hatred. The entire poem reads:

> Racist, I will accept you
> if you really *hate*, and not just are a blind slave
> to your prejudice, if you *really* hate me
> then you also have to *see me*
> if you deeply and sincerely hate all other races
> and not just hate for the sake of hating
> or for the sake of those who think like you, because you are bored
> or because you are afraid of everything foreign
> which seems to threaten your comfortable indolence
> if you raise yourself clearly above such banality
> if you would have given me your hate equally wholeheartedly
> if there had not been a single nigger in this country
> if you expose yourself in your hate
> if you devote all your time and energy to hatred
> and hate me endlessly and all the time with every cell in your body
> And *not* because you are looking for a scapegoat
> someone you can blame for your shame, a toilet seat for your soul!
> But for *my sake*, for the sake of *my race*
> racist, I accept you, I kiss you!
> If you take upon yourself the hate of all the other racists
> and crucify yourself with hate, if only the sight of brown, yellow
> and red makes you so *sick* that you have to be taken instantly
> to the hospital, if you are willing to *gouge out your eyes*

just to avoid seeing more black people
if you are willing to sacrifice your mother and your father your sister and brother
just in order to cultivate your hate full-time without restrictions
if your hate is completely cleansed of desire
for personal gain, if you would sacrifice everything, give everything
just in order to build a cathedral of hate in your soul
in order to bathe your senses in the clear waters of wrath
If you are willing to take your life
only to avoid something so demeaning
as having to live on the same planet
as these damn black people!
Then, dear racist, I accept you
then I will be your volunteer. (OD 61) [104]

It is not Besigye's aim in this poem to show how wounding racism is to its victims. The generosity on the part of the victim of racism established in the title is rather meant to create an ironic distance to the experience of racism. On the one hand, it raises the speaker to a higher moral realm, from which s/he can address the racist and explain to him or her the reasons for his or her prejudice and hatred of others. On the other hand, the generosity is also meant to mock the racist, suggesting that his or her prejudice originates only in the weakness of his or her character.

[104] "Rasist, jeg tar imot deg / om du virkelig *hater*, og ikke bare er en blind slave / for dine fordommer, om du *virkelig* hater meg / for da er du også nødt til å *se meg* / om du dypt og inderlig hater alle andre raser / og ikke bare hater for hatets skyld / for dine likesinnedes skyld fordi du kjeder deg / eller fordi du skremmes av alt fremmed / som fortoner seg truende på din bekveme sløvhet / om du klart hever deg over slike tamme grunner / om du ville gitt meg ditt hat like helhjerta / selv om det ikke fantes en eneste svarting i dette landet / om du blotter deg i ditt hat / om du vier all din tid og all din energi på hat / og hater meg uendelig hele tida i hver eneste celle i kroppen! / Og *ikke* fordi du er ute etter en syndebukk / en du kan presse under skammen, et toalettsete for sjelen! / Men for *min* skyld, for *min* rases skyld / rasist, jeg tar imot deg, jeg kysser deg! Om du tar på deg alle andre rasisters hat / og korsfester deg med hat, om bara *synet* av brunt, gult / og rødt gjør deg *så syk* at du må inlegges øyeblikkelig / på sykehus, om du er villig til å *stikke ut dine egne øyne* / bare for å slippe å se flere svartinger / om du vil ofre din mor din far din søster din bror / bare for å kunne dyrke hatet på heltid uten hindringer / om ditt hat var rensa fullstendig for lysten / til egenvinning, om du ville ofre alt gi alt / bare for å kunne reise hatets katedral i ditt indre / bare for å kunne dyppe dine sanser i vannklare former av vrede / *om du er absolutt villig til å ta ditt eget liv* / bare for å slippe noe så nedverdigende / som å måtte leve på *samme planet* / som disse satans svartingene! / Da, kjære rasist, tar jeg imot deg / da er jeg din frivillig."

Already the title and the first line prompt the reader to ask whether the speaker is serious or ironic. The acceptance could be interpreted literally as an act of forgiveness on behalf of the racist victim; however, as the reader learns that the speaker only accepts the "pure" racist, or "pure" hatred, the acceptance takes on another meaning. Rather than conveying forgiveness, Besigye's acceptance appears ironic.

Besigye's message with this poem is that racism and hatred are pure only in the realm of abstraction. Considering the attributes the speaker gives to the "impure" racist, racism has less to do with some "pure" hatred of some "real" cultural or racial difference than with the fear, boredom, desire, personal gain, conformity etc. that motivate ungenerous or hostile behavior. The various components of "impure" racism, in other words, disclose the true nature of racism and eventually prevent the speaker from embracing the racist. Furthermore, Besigye suggests that the racist's source of hatred lies within him- or herself and his world rather than in the object of his hatred. He thereby also suggests that there is no single or simple explanation of racism; it can never be separated from human and social subjects. The increasingly absurd criteria for the acceptance, the last being the racist's ultimate sacrifice – his own life - only enhances the ironic effect of the poem. In the end, it is impossible to interpret Besigye literally, as proposing a world of absolute values and identities and as providing forgiveness. Instead, Besigye deconstructs the identity of racism and the racist and discloses their respective impure and complex identities.

Rather than suggesting that racism will disappear if only people would begin to love one another across racial borders, Besigye reveals the "real" sources of racial categorization and racist behavior, namely those human feelings disclosed in the poem:

desire, fear, boredom, shame etc. By doing so, he exposes the absurdity of dividing humanity into different races and the falseness of the principle of purity, which guides these divisions. He thus also diversifies the identity of racism, proposing that it is always mixed up with different forms of human feeling and expression.

Trying to think "beyond race", Paul Gilroy proposes in his 2002 book *Against Race* that "the founding absurdity of "race" as a principle of power, differentiation and classification must now remain persistently, obstinately, in view" (42). Associating the idea of race with fascism, Gilroy favors a new, cosmopolitan type of humanism instead of the exaggerated focus on difference characterizing much contemporary cultural production and criticism. Gilroy's call to an end to "racial thinking" is founded on this planetary humanism, which he in a later book explains as "capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon one another" (*After Empire* 4). Gilroy does not dismiss the enduring power of racisms. On the contrary, under the subtitle "The Right to Be Human," he explains that racism exists "significantly and perniciously in unconscious and supraindividual forms" and that critical analysis of its potency contributes to the life of the humanities and to a broader civic interaction (12). Precisely because of this, he questions why typically humanist ideas of mutual worth, dignity and essential similarity are so unfashionable today. Gilroy proposes that such humanist ideals are important for the cultivation of a healthier relationship with otherness as well as for the development of a multicultural society that is not marked by fear, anxiety and violence (135).

Besigye both subverts the power of racism and discloses the absurdity of race in his poem. There is no separate race that the racist hates. Nor are there any pure racists

who can be forgiven and thus transformed into innocent human beings. Instead, there is a "primitive" humanity and its ordinary experiences of desire, sickness, fear and suffering. Since Besigye's poem asserts the human qualities of the racist he ultimately implies that the survival of humanity as a race depends on its ability to channel its powers into cooperative and generous acts instead of into hatred of self and other.

Life Worship or Hostility to Life?: Whores, Strippers and Sexuality

Besigye's second collection of poetry, published ten years after the first, demonstrates a significant shift in tone and subject matter. While his first collection contained many fine and powerful poems, including those analyzed in the last section, his second collection contains many poems and prose poems that have been interpreted as pornographic and hostile. Although these later texts must be viewed as part of Besigye's playful challenge to a closed Norwegian mainstream culture, they also risk limiting the potential of the affirmative subjectivity and the call for social and racial justice that characterized many of his earlier poems.

In a 2003 interview in *Dagbladet*, Besigye glorifies strip-clubs as spaces of freedom. In the article, he appears in a photograph at a strip-joint in Oslo, sitting at a table by the stage with a glass of beer in his hand, watching a topless stripper in long black boots perform her pole-dance. Claiming to be the first Norwegian poet writing a poem about strippers, Besigye defends stripping as emancipation and claims that Norwegian culture is hostile to sex and the sex industry (Sørensen "Nattas ridder"). In the poem "På strippebar" (At the strip-bar) in *Krystallisert sollys*, the speaking voice appears as a protector of strippers and whores:

> I have never despised whores. I would have liked to rush out onto the street and sing to their glory, yes, become the poet of the whores! Neither do I despise strippers. I have never despised strippers. *I admire them!* Yes, those who despise strippers despise life! Despise nature! Despise the universe! An ex-stripper told me that she once in the wardrobe behind the stage felt the smell of vanilla ice cream from the wing strokes of an angel while she put her makeup on… I am sure that strippers also have their own guardian angels, angels who protect them from those who despise life. (*KS* 57)[105]

Although it is possible to dismiss the problematic aspects of this poem by insisting on the author's ironic distance to what he is saying, I think such irony is harder to defend in Besigye's second collection. Are the female prostitutes and strippers actually practicing their subjective freedom from the deadening conformity of middle-class life, as Besigye suggests, or is their profession a sign of their lacking individual freedom? While Besigye's glorification of whores and strippers can be refreshing as an attack on conventional morality, it can also easily be interpreted as a form of misogyny. In another section of the same poem, Besigye reveals the desire of the speaker: "I would like to visit her one evening and undress her with my teeth, this cyberpunkblonde, and torture her with cock and whip and gags hour after hour"(57).[106] Here, Besigye shows that the speaking subject is a male, whose relationship to the prostitute is defined only by sexuality (and maybe also by aggression). In another poem, Besigye proposes that women's fear of being raped is a repressed desire to be raped (60). He describes a sexual act thus: "She loved that he called her a whore, tart, bitch, slave […] while he fucked her

---

[105] "Jeg har aldri foraktet gatehorene. Jeg skulle gjerne ha sprunget ut på gaten og sunget til deres pris, ja blitt gatehorenes poet! Og jeg forakter heller ikke strippere. Jeg har aldri foraktet strippere. Jeg *beundrer dem*! Ja de som forakter strippere forakter livet! Forakter allnaturen! Forakter universet! En forhenværende stripperske fortalte meg at hun en gang i garderoben bak scenen kjente vaniljeisduften fra en englevinges slag mens hun satt og sminket seg… Jeg er sikker på at også strippere har sine egne skytsengler, skytsengler som beskytter dem mot jordens livsforaktere."

[106] "Jeg skulle likt å besøke henne en kveld og kledd av henne med tennene, denne cyberpønkblondinen, og pint henne med pikk og pisk og knebler i time etter time!"

from behind against a wall filled with old German Luger guns and red devils' masks (58-59)"[107]

The pornographic aspects of Besigye's texts underline Besigye's claim that there is something positively disarming about the underground milieus of society that he depicts. They also serve Besigye's call for a more open mentality in general, including a healthy engagement with sexuality, hence their tendency to border on violence and violating behavior. Besigye's provocative expressionism in this regard has not gone unchallenged by critics. Eirik Loden criticizes Besigye's second collection in *Dagbladet*, claiming that the worship of life in his texts now and then comes dangerously close to hostility to life ("Krystallisert sollys"). Helge Torvund, another critic, also criticizes Besigye's overindulgence in power and violence. He claims that many texts in *Krystalliert sollys* express a fascistic fascination with power:

> Besigye presents us with a world that is a mixture of Bente Müller and Bukowski in a fantasy porno movie for teenagers created by de Sade and Blake […] One experiences that the trust in power and the superhuman, the diamond human, virility and the philosophy of individualism are in symbiosis with aggression eroticism and other metaphors of violence. ("Virile vers og visjonar" 46)[108]

The pornographic content of Besigye's poems has a telling parallel in Feridun Zaimoglu's later texts, many of which thematize the sexual explorations of young Turkish-German men in Germany. Zaimoglu's 2002 novel *German Amok,* for instance, caused a minor scandal in Germany for its excessively pornographic content. Besigye and

---

[107] "Hun elsket at han kalte henne hore, tøs, tispe, slave, ludder, bitch, mens han bakfrapulte henne oppetter en vegg av gamle tyske Lugerpistoler og røde djevelmasker."

[108] "Besigye presenterer oss for ei verd som er ei blanding av Bente Müller og Bukowski i ein pubertal fantasypornofilm skapt av de Sade og Blake […] Ein opplever at trua på styrke og overmenneske, diamantmenneske, virilitet og einartenkning går inn i ein symbiose med aggresjonserotikk og valdsmetaforar." Torvund positions Besigye next to writers from different time periods and of different nationalities, suggesting that Besigye's is engaging with and inserting himself into many different traditions, including satanism and the occult (Müller), the disaffected and the male-centered (Bukowski), the violently pornographic (de Sade) and the visionary and the mystical (Blake).

Zaimoglu both claim to use pornography as provocation of "the mainstream" and "the acceptable" as part of their attack on the dominant middle class culture. Raw sexuality and the vulgar become tools with which these immigrant men assert an invigorating difference. With the characteristic confidence of a rebel, Besigye dismisses readers' and critics' criticisms of the pornographic elements in these texts:

> I am one of the best poets in the world. Everyone is preoccupied with all the sex in my poetry. Very few Norwegian poets write about eroticism. But there is a lot written about coffee cups and sad childhoods. And about anxiety. I show the finger to the hostility to sex characterizing Norwegian poetry. (qtd. in Sørensen "Nattas ridder")[109]

Using sexuality as a tool to open up the Norwegian tradition, Besigye sets up a dichotomy between the sexual, vital outsider on one side and the sexually inferior conformists on the other. While the strippers and whores in the poem above are described by the male visitor as goddesses who cure men from their loneliness in a world of coldness, the female professionals who are guests at the strip-club are scorned for their expensive suits, their "cold intellect," their sensual inferiority and the bitterness that the male speaker reads in their faces. As commentary on different social classes, these depictions place Besigye on the side of those viewed as less privileged both socially and economically. Instead of lamenting the situation of these individuals, however, he affirms that they enjoy certain freedoms by virtue of their social marginalization.

Professor of Norwegian Anne Sabo has taken the same approach to the discourse of sexuality in Norway as has Besigye. Not only has she shown that it is part of a bohemian Norwegian tradition to provoke the repressed sexuality in Norwegian

[109] "Jeg er i verdensteten. Alle henger seg opp i all sexen i mine dikt. Veldig få norske lyrikere skriver om erotikk. Derimot er det skrevet mye om kaffekopper og traurige barndommer. Og om angst. Jeg viser finger'n til seksualfiendtligheten i den norske lyrikken…"

mainstream culture. Like Besigye, she also laments strict pornography laws and attributes these to a Norwegian Puritanical tradition hostile to sexuality.[110] In an international perspective, such bohemianism can easily appear a little curious and as a product of privilege. Norway, like other Scandinavian countries, has a developed culture of gender equality, a widespread social acceptance of adolescent and female sexuality, sexually explicit advertising and an increasingly sexualized public sphere, liberal laws regarding birth control, sex education and abortion, and a relatively healthy attitude toward nudity. In the context of these social facts, Besigye and Sabo both underline that there is a discrepancy between Norway's accomplishments as a western, rational, and democratic welfare state and the extent to which the individual Norwegian is liberated from conservative norms.

My criticism of Besigye is that the trite vulgarity of his texts - the abundant descriptions of orgasms, genitals and body fluids – risks falling flat. The violent tendencies of Besigye's texts also risk undermining the positive force with which the author seeks to challenge the normative and repressive aspects of Norwegian mainstream culture. The distanced scorn of the middle-class, and the claim that the entire middle-class is sensually and sexually repressed, confirm that the identity of Besigye's rebellious and vital subjects relies heavily on a constructed mass of people that appears far too homogenous to be realistic. The glorification of prostitutes and strippers also invites criticism of a male-centered, un-reflexive, even sensationalist engagement with the underworld of Norwegian city-life.

[110] See Anne Sabo's articles: "The Status of Sexuality, Pornography and Morality in Norway Today" and "Ari Behn's *Bakgård*: The latest contribution from a Norwegian bohemian tradition."

Mocking Stereotypes or Reproducing Stereotypes?

This leads me to a related, potentially problematic aspect of Besigye's texts, namely that of racial stereotypes. When asked in an interview what it means to be "African," Besigye gave an answer that invoked a cosmopolitan and diversified African diaspora. "An African," he said, "is a person who absorbs many ways of life, who finds himself everywhere" (Sørensen). Besigye ironically added that Norwegians can indeed be more African than Africans in this regard, thus implying the futility of defining individuals by culture, race or nation.

Building upon the anti-racist poems of *Og du dør,* in which the speaker is an ethnic other affected by racial prejudice, the long poem "Den Blåsvarte Dansdronningen" (The Blueblack Dancing Queen) in *Krystallisert* adds an interesting twist to Besigye's critique on racial stereotypes and racial discrimination. In the poem, a black woman dancer enters a nightclub and displays her sensual, sexual and musical superiority on a dance-floor while surrounded by an at once curious and hostile white crowd. From the moment she walks into the club, she is an object of the white people's paradoxical desires. Already from the first stanza, the reader knows that the night will end with someone from the white crowd raping the black woman:

> She entered the dance club wearing tight torn jeans / And a tight T-shirt, with a shining golden star. / The night she was raped / All eyes were fixated on her blue-black skin […] / She was so blue-black and so strong / In her hyper-African charm / Filled with the most dangerous hip-movements / and sparkling eyes / That a couple of white country-girls / Who had never seen / Anything *so black* before were overcome with dizziness by the sight. (31)[111]

[111] "Hun kom inn i danselokalet kledd i en tettsittende utslitt jeans / Og en tettsittende t-skjorte, med en glimrende gullstjerne på/ Den kvelden de voldtok henne. / Alle øyne låste seg på hennes blåsvarte hud […] Hun var så blåsvart og så sterk / I sin hyperafrikanske utstråling / Full av de farligste hoftejokk / Og blikkgnistringer / At et par hvite bygdejenter / Som aldri hadde sett / Noe *så svart* før ble spinnsvimle av synet."

The black woman instantly assumes the characteristics of a sensual and sexual seductress. Besigye exaggerates her features, in line with popular white culture's stereotypical assumptions about her; her natural and animalistic sexuality is essentially "African":

> The whole of Africa was running through her limbs / The whole of Africa was breathing through her pores / The whole of Africa condensed in her feet. / The whole of Africa turned inside a woman's body / Raw, as the lionesses on Serengeti / Turn softly during their afternoon rest. […] Congo and Timbuktu unfolding / From her arm movements! The Nile rushing in her footstep! / Her entire body had become a drum. / A black flame… (*KS* 32, 33) [112]

As the black woman continues to dance, she instills both fear and admiration in the surrounding white crowd. Gradually, the men are overwhelmed by violent desire, the women by hate and envy. The white women are described as interpreting the black woman's dance as "a demonstration of black power," a "war of the races" (32). Suffering from their own sensual and rhythmic inferiority, they are hateful of the way the black woman attracts the white men and threaten *their* power over *their* men (33).

Considering Besigye's own definition of "African" above, it may seem a little surprising that Besigye plays so heavily with racial stereotypes in this poem. Or does it? In line with Edward Said's notion of how knowledge of non-Western people has been reproduced in the West, many theorists have written about how avant-garde modernists and ethnographers of the early 20th century gave the black body the characteristics of physical strength, rhythm, magic, and erotic power. Such racial classification through

[112] "Hele Afrika rant gjennom hennes lemmer. / Hele Afrika åndet gjennom hennes hudporer. / Hele Afrika fortettet seg i hennes føtter / Hele Afrika vred seg i en kvinnes kropp / Rått, slik løvinnene på Serengeti / Vrir seg makelig i sin middagshvile. […] Kongo og Timbuktu foldet seg ut / Av hennes armbevegelser! Nilen fosset i hennes fottrinn! / Hele kroppen hennes var blitt en tromme. / En svart flamme!"

[113] As mentioned in previous chapter, bell hooks invents this metaphor when she accuses white culture of appropriating black culture. In her mind, black culture has become the seasoning that livens up the dull dish of American white culture (*Black Looks* 21).

stereotype is a necessary component of colonialist discourse, since it justifies domination and masks the colonizer's fear of the "true" other. bell hooks, who interprets such racial stereotypes in a contemporary context, claims in *Black Looks* that the stereotypical image of the black individual is still "the primitive," "the wild," and "the erotic." Black people are, according to these stereotypes, imagined to have secret access to intense pleasure, in particular pleasures of the body (34). Toni Morrison furthermore emphasizes that these stereotypes are perpetuated primarily by dominant white cultures: the aesthetics of "Africanism" in white American writers' work, she writes, is a literary aesthetic in the service of establishing white authority. This authority is established, she explains, through "the fetishizing of color, the transference to blackness of the power of illicit sexuality, chaos, madness, impropriety, anarchy, strangeness, and helpless, hapless desire" (*Playing in the Darkness* 80-81). hooks and Morrison agree that the colonialist stereotypes of white vs. black people are still being reproduced in all cultural spheres, including popular culture and mass media.

Besigye deals with such aesthetics differently from both hooks and Morrison. Instead of constructing white and black identities that defy the stereotypes, as they suggest, Besigye consciously appropriates these stereotypes in order to make them productive as cultural critique. Besigye's re-appropriation of stereotypes can be understood as a form of imitation or mimicry. "Colonial mimicry" is, according to Homi Bhabha, the process by which a subjugated people are driven to reproduce the characteristics and ideals of the dominant culture. Bhabha affirms the ambivalence of such reproduction. Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents, he writes, and in that very act of repetition, originality is lost, and centrality de-centred (*The Location of Culture* 88).

By mimicking white culture's stereotypical representation of blacks, Besigye acknowledges the power of such stereotypes even as he mocks them. Such mocking connects to Besigye's playful self-representation in interviews, talks or TV-shows. Just like the black woman dancer, Besigye performs the role of the African "other": he is that seasoning that can liven up the dull dish of Norwegian sameness.[113] Acknowledging that stereotypes can be used for different purposes, it is possible to read Besigye's poem about the African dancer as a self-reflexive allegory of colonial and racist violence.

Besigye's stereotypical portrayal of black and white people also prompts the question: is the hostility of blacks towards whites markedly different from the hostility of whites towards blacks? It is different. As I argued in Chapter 1, it is understandable that Feridun Zaimoglu "uses" the testimonies from lower class Turkish-Germans, however vulgar and resentful they appear in his texts, as a form of attack on a German society that excludes and discriminates against them. And as Michael Eric Dyson argued in the lecture on rap that I quoted from in the previous chapter, cultural productions need to be interpreted on a deeper moral level than whether they are "positive" or "negative." According to Dyson, the misogyny and resentment present in much rap music is a mere reflection of the pathologies of a dominant culture intent on marginalizing and demonizing those inner city identities that are the creators of rap. Dyson, who argues for a complex black identity across national and continental borders, defends hip-hop and black youth culture. Dyson suggests that there is a distinct difference between the ideological hostility of majority societies against minorities, and the experience-based hostility of those who have been oppressed or discriminated against. He also emphasizes

the importance of allowing all accents of blackness to come to the fore, including the stereotypical.[114]

A dismissal of Besigye's poem as stereotypical therefore fails to engage with the uncomfortable questions of violence underlying Besigye's representation of the woman's black and African identity. Besigye's point is that the identity of the woman dancer as it is expressed in the poem is created entirely by the culturally dominant white majority. Blinded by her exotic "blackness" and "Africanness," the white onlookers remain unable to know and appreciate the woman's authentic identity. By exaggerating the woman's exoticism, Besigye blatantly reminds his readers of the power of representation, of what Stuart Hall called "how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" ("Who Needs Identity" 4).

Few critics have commented on the logic underlying Besigye's representations of stereotypes. Farten Horgar, for example, reads Besigye's texts literally and dismisses his portrayal of black and white identity as prejudicial and clichéd. He even gets defensive regarding the "rhythmically underdeveloped" white crowd in this particular poem: "Africans were not born to a drum solo and do not dance better than everyone else" ("Den nye vins martyrer" 20). His criticism of Besigye here appears to be a white man's condemnation of a black man's racism.

The logic that Horgar fails to acknowledge stems from the violence experienced by black or different-looking others in Norwegian society, alluded to in several of Besigye's poems: dark men barred from Oslo night clubs, a vandalized Pakistani store in the middle of Oslo, the burning of a witch, and the hanging of five black men who had

[114] See Dyson lecture at http://frontrow.bc.edu/program/dyson/.

whistled after white women in the American South. Besigye's black woman dancer can be a reminder of the violence of racism, a reminder of that insult, in Frantz Fanon's words, that white men flung at humanity and that still produces various forms of resistance.

To move toward a conclusion, I take note of two of Paul Gilroy's thoughts on the future of race and racism in his 2005 book *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*, in which he ardently defends cosmopolitan openness against cultural antagonism and other anti-cosmopolitan trends:

> The commitment to being recognized as a black European proclaimed here is hopefully part of a larger transition that may take us beyond racialized and racializable categories of all kinds. (151)
>
> and
>
> We need to consider whether the scale upon which sameness and difference are calculated might be altered productively so that the strangeness of strangers goes out of focus and other dimensions of a basic sameness can be acknowledged and made significant. (3-4)

Besigye clearly fails to transcend unproductive divisions in a poem that plays with worn stereotypes of whites and blacks. If we admit that this play with stereotypes is very conscious, however, we must interpret such representation as a form of provocation. Besigye is reproducing these stereotypes as part of his quest to criticize both a Norwegian conformity and the dominance of a white western culture. While Besigye, in this poem as well as in others, displays the destructive result of that racial prejudice that continues to objectify the dark other in Europe, he also displays the ability to ironize and humorize such prejudice. I remain very ambivalent about what to conclude about this poem. Should I criticize Besigye for exaggerating stereotypes and for failing to envision a more

attractive cultural complexity? Or should I acknowledge Besigye as an excellent ironic stylist, problematizing existing boundaries by means of exaggeration? This ambivalence may be a productive point at which to end.

*

In part, what Besigye shows with his poetry is what happens when a black African Norwegian like himself styles his way into Norwegian literature. The poetic force of Besigye's voice affirms a strong and confident subject that does not accept the limitations placed upon it by dominant forces in society, whether they are capitalism, conformism, or racism. Besigye turns his cultivation of difference and estrangement into an art. By setting himself, his vital outsider characters and his texts apart from "the Norwegian," Besigye protests against all destructive forms of cultural dominance. Colorful, expressive, sexual, vulgar and other affirmations of life become antidotes to what Besigye calls "the routine-universe," which appears to be a product of capitalism combined with the conformism characteristic of a small welfare-state society.

Besigye envisions, often by means of humor and irony, a more diverse Norwegian identity as well as a Norway that has eliminated the ills of racism. By adding what he feels is missing in the Norwegian system of norms as well as in Norwegian literary conventions, Besigye can both maintain his public image as "interesting outsider" and remain true to the importance he attributes his own individual and "authentic" difference from Norwegian culture and taste. Although Besigye, just like Zaimoglu, risks perpetuating divisions through his disdain for a conformist and homogenous middle-class culture, he nevertheless successfully challenges the prejudices of Norwegian mainstream culture and asserts that contrast and individuality are preferable to conformity. And just

like Zaimoglu pushes for ethnic equality in his texts, Besigye asserts the continued significance of racial identification and the relevance for all calls to racial equality.

CHAPTER 3.

Jonas Hassen Khemiri, Sweden: Toward New Ethnic Mixtures

It is not that the presence of immigrants corrodes the homogeneity and solidarity necessary to the cohesion of authentically social-democratic regimes but rather that […] these beleaguered regimes have produced strangers and aliens as the populist limit against which increasingly evasive national particularity can be seen, felt, measured.[115]

- Paul Gilroy

The Meanings of Black Swedish

Only rather recently in Swedish public discourse did "immigrants" (*invandrare*), who had been referred to as "foreigners" (*utlänningar*) between the 1940s and 1960s, become either "persons of foreign background" (*personer med utländsk bakgrund*) or "new Swedes" (*nysvenskar*). These changing epithets symbolized attempts to counter outsidership and signal that immigrants and their children were an integral part of Sweden as soon as they had permanent residency. These epithets also stand for different approaches to immigration. While "foreigners" were expected to assimilate, "immigrants" were respected as culturally different, and "new Swedes" signaled a potential cultural hybridity or mixing that affected society as a whole. To a great extent, however, the new Swedes continued to appear in public discourse in the same social contexts as had foreigners and immigrants: integration, multiculturalism, unemployment, language competence, and more recently, criminality. The most apparent paradox is that a large group of the new Swedes growing up in the ethnically segregated suburbs are both less integrated into and less positively inclined toward Swedish society than were the foreigners of the 1950s.

[115] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire* 123.

In a debate on Swedish television in March in 2006, the "official year of Multi-Culture," Ebba Witt-Brattström, a prominent professor of literature at Södertörn University[116] in Stockholm, said the following about the nature of Swedish language instruction at the nation's public schools:

> The government signals to our new Swedes that it is sufficient if they learn a little "Black Swedish" (*blattesvenska*)[117] so that they can put up a booth and sell bananas in Rosengård [a suburb to Malmö with a population largely consisting of immigrants]. ("Vem äger svenskan")[118]

In subsequent articles, Witt-Brattström continued to criticize segregation, blaming the ideology of multiculturalism and home-language instruction for delaying integration. Had multiculturalism been the guiding principle of integration when *she* went to school in the 1950s, she claimed, she would have attained "the conceptual ability of the monkey Enzo in the [animal park] Kolmården."[119] Brattström, whose parents had come to Sweden as refugees during the Second World War, later expanded on her claim that children educated in suburban schools with home-language instruction will have inferior language and intellectual ability and therefore be suitable only for denigrating jobs such as selling

---

[116] Södertörn Högskola

[117] This suburban Swedish, spoken by both immigrants and Swedes living primarily in the multiethnic areas of the suburbs, has many names. While "Black Swedish" (*blattesvenska*) is the appropriated version that many speakers of the dialect use, other names are "Million Swedish" (*miljonsvenska*) -- i.e., the language of the inhabitants of "the million projects," a reference to the 1970s plan to build 1 million units of housing in suburbs, units which were later inhabited mostly by immigrants – "Rinkebyswedish" (*Rinkebysvenska*), referring to that suburb northwest of Stockholm mostly associated with immigrants, and "Rosengård Swedish" (*Rosengårdssvenska*), referring to a suburb in the city of Malmö. While "Million Swedish" has become the general term for a broken Swedish spoken by immigrants, "Black Swedish" is the term favored by speakers themselves, and "Rinkeby- and Rosengård Swedish" are the more specific local dialects spoken in these areas and referred to mostly by sociologists and linguists who have studied these particular dialects. The word *blatte* in *blattesvenska* was originally a derogatory term for a person of darker complexion viewed as "not northern European." Since 2000, immigrants in Sweden have re-appropriated the word and thereby neutralized it. In popular culture, the opposite archetype of *blatte* is *svenne*, signifying ethnic Swede.

[118] TV 24, 26 March 2006. "Regeringen signalerar till våra nya svenskar att det räcker om de lär sig lite lagom blattesvenska så att de kan slå upp ett stånd och sälja bananer i Rosengård."

[119] "en begreppsbildning på nivå med apan Enzo i Kolmården."

bananas in the suburbs: she claimed in a subsequent article that "slang is not a language" but an "aggressive cry for help", which has no usefulness in any other context than "sex, sexualized violence, homophobia, drugs and crime." She called for a stop to home-language programs and a strengthening of Swedish-language education in schools. Moreover, she asserted that Swedish literary classics should play an imperative role for immigrant youth and their linguistic-cultural integration ("Miljonsvenskan – en mediebluff").

The significance of this debate lay in the different approaches to Swedish identity that were prescribed. While Witt-Brattström made valuable points about the importance of Swedish-language instruction for the integration of immigrants and their children, she also came to represent an elitist, ethnic- and class-biased position on Swedish identity and culture. She failed to acknowledge both the discriminatory mechanisms that immigrants and their children face on a daily basis and the integrity of the multicultural identities that they represent. Those who rectified Witt-Brattström's elitism offered more realistic, progressive and fair approaches to Swedish identity. They acknowledged what the linguist Ulla-Britt Kotsinas, an expert in second-language acquisition and slang, has argued in several articles: that behind the demand for "proper" Swedish is not a concern with immigrant youth but rather a typical middle-class bias and fear of other people, of rapid changes in society and ultimately of the loss of privileges ("Kravet på en god svenska").

The journalist Ossi Carp pointed out, for example, that a multicultural dialect is an important marker of a person's identity and should not be dismissed as poor language. Carp turned to professors in the field of bilingual education for explanations that defied

Witt-Brattström's stereotypes about suburban language users. He found that children in multicultural suburbs often speak several languages, and that such multilingualism should be viewed as a potential, not a problem. These various languages, Carp's sources asserted, enrich one another in a multilingual person's world, as evidenced by the amount of creativity, joy and humor in suburban slang. Most importantly, Carp also emphasized that socially, slang is an expression of identity, community and solidarity; it is a local, transcultural and transnational formation. Finally, slang does not necessarily stand in opposition to the use of standard language. A specialist in immigrant second-language acquisition, Professor Inger Lindberg, deemed Witt-Brattström's vision of Sweden "strangely monolingual and monocultural" (Carp, "Ett språk för miljoner"); she was surprised at the antagonism, arrogance and lack of realism that Witt-Brattström expressed in the debate.

*

Three years prior to this debate, in 2003, Jonas Hassen Khemiri published his first novel, *Ett öga rött* (One Eye Red). This book can be viewed as challenging Witt-Brattström's culturally dominant perspective on Swedish identity. Khemiri's book, which quickly became a bestseller, follows the young Moroccan-Swedish protagonist Halim, who partly communicates in a Khemirian version of Black Swedish characterized by inverted word order and other accents, including vocabulary from many different languages. Throughout the book, Halim defies what he considers "the Swedish integration plan," which aims to make Swedes of all immigrants. He neglects or pokes fun at everything Swedish and glorifies Arab culture. Halim's main opponent in this struggle for a strong ethnic identity is his own immigrant father Otman, who had come to

Sweden after a coup d'etat in Morocco, the failure of which devastated his plans for a future in his country.[120] Halim views his father's benevolent attitude toward Sweden and its democracy with derision, accusing his father of denying his own authentic identity and his heritage -- of having become "Swedified" (*svennifierad*).

In 2005 came Khemiri's second novel, *Montecore - en unik tiger* (Montecore – a unique tiger), an equally successful, formally complex book, in which the narrator is Jonas Hassen Khemiri himself. In this book, Khemiri constructs other accents of Swedish, different for each character. He continues to elaborate on the relationship between a rebellious son and his immigrant father, with the emphasis on the drastic changes that both their relationship and Sweden undergo in the 1990s. In the first chapter, Jonas receives an email from Kadir, a distant friend of Jonas' father Abbas. Kadir wants Jonas to write a biography of the father, now a world-famous photographer. In the ensuing exchange of emails, which constitutes both the biography and the book *Montecore* itself, the memories of Jonas and Kadir take turns recreating the story of Jonas' father Abbas. The novel covers the time between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, from Abbas' arrival in Sweden with great hopes of finding a place in what he considered an idyllic paradise, to his departure from Sweden triggered by his hunger for professional success and the increasing xenophobia in Swedish society.

This chapter explores Khemiri's texts as a critique of a narrowly defined Swedish identity. In contrast to Witt-Brattström, who promotes assimilation or one-sided integration as remedy to the outsidership of immigrant youth, Khemiri engages in his two

[120] The historical facts are only briefly mentioned in the narrative, but Khemiri is probably referring to one of the two attempted coup d'etats in Morocco in 1971 and 1972. These attempts, which both failed, aimed at assassinating King Hassan II and thus overthrowing the despotic monarchy that had been formed after Morocco gained independence from the French in 1956.

novels in a more productive dialogue between differently oriented identities. On the one hand, Khemiri shows the effect of ethnic marginalization in his portrayal of the sons and their rebellion. Similarly to Zaimoglu's *Kanaken,* Halim and Jonas (the sons in the two novels) react to a dominant society they perceive as hostile and closed to their identities. On the other hand, Khemiri also shows how Otman and Abbas (the fathers) struggle to integrate by remaining open to Swedish society and culture and de-emphasizing, even neglecting, their origin and ethnicity. Khemiri emphasizes that neither sons nor fathers enjoy a full degree of acceptance in Sweden. As if responding to Witt-Brattström's dominant perspective, he says in an interview with the trilingual Online magazine Qantara that,

> Slowly but surely people are no longer asking how immigrants can integrate themselves into Swedish society, but rather what discriminatory processes in Swedish society are keeping immigrants from finding their place. Should we try to train immigrants to become Swedes, should they have to pass Swedish tests before they are admitted? The real issue is to integrate Swedish people into the modern globalized world. (qtd. in Müller, "Immigrants Who Can Do More Than Just Rap")

Khemiri is careful not to blame Swedish society or Swedes exclusively for immigrants' segregation, however. In diplomatic fashion, he tends to promote the notion that everyone should become more self-reflexive and sensitive to others' perspectives. The tone of irony that pervades Khemiri's texts suggests the distance that Khemiri, a self-ascribed cultural hybrid, places between himself and all positions in the debate about Swedish multicultural identity. While clearly in favor of the fathers' more individualistic and cosmopolitan approach to identity, Khemiri pokes fun at the fathers as well, disclosing the weaknesses and contradictions in all identity positions. Especially in his second text, where the son's and Kadir's different reconstructions of the father's identity

grow into an increasingly difficult and ambiguous endeavor, Khemiri emphasizes the fictional aspects of identity. In the end, Khemiri suggests that there must be more productive ways for immigrants and their children to identify in multicultural Sweden than through the reversion to a spurious authenticity of ethnic origin (the sons) or through assimilation into the majority culture (the fathers). I read Khemiri's books as provoking a widening of Swedish identity: a Swedish identity including "different-looking" others with or without other cultural attachments. While Khemiri both envisions and personifies this open, ethnically and culturally mixed Swedishness, he reveals that Swedish dominant culture still lacks in openness toward such an identity.

*

Khemiri was born in 1978 in Stockholm, Sweden, to a Tunisian father and a Danish-Swedish mother. He had studied economics and literature at different universities in Stockholm before the successful publication of his first novel in 2003. Since then, his national and international tours have established him not only as a writer but also as a representative of multicultural Sweden. Dramatic adaptations of Khemiri's work have been performed at *Statsteatern* (the City Theatre) and at *Dramaten* (the Royal Dramatic Theater) in Stockholm.[121]

Khemiri has often expressed uneasiness with the position he has assumed in the literary field. He is particularly guarded against epithets such as "the new Swede" (*nysvensk*) or "the multicultural Swede" and he has grown wary of reminding critics that

[121] This is particularly ironic, since in *Ett öga rött*, one of the defiant games of Halim is to trail Dramaten actors after their late-night shows with the purpose of physically harming them and thus banishing them from the most prestigious stage of the Swedish cultural establishment. In this way, Halim wishes to leave room at Dramaten for the first immigrant actor with an accent, more precisely his unemployed actor friend Nourdine. This action (like the entire novel) seeks to effect an expansion of Swedish identity, albeit through questionable means.

his texts serve to undermine rather than assign ethnic identity. This dilemma or burden of representation is common to minority writers, who do not want to be branded as "ethnics," "different" or "multicultural." Recalling Henry Luis Gates' claim that the biggest threat to the margin is not the assimilation or dissolution of the margin but the homogenization of the ethnic other as, simply, other, it is easy to understand Khemiri's attitude. Gates argues that the challenge ahead for minority writers (and others) is to try to be inclusive and extroverted instead of exclusive and introverted in exploring marginal positions ("'Ethnic and Minority' Studies" 299-300).

While Zaimoglu and Besigye, as I have shown, *can* be interpreted as too exclusive in their portrayal of marginal identities, therefore risking what Gates calls "the homogenization of the other," Khemiri sets out explicitly to be both extroverted and self-reflexive. In *Montecore*, he even comments ironically on his own "immigrant persona" while reflecting on the success of his first novel. The father's friend Kadir, who has read the reviews of Jonas' first book, writes in one of his emails, accented with his own dialect and unusual word-choices:[122]

> Why so angry about the fact that Norstedts [*the Swedish publishing company*] has presented your novel as 'the first novel written in authentic Rinkebyswedish'? Isn't it their way to *grow* interest in the reviews? […] Apparently, you have given life to "the immigrant's story" in a language that sounds as if you have just "dropped a microphone" into *optional* immigrant area. Didn't you write that your book was about a Swedish-born man who intentionally *accents* his language? What happened to your alleged exploration of "the theme of authenticity." […] Your novel seems filled with inconsistency to me and sullied with exactly those ugly words that your father condemned. "Gussar?" "Baxa"? Why does the book

[122] As mentioned, Khemiri's gives each main character his own particular "accent." Kadir's language is archaic, interchangeably influenced by Arabic, French or English. His Swedish is thus marked by "mistakes" that often have a humorous effect. I have marked Khemiri's most unusual (yet intentional) word choices with italics in the quotes.

> use the language that your father hated the most? No surprise that people "misunderstand." (28, 39) [123]

Khemiri undermines and questions not only the protagonist Halim's defensive identity but also his own defensive response to the critics' interpretations of his first novel. He admits that the critics' focus on cultural difference and their interpretation of Halim's language as authentic "Black Swedish" were not as far-fetched as the author would have liked it to be.

Khemiri writes in the context of a Swedish national identity that has only recently started to be opened up to greater ethnic diversity.[124] That Khemiri's first novel could be seen as such a novelty is a case in point. On one level, Khemiri's language experiment serves the same social function as the African-American vernacular writing of the 1970s, the broken German in some of the *Gastarbeiterliteratur* of the 1980s, or the French

[123] "Varför så arg över att Norstedts presenterat din roman som "den första romanen skriven på tvättäkta Rinkebysvenska"? Det är väl bara deras metod att växa intresset inför recensionerna? […] Tydligen har du gett liv åt "invandrarens historia" på ett språk som låter som om man "sänker ned en mikrofon" i valfritt invandrarområde. Skrev du inte att din bok handlade om svenskfödd man som bryter sitt språk med intention? Vad hände med din påstådda exploration av "autencitetstemat"? [...] Din roman tycks mig hålad med inkonsekvenser och smutsad med just dom fula ord som din far fördömde. "Gussar"? Baxa"? Varför använder boken just det språk som din far hatade mest? Ingen surpris att folk 'missförstår'"

[124] Apart from the increasing presence of immigrant and minority directors and protagonists in recent Swedish filmmaking (Reza Parsa'a *Före Stormen* (Before the Storm)(1999), Josef Fares' *Jalla Jalla* (Jalla Jalla)(2000), Reza Bagher's *Vingar av Glas* (Wings of Glass)(2000), Peter Birro's and Lukas Moodysson's *Det Nya Landet* (The New Country) (2000)), within the literary world, recent bestsellers and winners of the prestigious August Prize in Sweden, such as Mikael Niemi's *Populärmusik i Vittula* (Popular Music in Vittula) (2000) and Susanna Alakoski's *Svinalängorna* (The Houses of Pigs) (2006), show that also other minority experiences are getting increasing literary attention. Niemi's book is a story about social relationships in one of the northern Swedish-Finnish borderlands in the 1950s and 1960s, and Alakoski's novel is a story written from a Finnish minority perspective. Both books are burlesque and humorous but focus to a large extent on the social class differences between majority and minority and on the question of a Swedish cultural dominance imposing self-consciousness and inferiority on the minority. Per Nilsson's book *Svenne* (Swede), which received the August Prize for best children's and youth book in 2006, must also be viewed as an important book for multicultural and multiethnic Sweden. It is a story about right-wing extremism and racist groups establishing their authority in Sweden.

Maghrebi Beur writings of the 1980s.[125] It serves to affirm a Swedish identity different than the culturally dominant one. On another level, Khemiri's irony and self-reflexivity add an interesting dimension to his texts and to the identities he constructs in these texts, warning the reader to interpret Khemiri's texts as social realism. It is this ambiguous quality of his texts, existing somewhere between social realism and aesthetic play, that allows for both social and philosophical understanding of the identities contained therein.

Blatte: Taken and Mistaken Identity

When Khemiri's *Ett öga rött* was published in 2003, many saw it as related to the immigrant magazine *Gringo's* promotion of a "non-Swedish Swedish" *blatte* identity. *Gringo* was established by the Kurdish-Swedish Zanyar Adami, who saw the need to cultivate a more pluralistic Swedish identity. The main intent of the project was to report from the multicultural suburbs of Stockholm and portray these areas in a positive and humorous light. *Gringo* coined the term "million Swedish" (*miljonsvenska*) as an alternative to the existing terms "Rinkeby Swedish" (*rinkebysvenska*) and "immigrant Swedish (*invandrarsvenska*). According to *Gringo*, this suburban slang, the language of "the million project areas," signaled a new transnational class of young people; it was spoken neither exclusively by immigrants nor by all immigrants. Adami's magazine took

[125] Within the context of a French nation "in which all are French" and in which a radically secular approach to integration has been preferred to multiculturalism, the term *les Beur* refers to a culture of primarily second-generation immigrants from North Africa that gained cultural ground during the 1980s. *Les Beurs* were a generation in-between, mostly children of unskilled Maghrebi workers, who mostly lived (and still live) in the *les banlieues*, the poorer suburbs of Paris and other cities. After the initial famous march in 1983 from Marseille to Paris, the march for equality and against racism (*La Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*), they became increasingly visible also in the cultural sphere under the labels Beur music, Beur autobiography, Beur fiction, Beur cinema etc. (See A.G. Hargreaves, "The Beurgeoisie" and "Beur Fiction"). As mentioned in the introduction, such a group-oriented immigrant discourse has been largely absent in the Scandinavian context.

on a provocative tone vis-à-vis the established majority culture and aimed to recover and reclaim the derogatory and racist slurs "Blackie" (*blatte*) and "Blackhead" (*svartskalle*). When Adami and *Gringo* were accused of reinforcing stereotypes, Adami asserted:

> The most common criticism is precisely this […] But somehow, you have to handle this question, for it has been swept under the carpet. We lift the carpet and show: this is what it looks like. We must talk about the division, make fun of it, in order to slowly but steadily explain how to continue. (qtd. in Carlbom, "Blatte")[126]

Adami's reproduction of stereotypes is similar to Zaimoglu's, Besigye's and Khemiri's in that they all serve both to humorize and to criticize these stereotypes. There is a special resemblance between the Swedish *Gringo*-project and the German *Kanak*-movement. The promoters of these projects seek to draw attention to the prejudices to which immigrants and immigrant areas are often subjected while at the same time refusing the label of victimhood often associated with such marginalization. By turning the ghettoized *blatte* into a cool and proud identity, Adami gives legitimacy to a "new", "multicultural" Swedish identity.

Not surprisingly, Adami was one of Witt-Brattström's main opponents in the debate in *Dagens Nyheter* over Swedish identity and culture; he called her position out-of-date and identified the magazine *Gringo* as "the most Swedish of Swedish newspapers." Adami writes on *Gringo's* webpage:

> *Gringo* was born because the media-image of the million programs was fucked up. Million Swedes were always portrayed as threats, victims or exotic exceptions. And we reacted by creating warm, loving and optimistic journalism about Sweden. That Sweden which has existed for so long but which many have

[126] "Den vanligaste kritiken är just det. […] Men på något sätt måste man hantera frågan för den har sopats under mattan. Vi lyfter på mattan och visar: så här ser det ut. Vi måste prata om uppdelningen, driva med den, skämta om den, för att sakta men säkert förklara hur vi ska gå vidare."

> not yet seen. We don't speak of "new Sweden," for we have had immigrants since the 40s and million programs since 1975. It is nothing new. It is Sweden.[127]

There is a telling difference between Zaimoglu's and Adami's approach to the identities they promote. While Zaimoglu (at least initially) recommended and defended a hostile response to objectification and discrimination, Adami suggests that an affirmative and positive resistance is more effective. Recently, *Gringo* has gained in status from changing its layout and starting to include a variety of news items. Some new topics now come from the Europe-wide phenomenon of immigration, including, for example, the phenomenon of the so-called "paperless people".[128]

Halim's Rebellion

Halim, the protagonist in Khemiri's first novel, is the son of Moroccan immigrants to Sweden, caught between his father's efforts toward assimilation and his female friend Dalanda's Arab nationalism. The death of Halim's mother may play a role as well in the young man's increasing identification with Dalanda and the margin. Possibly blaming the closed-ness of Swedish society for his mother's sickness and death, Halim both romanticizes and draws strength from her once politically oriented lifestyle. Dalanda, whom Halim's father refers to as "a fundamentalist fool" and "a crazy old bitch," urges Halim to distance himself both from integration-friendly immigrants and

---

[127] "Gringo föddes för att mediebilden av miljonprogrammen var pippad. Miljonsvenskar framställdes alltid som hot, offer eller exotiska undantag. Och vi reagerade på det genom att göra varm, kärleksfull och optimistisk journalistik om Sverige. Det Sverige som funnits så länge men så många inte sett. Vi snackar inte om "nya Sverige," för vi har haft invandrare sen fyrtiotalet och miljonprogram sen 1975. Det är ingenting nytt. Det är Sverige." http://www.gringo.se/gringo.asp. 6 March 2007.

[128] Instead of using the term "illegal immigrant," increasingly many Europeans choose the term "person without papers" or "paperless person" to indicate a person who has entered a country without the proper documents.

from the corrupt, "US-friendly," "Palestinian-and-Arab hating" Western culture, and instead take pride in Arab history and the Arabic language. She also invents a term - "the Integration Plan" – for the immigration politics of Sweden. This plan, she argues, aims to turn immigrants into Swedes and thus erase all their authentic differences. Assimilation is both impossible and undemocratic, according to Dalanda. The only proper response is to renounce everything Swedish and everything mixed and instead cultivate a pure Arabic identity. Inspired by Dalanda's firmness of belief, Halim starts to study Arabic texts in order to reclaim his authenticity, especially since, as Khemiri ironically has Dalanda say, "texts are not like people, who change and forget things" (12).

Khemiri portrays Dalanda and Halim's flirtation with an authentic Arab identity mostly through humor; their conversations usually appear rather ridiculous and their reactions exaggerated. He also, however, shows that Halim's alternative identity is a product of a society still reluctant to embrace or actively promote diversity. Khemiri portrays how other, more cosmopolitan-minded immigrants, are reduced to ethnics and "Others" as well. Halim's actor friend Nourdine, for instance, who went to theater school in London, finds no access to the Swedish theater despite endless job applications and auditions. While helping Nourdine to rehearse for the role of Ibsen's Peer Gynt, Halim suggests, in tune with his black-and-white view of identity, that a dark-haired *blatte* with an accent will never be able to play Norwegian classical drama. According to Halim, the only role that would genuinely fit Nourdine is the role of taxi driver or Kebab salesman (30). Halim's worldview is a mere reflection of how many non-immigrants view immigrants in Sweden or how closed the cultural establishment is to "ethnic" experimentation. Nourdine, who used to travel all over Europe playing Beckett's

Estragon, remains unemployed throughout the book. Unlike, Halim's father, who owns a store that sells everything, he refuses to join the only profession that seems available to immigrants: that of entrepreneurship.

Maybe as an appropriation of state methods to categorize and order immigrants into ethnic groups, Khemiri shows Halim navigating through this socially divided Swedish world by defining people and classifying them, often with humorous results. Reminiscent of Besigye's ethnographic gaze on the well-to-do Norwegians in Hugo Boss suits, there are the streamlined luxury-Swedes, "the Swedish mafia," who flaunt their class belonging by wearing expensive clothes. There are the bohemian-Swedes, who only superficially have more integrity or individuality, for they dress like bums even if they don't have to ("their parents aren't in jail and don't work as cleaners"(37)). Among immigrants, there are the street-smart joker-criminal immigrants who are experts at stealing chocolate, avoiding civilian cops, and, in other trivial ways, turning power relations around. Also ridiculed, as in Zaimoglu's texts, are the good, mimic-immigrants, those, according to Halim, who betray their own difference by trying to fit into mainstream society (36-37).

As insights into Halim's universe, these characterizations of different groups of people display a mixture of cultural bigotry and satiric description: Yugoslavians are criminals, Iranians are the soft Middle Easterners and Americans plan to exterminate the Arabs, steal Arab oil and give everything to the Jews. Still, Halim's cultural observations also illustrate a certain cultural sensitivity. He acknowledges the differentiation within the two groups he otherwise often simplistically refers to as *svennar* and *blattar*. In addition, in his observation of what he considers the doubly inauthentic cultural hybrids, Halim

expresses a certain understanding of the complexity of individual identity. His helper Alex, for instance, is an Asian adoptee who embraces hip-hop and black culture. Khemiri refuses Halim this insight about himself, however. According to Halim, the only authentic people within the contemporary multicultural circus are the few revolutionaries, like himself, who remain free thinkers and who are capable of seeing through all the fake identity games and lies (38, 185). Khemiri skillfully pokes fun at his protagonist while at the same time not entirely dismissing his perspective.

*

Edward Said has famously asked whether one can divide humanity into different cultures, histories, traditions, and societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly. In his book *Identity and Violence* (2006), Amartya Sen argues likewise that one of the prevailing ideas of modern times is that of civilizational and cultural partitioning. Sen criticizes this world-view, famously promoted by Samuel Huntington, because it assumes that the conflicts existing between nations and cultures stem from irreconcilable cultural differences and not from desires of control and power. This idea, he writes, creates the illusion of unique and singular identities and destinies and it ignores the complexity of culture. It also risks creating antagonistic identities (100). Sen discusses Islamic fundamentalism and Western hegemony as co-dependent identities that each defines itself in opposition to the other. Sen proposes that the idea of individual pluralism helps us conceive of a more interconnected and less divisive cultural world.[129]

Apparently, it is this logic of singular identities that structures Halim's Arab Nationalism. Halim is far from a dangerous modern fundamentalist or radical ethnic. But

[129] Samuel Huntington's controversial theory was elaborated upon in one article and one book: "The Clash of Civilizations"(1993) and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996)

his ego-centrism, his strong sense of outsidership and the reductive and antagonistic basis of his understanding of the world foster a destructive potential. Halim's insular worldview eventually alienates him from almost everyone: his classmates, his well-meaning father and his equally well-meaning teachers at school. While Khemiri seemingly seeks to make some objective comments on the closed nature of Swedish society with respect to immigrants and their children, he also assures the reader that the door to Swedish culture is never quite as closed as Halim imagines. When Halim bombards his helper Alex with glorifications of Arab culture and stereotypes about Jewish people, Alex responds with some uncomfortable facts about Halim's separatist world. He accuses Halim of living the immigrant stereotype only out of fear of opening up (209).

One of the merits of Halim's black-and-white view of multicultural Sweden is that it questions to what extent and in what ways Sweden is open to difference and diversity. Similarly to Zaimoglu, Khemiri pokes fun at a superficial and naïve promotion of multiculturalism. The countrywide "school democracy" projects, for instance, becomes an example of authoritarian hypocrisy. While one of its official aims is to include students in the multicultural democratic project, it really serves as a shield against real-life conflicts and differences. While Halim initiates a new menu of Arab foods in the cafeteria, his rebellious acts – his stealing chocolate from the school cafeteria and him drawing obscene pictures on classroom walls - undermine the meaning of such superficial "multicultural" changes. The Swedes may take pleasure in the multicultural spectacle and foods of other cultures, Halim thinks, but they lack courage and character for they have never experienced any significant hardships. Khemiri implies that the respect for the

other must go much deeper, that Halim's feeling of outsidership is not reduced by the introduction of Arab foods in the school menu.

Halim is also able to view both pragmatic integrationists and distanced cosmopolitan intellectuals in a critical light. He learns from Dalanda, his friend from the park, that integration-friendly immigrants like the father or endlessly theorizing intellectuals, whom she refers to as "despicable chameleons" or "limping camels," will never fight existing inequalities since they are too eager to adapt and thus to reap their own gains in life (32). According to Dalanda, Halim's father represents a non-solidaristic group of immigrants, equivalent to the *Assimil-Kümmels* and *Assimil-Fatmas* in Zaimoglu's texts. Halim interprets his father's positive attitude towards Sweden as a sign of betrayal and dishonesty.

*

Jonas in Khemiri's second novel is a considerably more mature and reflexive protagonist than Halim. Parallel to his exploration of his father's identity, Jonas develops a more complex understanding of contemporary urban identities. For example, Jonas is equally critical of all "soft" notions of multicultural understanding, because he has seen the lack of openness in the relations between different immigrant groups. By displaying that he has some insight into the different ethnic antagonisms and hierarchies both between Swedes and non-Swedes and between different ethnic groups of immigrants, he suggests that something much more basic than "understanding" motivates people:

> Bla bla bla and understanding here and understanding there and you have had understanding for everyone in your whole damn life, understanding for idiot blackies who routinely complain about Sweden and understanding for idiot Swedes who complain about the temptation that blackies have for social welfare and understanding for Arabs who hate Iranians because they always want to be

> better than other blackies (except when it comes to using blackie quotas to their advantage) and understanding for Iranians who hate Arabs for all the historical drivel and understanding for Serbs who hate Bosniacs [Khemiri's conscious misspelling] and Bosniacs who hate Turks and Turks who hate Kurds and Kurds who hate everyone and everyone who hates gypsies and the only ones you have had a little hard time understanding are black Afrikanos [Khemiri's term], for they are low in the blackie hierarchy but as opposed to the Gypsies they never hate back and you cannot understand how they can abstain from using hate as their driving force. For isn't it hate that drives us onwards… (312)[130]

In contrast to Halim, Jonas does not exclusively blame Swedish society for the divisions characteristic of multicultural Sweden. He acknowledges both the historical baggage that immigrant groups have brought to Sweden and the new antagonisms created by the power struggle among different immigrant groups. The rhetorical question at the end of this depressing description of a divided Swedish multicultural world suggests that Jonas is not content with these divisions. Even if he is puzzled by the "black African" attitude, he still considers it an alternative to hatred.

This description by Khemiri evokes the term diaspora and suggests that there is nothing intrinsically liberating about the social fact of multiculturalism. On the contrary, this description of different diaspora groups cultivating antagonism toward the majority culture on the one hand and toward other diasporic groups on the other suggests what James Clifford notes in his essay "Diaspora," namely that "indeed, some of the most violent articulations of purity and racial exclusivism come from diaspora populations"

[130] "bla bla bla och förståelse hit och förståelse dit och du har haft förståelse för alla i hela ditt jävla liv, förståelse för idiotblattar som rutinklagar på Sverige och förståelse för idiotsvennar som klagar på blattars socialsukt och förståelse för araber som hatar iranier för att dom ständigt vill vara bättre än andra blattar (utom när det gäller att kvotera in sig på blattekvot) och förståelse för iranier som hatar araber för allt historiskt tjafs och förståelse för serber som hatar bosniacks och bosniacks som hatar turkar och turkar som hatar kurder och kurder som hatar alla och alla som hatar zigenare och dom enda som du har haft lite svårt att förstå är svarta afrikanos för dom står ändå långt ned i blattehierarkin men till skillnad från zigenarna tycks dom aldrig hata tillbaka och du kan inte förstå hur dom inte kan lockas att använda hatet som drivkraft. För det är väl ändå hatet som driver oss vidare..."

(307). Khemiri reminds his Swedish readers of the banal truth that immigrants are a very diverse group of individuals with distinct historical experiences. He also suggests that people whose sense of identity is defined by a collective history of displacement may be very reluctant to integrate or assimilate into a new national community. Indirectly, he expresses a certain fatigue with the existing antagonisms within multicultural Sweden. He suggests that there is something primitive and self-defeating in the cultivation of ethnic or cultural exclusivism and antagonism, and that the positive articulations of diaspora exemplified by the Africans are more productive examples of how to live in a multicultural society. The black African attitude, as it is expressed here, suggests that difference can be articulated not merely through antagonism and separation but through peacefulness and connection.

One of Clifford's more valuable arguments is that diaspora identities should not become "tropes" or "figures" for complex modern identities. The stubborn hope of renewal and survival that exists within diaspora populations, Clifford notes, goes hand-in-hand with a recovery of "not-only-western" models for cosmopolitan life (328). Reminiscent of those voices in Zaimoglu's and Besigye's texts that search for different lifestyles, sentiments and attitudes, Jonas' observation of how black Africans carry themselves in a sometimes hostile Sweden suggests that many immigrants and refugees, regardless of their unenviable situation, have the ability to resort to their own models of life. It also suggests that Sweden appears much less hostile to many immigrants than it does to the protagonist Jonas in Khemiri's book.

*

One irony of Halim's pure and "ideological identity" is its lack of any real connection to the Arab world: in other words, its lack of authenticity. Khemiri wants to foreground that there is more "ethnic" authenticity to the father's cosmopolitan identity than to the son's Arab identity. The father speaks Arabic, knows the Koran and has strong memories of Morocco. Halim's knowledge of Arabic is on a beginner's level. He has only occasionally visited his father's homeland as a tourist, and most of his friends are not Arab but Swedes of different immigrant backgrounds. Not surprisingly, he just started studying the Koran, which he alludes to as the source of truth throughout the novel. Thus, Khemiri underscores the fact that the pure identity, which Halim claims has more grounding in fantasy and isolation than in any actual engagement with different social and cultural worlds.

Parallel to Khemiri's foregrounding of such irony, however, is the tenderness in his portrayal of his protagonist, for whom "it is *not* easy *not* to think evil thoughts"(27), or *not* to press "the mute button in his brain"(23) when he is overwhelmed by confusion or the state of the world. The reader comes to understand that Halim, behind his rebellious façade, loves his father, seeks his approval, and rejoices the most when he sees his father laugh. Through Halim's diary entries, the reader is given insight into his sensitivities and insecurities. It is as if Khemiri consciously penetrates the mask of Halim's rebellious identity and reveals it to be a mere shield held up to a hostile and confusing world. Every time Halim has an outburst, it is described as a swirl of chaos rushing to his brain and limbs.

These unpleasant moments are always preceded by some event hurting him: the news that his school has no money for home-language instruction, an embarrassing cold

shoulder by the girl he likes, some reading in school about a Norwegian's cultural outsidership in Sweden, reminders of Israeli massacres of Palestinians on TV or articles he finds about further sanctions in Iraq or the famine in Afghanistan. Realizing that he is fighting to hide his sensitivity from the world, Halim writes in his diary, characteristically with wrong word order, in third person and without consistent punctuation: "Before was Halim soft but now hardness has taken over although the loneliness sometimes comes back nothing ever will be seen on the outside…" and a little later, overcome by memories of his mother's death and reminded again that his vulnerable self must remain unknown to the world:

> It is not easy to escape memories Halim thinks as he stands outside the school near the grove and blows his nose in his hand, crumbles snow on his face and thinks that no one will notice, no one should notice when you are so very soft inside. (191, 194-195)[131]

Khemiri conveys that there is certain honesty about the way Halim absorbs and reacts to both big and small inequalities and obstacles that come his way. It is as if he allows all kinds of unfairness to resonate with oppressive conditions everywhere and create reactions within him. To live in peace and to be truthful to one's sensitivities and convictions appear as two irreconcilable desires in Halim's world; if most go for the former it means they must betray the latter. Halim subsequently uses the epithet "chameleon" and his self-made adjective "chameleontic" (*kameleontisk*) to describe those failed revolutionaries who have become integration-friendly immigrants and those Swedes who think of themselves as "democratic" but whose benevolence is only skin-

[131] "Förut Halim var mjuk men nu hårdheten har tagit över fast ensamheten ibland kommer tillbaka ingenting någonsin kommer synas på utsidan […] Det är inte lätt att gitta från minnen Halim tänker när han står utanför skolan nära skogsdungen och snyter i handen, smular snö i ansiktet och tänker ingen kommer märka, ingen får märka när man är som allra mjukast inuti."

deep. The project of "student democracy," for instance, represents, in Halim's eyes, the insincere and fake enactments of authority, only serving to keep the students from questioning the inequalities in their own vicinity and in the world. Symbolizing the triviality of such democratic decision-making, at the first meeting of the food committee, "democracy" is enacted in an hour-long discussion about whether to continue serving triangular hard bread in the school cafeteria. Halim's reaction appears healthy and sound: "Everything was very fake and chameleontic. […] 'I shit on your protocols and your democracy, I thought'" (102-103).[132]

As a comment on Sweden at large, the discussion of triangular bread symbolizes a Swedish democracy where the most important societal problems are disguised behind discussions of trivialities. It also reflects the privileges of a well-to-do majority population, whose worries are trivial compared to those of many refugees or immigrants. It is hard to separate Halim's sensitive and sensible cultural observations from his growing paranoia. According to Halim's conspiracy theory, for instance, the current integration plan in Sweden aims at keeping the immigrant population calm, pacified, and downtrodden. The plan includes attempts to spread immigrants across different parts of the country and the city, as well as the clandestine smuggling of pacifying propaganda into TV programs such as Survivor (*Robinson*), the soccer league (*Allsvenskan*) and MTV Grind.

Khemiri does not criticize and ridicule the mainstream culture as directly as Zaimoglu and Besigye do. His position appears more ambiguous since he retains an ironic distance to Halim's accusations. This is exemplified in a particularly humorous

[132] "Allt var fett falskt och värsta kameleontiskt. […] 'Jag bajsar på eran protokoll och eran demokrati.' jag tänkte."

passage at the end of *Ett öga rött*, when Halim walks out at night with a plastic gun in his pocket. He plans to use it to frighten those Swedes who express dislike of dark-haired people like himself. When the whole evening passes peacefully without Halim having found one single reason to react, it becomes clear how deeply inside his own head Halim lives. Such authorial distance undermines Halim's position and exposes his loneliness as well as other intimately personal reasons behind his separatist ideology.

The Lost Generation and the Failure of Integration

Khemiri has admitted that Halim is partly a portrayal of his own rebellion at a younger age. Although Khemiri insists that Halim should not be taken too seriously, I cannot dismiss the questions of segregation and outsidership that Khemiri's novels pose. I argue that alongside Khemiri's ironic treatment of his characters, there is a serious message about the failed integration of large groups of immigrants and their children into Swedish society.

In his book *Even in Sweden* (2000), the American geographer and social scientist Alan Pred challenges the image of modern Sweden as a stronghold of tolerance. Married to a Swedish woman and having spent many summers in Sweden, the Berkeley professor had become acquainted with what he considered a strange and disturbing silence regarding the racial discrimination occurring in the country. He argues in his book what most people accept today, namely that the reawakening of European racism towards the end of the 20th century and the accompanying silence about it have contributed to an extreme marginalization of large parts of immigrant populations in European countries. After 2000, another American, the journalist Christopher Caldwell, published several

articles in the *New York Times* about Swedish multiculturalism or the absence thereof, again suggesting that the segregation of majority and minority populations, a silent acceptance of xenophobia, an absence of public discussions about racism, and a lack of legal measures taken against discrimination have struck many Americans living in or visiting Sweden. Even if Caldwell reveals his own anti-welfare state and anti-Islam biases in his articles, and even if he and Pred may exaggerate the explosiveness of racial tensions in "the new Sweden," their verdict is an interesting one. Caldwell claims, in line with Pred, that Sweden is not culturally mixed at all, but rather "the most segregated country in Europe." Quoting, among others, an Iranian-Swedish professor of Ethnic Studies at Uppsala University and a rich cacophony of immigrant voices, Caldwell deems integration in Sweden "a complete disaster." There is a depressing consensus among his immigrant interview subjects that "Sweden will never accept you" ("Islam on the Outskirts" 5-6).[133]

When readers or critics have asked Khemiri about the social milieus in his books, he has often denounced any realist interpretation. An outspoken critic of the way immigrants and their children are categorized as 'others,' Khemiri prefers to discuss his aesthetic "play" with identities. I have wondered whether Khemiri's sensitivity in this regard, his reluctance to categorize or to discuss categorization, falsely obscures that reality of marginalization, which he clearly thematizes in his books. And why is Khemiri offended when he becomes associated with the multicultural suburb? In order to give not

[133] It should be mentioned that some have claimed that Pred's and Caldwell's allegations of Swedish racism are very much exaggerated. See for instance Richard T. Tomassen's article "How Sweden Became So Secular" in *Scandinavian Studies* (2002). Tomassen criticizes Pred's pessimism and presents the extreme secularism in Sweden as the main reason why many highly religious groups, primarily Muslims, are not well integrated into Swedish society.

only Khemiri, but also Halim (and Jonas), a fair interpretation, it is necessary to ask questions about the segregated Swedish multicultural reality that Jonas and especially Halim view themselves a part of. At least potentially, Halim and Jonas could become representatives of a lost generation, who, in their quest for recognition will resort to more harmful rebellious acts than the petty vandalizing acts of Halim and Jonas.

In 2005, two reports were published by the Swedish government as a result of an increasing concern with the failure of the integration of immigrants: *Bortom vi och dom* (Beyond Us and Them), edited by Masoud Kamali and Paulina de Los Reyes and, and *Det blågula glashuset* (The Blue-Yellow Glass-House) by Paul Lappalainen. Both reports place Sweden and its integration of immigrants in a historical and international context, giving the integration politics of Sweden and other western countries a failing grade. The goal of these two projects was to shift the focus from immigrants to the very system of structural discrimination: from a victim-oriented discourse of the "other" to a consideration of the system and the conditions that produce such "others". As is stated in the conclusion to the second report, there are plenty of studies about immigrants' integration into Sweden but few on Swedish integration into the multicultural society. It also states that there are no self-reflexive studies on *why* research has focused on immigration and immigrants as "a problem" to the majority society, rather than on the question of discrimination (Lappalainen 461).

The first report, *Bortom vi och dom* is a compilation of theoretical essays written by Swedish and European writers that focuses on Sweden as part of a European tradition suffused with colonial and racist thinking. Structural discrimination is thus seen as a result of the historical depreciation of the different and the strange. The report points to

the importance of a variety of new and international perspectives on structural discrimination inspired by primarily Anglo-American and Francophone theories that view racism as an indelible part of western society (postcolonialism, minority discourse, antihumanism, and critical whiteness studies).

Det blågula glashuset, the second report, is an empirically oriented study of structural racism. Two of the merits of this report are (1) that ample space is dedicated to comparisons of Sweden to other multicultural countries, and (2) that it in the end suggests various remedies to structural discrimination. It points out that more historically multicultural countries, like the United States or Canada, have better managed both to value cultural difference and to give legal rights to minorities. It suggests that the American judicial protection against discrimination and the promotion of ethnic interest groups within the university system, for instance, have strengthened minorities' sense of national identity in the US. Most importantly, the report suggests that future research should focus on the majority society rather than on "the Other," and that it should direct its attention to what constitutes privilege. It proposes the necessity of affirmative mechanisms, suggesting that a more active anti-discrimination policy be written into law, and that those affected by discrimination become a larger part of the formulation of problems and solutions. Recommending greater interdisciplinary focus on questions regarding the multicultural society, the report asserts the importance of subjective, qualitative and experience-oriented approaches to knowledge. This is echoed in *Bortom vi och dom*: "It is interesting," Los Reyes writes, pointing to the absence of institutional engagement with questions of discrimination in Sweden, "that antiracist voices, like [the rapper group] Timbuktu's […], which are applauded within the frame of cultural

production by an enthusiastic audience, are without parallel in other areas of society" (253).[134]

*

Khemiri's literary works can indeed be interpreted as anti-racist and provocative in the same vein as Timbuktu's music. And there is certainly some seriousness behind Khemiri's joke that it was his first novel that brought upon a definite shift of consciousness in Sweden (Müller "Immigrants Who Can Do More Than Just Rap"). The attention that Khemiri has received in Europe demonstrates that Khemiri's novels engage in a social phenomenon that is European in scope. Does Khemiri suggest that the social contexts of ethnic outsidership in Sweden could potentially fuel backlash rebellion just as it has done in France and England? [135]

In his book *After Empire*, Paul Gilroy mentions Zacarias Massaoui, the 20th hijacker of the planes that toppled the Twin Towers. He quotes Samad Massaoui, who wrote a biography of his brother, and who links the experience of cultural uprooting to the attraction his brother felt for a tradition that accepted him, however extreme it was. He describes his brother's arrival in Britain:

> [The young Muslims] found themselves in a foreign land not necessarily welcoming. […] Zacarias, as we have seen, is a French man not at ease with being French, and a Moroccan who can't even speak Arabic. Which community does he belong to? His malaise would definitely foster a sense of belonging to the group that took him in. (126)

[134] "Intressant är att antirasistiska röster som Timbuktus […], som hyllas inom ramen för kulturproduktionen inte har några motsvarigheter i andra samhällsområden."
[135] The social unrest that broke out in violence in several cities in France in 2005 has been interpreted as a result of the failure of the French nation-state to integrate large parts of its new minority inhabitants; it also suggests a backlash against an ongoing demonization of Muslims and Islam in the West.

Islamic fundamentalism is certainly much more complicated than a simple reaction by immigrants and their children to social exclusion or humiliation. However, Massaoui's example can serve to highlight the connection between a British (and European) regimentation of national identity, including a hostile promotion of assimilation, and the outsidership of ethnic and racial minorities. Most importantly, the growing ground for radical fundamentalism, as Gilroy likewise observes, is not to be found "somewhere else," but often enough in those locations where people are routinely frustrated and made angry and miserable by the everyday effects of discrimination (126).

Former colonial nations such as Britain and France started their literary explorations of multicultural urban life earlier than the Scandinavian countries, whose direct investment in the colonial project has been viewed as negligible. Although it is difficult to compare different national situations with different immigrant populations and different types of outsidership, a glimpse at one of these European literary forerunners will help emphasize the importance of Khemiri's project as social commentary, and even as a forewarning of the potentially destructive effects of ethnic segregation in European society. I see no reason not to interpret Khemiri as simultaneously humorous and serious in his portrayal of rebellious youth, aiming to challenge their parochial, potentially destructive identities as well as the discriminatory system that sustains them.

Hanif Kureishi, a Pakistani-British writer, starts his 1990 novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* by marking a "new" British identity with the words: "My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred. Almost" (7). Exploring new ways to be British in multicultural Britain, Kureshi's stories are much like Khemiri's in that they foreground different tactical strategies used by first- and second-generation immigrants to re-invent

identity and come to terms with belonging. Whether dedicated to traditionalism, mimicry, black nationalism or assimilation, Kureishi's characters belong to a cacophony of metropolitan identities, reflecting the racially and ethnically diverse condition of contemporary England. At the same time, outsidership is central to many of Kureishi's protagonists and characters, who often define themselves in relation to a British majority culture they perceive as hostile to their identities and aggressive in its demand for their assimilation.

In the 1980s, after the fatwa on Salman Rushdie had been issued, Kureishi started to visit mosques in London. He wanted to find answers to the irony of "modern" fundamentalism: why people born and bred in the West turn to extreme ideologies with such passionate attachment. Kureishi discusses the Muslims he discovered there in an interview:

> It seemed to me that these younger kids would be interested in what I was interested in, *bhangra* music, pop music, all that stuff. But they had completely rejected all of that and I was really shocked for these kids were as English as me. They were born and raised in England, yet they rejected the West. They hated it. (qtd. in Kumar, "A Bang and a Whimper" 127-128)

Kureishi subsequently created various characters with fundamentalist tendencies in his stories, searching for answers to this phenomenon. One of these characters in the novel *The Black Album* (1995) explains characteristically:

> And we think we want to integrate here! But we must not assimilate, that way we lose our souls. We are proud and we are obedient. What is wrong with that? It's not we who must change, but the world. (67)

Kureishi, an outspoken commentator on multiculturalism in Britain and Europe, considers radical Islam incredibly powerful and a serious threat to liberal democracies.

He also, however, argues that one of the fuels of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism is the western elitism that imparts double standards upon many formerly colonized peoples and minorities. Reminiscent of Halim's scorn of liberal multicultural respect in *Ett öga rött*, and of Zaimoglu's downright dismissal of multiculturalism, Kureishi writes in his foreword to *My Son, the Fanatic* (1999):

> [T]he central tenets of the West - democracy, pluralism, tolerance ... - could be treated as a joke. For those whose lives had been negated by colonialism and racism such notions could only seem a luxury and of no benefit to them; they were a kind of hypocrisy. (xi)

Kureishi's stories are bleaker and more violent than Khemiri's books, and Kureishi is more cynical than Khemiri. Kureshi's multicultural London is also more diverse and more challenging than Khemiri's Stockholm. Kureishi's literary worlds are filled with conflicts within, across and between the immigrants' and natives' cultures. His plots, however, develop similarly to Khemiri's, against the backdrop of conflicts between differently-minded immigrants or immigrants' children, between fathers and sons, between siblings or friends, some of whom represent measured integration, while others have turned to extremism in their search for identity and life's meaning. The more extreme situations and behaviors of the characters in Kureishi's fictional world suggest not only that the tension within the multicultural milieu of Britain is on a different scale than in Sweden, as recent events also have shown, but also that the future may bring increased social and cultural tensions to Scandinavia as well.

The diagnosis of British suburban life in Kureishi's work is alarming, argues David Punter in his reading of Kureishi's *The Black Album*. It is marked by "the intensity of the fragmentation of family and community in the face of unrelenting, insensate

hatred" (*Postcolonial Imaginings* 162). In Kureishi's book, writes Punter, the only alternative to the regime of purity is an addiction, often to drugs, that destroys many of his characters: "deprived of nurture, […] renamed in a desperate search for an alternative identity […] we are dealing here in a ceaseless disappointment, a limitation of hopes and expectations" (171-172). While Punter's readings of postcolonial literature generally conflate exile almost exclusively with loss and destruction, it is possible to see some optimism in Kureishi's stories. For example, at the end of Kureishi's *The Black Album*, the young protagonist Shahid, who is a Pakistani-Brit but is otherwise reminiscent of the sensitive, young and searching Halim in *Ett öga rött,* slowly turns away from the fundamentalist ideas of his friends, not toward some unambiguous secular Britishness but toward an ambivalent and "reasoning" existence. While Shahid's friends gather on campus to burn a book they consider an affront to Islam, Shahid chooses to stand on the side of his British girlfriend who calls the police in order to prevent this violent act of censorship.

*

While the themes of immigration and multiculturalism figure in increasingly many Swedish films since the mid-1990s, as well as in music (especially rap- and hip-hop), literary accounts of the multicultural suburb are still largely absent from contemporary Swedish literature. The Ugandan-Swedish Johannes Anyuru's suburban epic poem *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* (It is only the Gods that are New)(2003) is an exception. I include Anuyru's poem in this chapter to further broaden the scope of Khemiri's critique of exclusive identities. Khemiri and Anyuru are two of the first representatives in the literary establishment of a generation that does not accept

outsidership on the basis of ethnicity or skin-color. Typical of this generation, Anyuru blends the expression of confidence and pride in the multicultural areas of Sweden with a protest against the reality of ethnic segregation.

Anyuru's long poem is a lyrical and melancholic description of the segregated and "ethnically other" Swedish suburb and of the search for the proper response to the social outsidership felt by many of its inhabitants. Anyuru describes the Swedish multicultural suburb as a sometimes violent, sometimes boring, often father- and godless world ("we never had any dads, but yet / they were there all the time / like a pain / deep inside us" (55)),[136] where friends are taken into custody on a daily basis or just disappear, where faceless cops in uniforms frequent the streets, and where the hope for a more colorful future is scorned by the graffiti that adorns the endlessly grey world of concrete. The roaming warriors of the suburb are both lost and heroic in their search for meaning and a sense of belonging. For Anyuru's suburb is a beautiful and culturally rich world as well, at night enveloped in the cosmic enigma of star-filled skies and in the day filled with a mixture of the world's languages and peoples, with old and new worlds intermingling. And there is love and creative force behind the outsiders' quest for meaning, even if, or rather because, the majority society resides at a great distance and typically signals closedness and conformity rather than openness and diversity. Anyuru suggests that the multicultural suburbs growing from the million programs are sites of an alternative Swedish identity:

> The large, silent high-rises, how they rise / against the night sky / (distant and therefore weightless): / you want to compare them to something, / diagrams of light, blue hand-imprints, a / gigantic, lit blueprint / raised against the sky; yes, I want quite simply to find / a formulation, which…I don't know…*something*; / I

[136] "Vi hade aldrig några farsor, men ändå / var de där hela tiden / som en värk / långt nere i oss själva."

> think there is an immense rescue there / for us all, a poetry / as mighty / as a breath. (37-38)[137]

Through his texts, Anyuru imagines what a truly hybrid contemporary identity can be. He structures his text with a mixture of images and characters from Homer's *Odyssey* on the one hand and from the contemporary suburb on the other. Quotes from *Odyssey* mingle with memories of current wars articulated in contemporary multicultural slang. Anyuru imagines an identity contaminated by classical culture and multiculturalism, by the sophisticated and the vernacular, the traditional and the innovative, the tragic and the comic. As if making an ironic comment to Witt-Brattström with his poem, Anyuru debunks the idea that suburban youth cannot achieve mastery of the Swedish language. He also insists upon the relevance of multicultural lifestyles and languages to Swedish culture and literature.

Anyuru, who was born in Sweden to a Swedish mother and a Ugandan father, testifies that it is not one's country of birth but the color of one's skin that determines whether one is viewed as an "immigrant" in Sweden. As a black Swede, Anyuru's experience of discrimination is ever-present, if often only as a paranoid thought in his mind (Collin "Kultur- elitens nya kelgris"). Reminiscent of Besigye's life-affirming subjects, Anyuru's suburban warrior poet, both a self-ascribed poet outsider and an ethnic outsider denied full belonging, is imagining a new kind of belonging to Sweden:

> There is a resounding simplicity in the words / that turn the conditions upside down, that tear / society apart and make it easier to fight against / or maybe only make it so distant / that you no longer need / to measure yourself against it. […]

[137] "De stora, tysta höghusen, hur de reser sig / mot natthimlen / (avlägsna och därför tyngdlösa): / man vill likna dem vid något, / diagram av ljus, blå handavtryck, en / jättelik, upplyst blueprint / rest mot himlen; ja, jag vill helt enkelt hitta / en formulering, som…jag vet inte…*något*; / jag tror att det finns en jättelik räddning där, / för oss alla, en poesi / lika väldig / som ett andetag."

> (and I think that still, in the end / maybe it is enough to survive / to "make it" / Life. / Maybe that is what it is about. / Maybe *fuck it* is / the most ingenious antithesis / that has been uttered in our millennium). (50, 54)[138]

Just like the notion of "taking apart" signifies an act of creative renewal, the "Fuck it!"-attitude suggests the possibility of rejecting the standards and prejudices of the dominant society in order to cultivate an alternative identity. There is something attractively non-confrontational about the *fuck-it* attitude expressed in Anyuru's text. If Zaimoglu's Kanaken and Khemiri's Halim construct their identities as a response to that which upsets them, and fuel their self-segregation with resentment, Anyuru expresses that it is possible, maybe even necessary for the minorities living on the margin to cultivate their independence from the norms and values of mainstream society. This attitude comes close to Besigye's playful detachment from the tastes, priorities and values of the dominant, white middle-class culture in Norway.

There is also a strong sense of the value of simplicity and immediacy in Anyuru's poetry: the ability to live in the moment, without program. Besigye and Anyuru's appear to express something similar here, a move away from the prevalent lifestyle of a western capitalist society with its focus on personal success, social status and materialism. Tentatively, I conclude that this search for different, healthier, more honest scripts of life appears to organically develop from a diverse and multicultural world filled with differences. In the end, Anyuru envisions somewhat idealistically the independence and integrity of a singular identity that does not measure itself against any majority norm or

[138] "Där finns en klingande enkelhet i orden / som vänder på förutsättningarna, som bryter sönder / samhället och gör det lättare att slåss mot / eller kanske bara gör det / så avlägset / att man inte längre behöver / mäta sig mot det. […] (och jag tänker att ändå, i slutändan / räcker det kanske att överleva / för att "klara det". / Livet. / Kanske är det vad det går ut på. / Kanske är *fuck it* / den mest geniala antites / som har yttrats i vårt årtusende)."

against others, but finds its own truths and cultivates its own freedoms. The Mexican-American Gloria Anzaldua has expressed this need to find "a way of life" beyond the reaction to cultural dominance:

> At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed... [...] Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off all together as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. ("La conciencia" 95)

It is telling that Anyuru and Khemiri, who are good friends, and who are both creatively exploring the *Fuck it!*-attitude towards a Swedish world that excludes many of its own young citizens from apt participation and sense of belonging, were the two finalists for a prestigious debut prize in 2003. Together with Besigye, they are part of a new, politically-, socially-, and "multiculturally" conscious generation. As representatives of this new generation of Scandinavians who are probing the effects of mixture on society, culture and identity, these writers bring refreshing styles and provocative and important social perspectives to Swedish literature.

The Two Cosmopolitans and The Envisioning of New Futures

Salman Rushdie, a self-described atheist and cosmopolitan, famous for challenging Islam, dogmatism and religious world-views, has described contemporary metropolitan identities as "those unexpected combinations of peoples and ideas that rejoice in mongrelization and fear the absolution of the pure" (*Imaginary Homelands* 394). Fittingly, Halim mentions Salman Rushdie in his diary one evening as an example of a Muslim-hating westerner. Halim is either misinformed – he calls Rushdie a Jew, who has

dissed the Koran (11) – or he is categorically giving the label Jew to everyone he does not agree with. However, it is still quite fitting that he chooses Rushdie as an opponent in his quest for a pure Arab identity, especially since Rushdie's open-minded perspective of identity, as expressed above, is similar to that of Halim's father, Halim's main adversary.

The fathers are representatives of a generation of immigrants who have escaped difficulties in their home countries and therefore view their new homes in a positive light. Perhaps it is because Otman himself never quite "arrives" emotionally in Sweden in *Ett öga rött* that he constantly urges his son to make Swedish friends and learn the Swedish ways. After his wife's death, he moves from the multicultural suburb to the center of Stockholm in order to save his son from the segregation and social problems of the suburb. Although Otman was once a revolutionary in his own country, who had organized to overthrow the despotic regime, in Sweden he has developed a critical distance to politics. He even questions whether it was worth to sacrifice his personal success for political change:

> Fight, what fight? There is no fight. Look at me, Halim! Look me in the eyes! Imagine what I would have had, had I chosen differently! One semester, ONE fucking semester was all I had left when the state coup failed. What could I do? You talk just like your mother – may she rest in peace: 'No, we cannot give up, we have to continue, we cannot give up the fight! […]' And now? What happens now? Look at me, I sit here with a store full of shit! (215-216)[139]

Otman appears disillusioned but also realistic and pragmatic. He refuses to romanticize his political past or his cultural tradition and he does not exaggerate the extent of the

[139] "Kampen? Vilken kamp? Det finns ingen kamp! Titta på mig, Halim. Se mig i ögonen. Föreställ dig vad jag hade haft om jag hade valt annorlunda. En termin. EN jävla termin hade jag kvar när statskuppen misslyckades. Vad kunde jag göra? Du snackar precis som din mor – må hon vila i frid. 'Nej, vi kan inte sluta, måste fortsätta, kan inte ge upp kampen.' […] Och nu då? Vad händer nu? Titta på mig - jag sitter här med en affär full med skit!"

discrimination he experiences as an immigrant in Sweden. Overall, Otman admires and respects the level of democracy in Swedish society. When Halim complains about Swedish bureaucracy and the political conspiracy that keeps immigrants unemployed and dependent on social welfare, Otman sarcastically asks his son,

> But tell me, Halim. What do you really remember from there? I am very curious. Tell me about West Sahara. Or…. tell me about the questioning methods of the police. It would be nice to hear. And maybe you can tell me something about King Hassan's poverty politics while you are at it. Yes? What is your opinion about the luxury in the Casablanca mosque? (97)[140]

Otman views Sweden in a wide, global perspective. By placing Swedish democracy next to a despotic and repressive regime that flaunts its riches to its largely impoverished population, Otman urges his son to view his own life situation in Sweden in a more favorable light. He even suggests that Halim's rebellion is a sign of privilege: that next to the human rights abuses of many regimes in the world, Halim's complaints about the state oppression of immigrants in Sweden appears negligible, even laughable.

Khemiri consciously undermines the stereotype of conservatively religious Muslims in his portrayal of the open-minded and modern fathers. Khemiri relates how the father cut his son's umbilical cord after his birth in a Swedish hospital, how he cooks and cleans, and how he develops an intimate friendship with a Swedish woman who has a child by a now-absent black African father. He is both secular and religious, even if he has chosen not to believe too much in anything. In conflicts, he prefers critical distance, nuance and arguments to reactive feelings: "What do you mean *our* side?", he responds

[140] "Men berätta nu Halim. Vad minns du därifrån egentligen? Jag är jättenyfiken. Berätta om Västsahara. Eller… berätta om polisernas förhörsmetoder. Det skulle vara kul att höra om. Och du kanske kan berätta lite om Hassans fattigdomspolitik när du ändå är igång. Ja? Vad tycker du själv om lyxen i Casablancamoskén?"

to his son's talk about the Arab cause: "who is us? […] What is it that we need? More suicide-bombers? Or more clever negotiators?" (219).[141]

The ambiguity of Arab identity suggested by Otman is meant to question the son's one-sided view of ethnic identity as well as to display the father's modern Arab and Muslim identity. By questioning the boundary between Palestinians and Israelis, Otman furthermore suggests that at least part of the political conflict is a result of people's inability to get over the division in their minds. By revealing that "we" the Arabs is a differentiated rather than a unitary "we," Otman suggests that the most democratic answer to the conflict must be sought across the boundary, and that both sides need to fight for democracy within their respective communities as well.

As opposed to Halim, Otman resorts neither to blind faith nor to the politics of blame. Parallel to any fight against social injustice, he suggests, must be the individual's dedication to self-enlightenment. In a conversation with Nourdine, Otman says:

> The Koran teaches us that the big jihad is to fight against the evil inside of us. The inner fight. The little jihad is to fight against injustice. But none of them has anything to do with terror-attacks against children and women" (220)[142].

Otman suggests that his son's personal Jihad against the Swedification and Integration Plan is childish, futile and misdirected. He wants his son to appreciate Swedish democracy and learn that all societies are differentiated within.

*

[141] "Vad menar du *vår* sida. Vem är vi? […] Vad är det vi behöver? Fler självmordsbombare? Eller fler smarta förhandlare?"
[142] "Koranen lär oss att den stora jihad handlar om kampen mot den onda inom oss. Den inre kampen. Den lilla jihad handlar om kampen mot orättvisor. Men ingen av dom har någonting att göra med terrorattacker mot barn och kvinnor."

As I have suggested already, in *Montecore*, his second novel, Khemiri adds complexity to the identity of both son and father. While the son in the end starts developing certain sensitivity to his complex Swedish identity, the father slowly realizes that he cannot cultivate his cosmopolitanism in a restricted Swedish social climate. In *Montecore*, Khemiri also puts stronger emphasis on the restrictions that Swedish society imposes on the father's cosmopolitan identity and he shows the extent to which the son's rebellion is a result of the father's failure to integrate. That said, although Khemiri has admitted that he identifies more with the fathers than with the sons in his books, he shows that also the fathers' cosmopolitan identities have limitations and prejudices.

For instance, before his departure from Sweden, Abbas often shows intolerance toward immigrants who are critical of or express their difference from Swedes. He feels a growing frustration with women who wear hijab or headscarves, with those who habitually complain about Swedish racism and with the unemployed, welfare-dependent immigrant men who hang around coffee shops all day. According to Abbas, these individuals keep alive the stereotype of antagonistic and lazy immigrants and give a bad name to hard-working immigrants like himself. His irritation with Jonas' circle of friends reveals his fear that his son will fail to become "sufficiently Swedish":

> Why are you only hanging out with immigrants? Niggers, Indians and bloody South Americans… Why no pure Swedes as friends? Are you a racist? Beware of hanging around with the wrong kind of people. Swedish people are better. Immigrants just use you and use you and then, when you need them the most, they stab you in the back. (284)[143]

Abbas is especially sensitive about his son's outsidership because of his own failure to

[143] "Varför hänger du bara med invandrare? Negrer, indier och jävla sydamerikanare… Varför inga helsvenska vänner? Är du rasist? Akta dig för att hänga med fel folk. Svenskar är bättre. Invandrare bara utnyttjar och utnyttjar och sen, när du behöver dom allra mest sticker dom dig i ryggen."

belong and feel accepted in Sweden. This is emphasized in a sequence of events starting in the summer of 1991. First, as a bitter irony, his optimistic documentary photographical project called "Swedish tolerance" fails to attract an interested public; then, skinheads vandalize his store and the Laserman starts targeting immigrants.[144] Shortly before his departure from Sweden, the father loses his will to struggle and is described by the son as a shell without color. The son, who blames Swedish intolerance for his father's decline, starts cultivating his hatred to Sweden more intensely. He reads Malcolm X and organizes a group that will revolutionize Swedish identity.

Kadir, the father's friend, defends the father's flight from Sweden and accuses Jonas of not sufficiently acknowledging his well-meaning father's struggle. He also denounces Jonas' and his friends' identity politics as regressive, as merely perpetuating the very racist structure it claims to undermine:

> Do you now realize how comic it was that you, in your ambition to minimize your Swedishness, started to attribute the value of ethnicity such decisive weight? For what is more Swedish than to tie people to their ethnicity? What people do that better than Swedes? And who becomes a better pet to racists than persons who accept the existence of an us and a them? Who becomes more toothlessly harmless than "the blackie" who has accepted his existence as "the blackie"? (322)[145]

If Jonas' rebellious reaction against cultural dominance seems counter-productive, however, the father's benevolent and open attitude appears just as ineffective. Abbas'

---

[144] The Laserman events refer to the numerous shootings that took place in Stockholm from August 1991 to January 1992 by a man with a gun with a laser-sight. One person died as a result of these shootings and several were severely injured. All victims had dark hair or skin-color, and it has been established that the perpetrator consciously sought foreign-looking victims.

[145] "Inser du nu hur komiskt det var att ni, i er ambition att minimera er svenskhet, började tillskriva etnicitetens valör en så avgörande tyngd? För vad är mer 'svennigt' än att knyta människor till sin etnicitet? Vilka gör det bättre än svenskar? Och vem blir en bättre kelgris till rasister än personer som accepterar existensen av ett vi och ett dom? Vem blir mer tandlöst ofarlig än 'blatten' som accepterat sin existens som 'blatten'?"

eventual "escape" from Sweden suggests that Swedish society fails to accommodate even those immigrants who are most eager to belong.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the public discussion of social exclusion has attracted a wide variety of different voices. There are obviously great differences in attitude toward multiculturalism within the immigrant community as well. One immigrant who has defended the values of the Swedish nation and Swedish national identity is Mauricio Rojas, a Chilean-Swedish politician and Folk Party member. According to Rojas, there are definite limits to cultural diversity. Rojas believes that Sweden is presently being aroused from a utopian dream of multiculturalism and that people instead need to reassert their national culture and its core values. He wants to ban un-democratic and oppressive traditional cultural customs in Sweden, such as arranged marriage and female circumcision, and he attacks the rebellious attitudes of immigrant youth (including the *Gringo* project) because of their unwillingness to embrace Swedish culture. Rojas, who arrived in Sweden in 1974 as a leftist refugee, has assimilated very well into Swedish society and culture. As an academic well versed in Swedish literature, he suggests that the social outsidership of first- and second-generation immigrants is linked to a lack of connection to Swedish history and Swedish cultural heritage.

Rojas' perspective is both refreshing and controversial. As one of few minority members of Parliament, he poses as an example of successful integration. By urging immigrants to be interested in Swedish culture, he can be viewed as promoting an open, cosmopolitan identity. His open criticism of self-segregating immigrants is a result of his wish to blur the distinction between majority and minority. Rojas has met plenty of criticism, however: less educated and less well-integrated immigrants and their children

feel especially alienated by his approach and his failure to address the questions of discrimination and racism. Rojas has been criticized for promoting an elitist and culturally dominant perspective on integration. He has also been accused of expressing prejudiced views of those immigrant communities that are the least integrated into Swedish society, among others the Chilean community.[146]

The difference between Rojas and Khemiri's fictional character Abbas is that Rojas - who came to Sweden in his twenties, just like Abbas - actually "made it" into Sweden and Swedishness, as much as that is possible, whereas Abbas did not. Rojas, in his quest to understand the specific Swedish "differences", has made many valuable and interesting observations and comparisons between the two cultures with which he is familiar. For instance, in his book *I ensamhetens labyrint* (The maze of loneliness)(1993), there are many amusing and telling descriptions of a paradoxical Swedish culture, alien to many of its outsiders. Although this book perpetuates many stereotypes about Swedish and Latin American culture, Rojas shows that it is important for an immigrant to engage reflexively with cultural differences:

> This incomprehensible country that hides its own face. This compact nation without national feeling. This urbanized farmer's country that has not kept up

[146] The "cultural" debate about integration has focused on what strategies should be used to come to terms with the problem of social segregation. Rojas, on Witt-Brattström's side in the language/culture debate, has, during the past couple of years, widely criticized what he considers the increasingly segregated and "criminal" Chilean community in Sweden, and has called for ethno-cultural studies of immigrants' criminality. In contrast, the writers and literary critics Mustafa Cem and Stefan Jonsson have been active in defending a position that finds the causes of segregation in the Swedish system itself. While Rojas and his allies advocate for a strengthening of "cultural Swedishness," Jonsson and Cem advocate for a weakening of national identity: a cosmopolitan loosening of cultural bonds that will lead to a greater inclusiveness. For parts of this debate in the daily *Dagens Nyheter*, see Mauricio Rojas, "Rättvisepolitik" (Equality Politics) (2007), "Kulturarv ligger bakom invandrares brottslighet" (Cultural heritage is the reason for immigrants' criminality) (2005), "Invandrarnas tystnad om brott ett svek mot demokratin" (Immigrants' silence about crime - a betrayal of democracy) (2005); see further articles by Stefan Jonsson: "Litteratur som gränsvakt (Literature as Border Guard) (2007), "Vart är Folkpartiet på väg?" (What direction is the Folk Party taking?) (2005), and Mustafa Can: "Folkpartiet har blivit populistiskt." (The Folk Party has become Populist) (2007).

> with its own development. This historyless people that bubbles over with history from head to toe. […] …an explanation why so many non-locals are amazed and often feel so "damn outside." (Rojas 10) [147]

What Rojas has in common with both the fathers and the sons in Khemiri's books is that he has experienced a Swedish society not sufficiently open to immigrants. Rather than blaming the Swedes collectively for immigrants' outsidership, however, both Rojas and Abbas assert that immigrants benefit if they learn to appreciate the mainstream culture.

The character Jonas in *Montecore* addresses the question of national identity from a slightly different perspective. As indicated earlier, he emphasizes that there are power relations between identities in multicultural Sweden. Jonas criticizes his father's willingness to conform because he views conformism as a subjugation of the immigrant's true identity to the dominant culture. The father's eventual escape from Sweden tragically proves that Jonas is right on some level. As a response to the culturally dominant attitude and as an ironic twist on Eurocentric stereotypes, Kadir describes Abbas as an open and modern ethnic outsider struggling against the backwardness of Swedish culture:

> He is just a man who tries to secure his children's success in a country heavy with tradition! He is a solitary modern cosmopolite in a barbarian society. For this is the truth about the country we call Sweden, civilized on the surface but barbarian in its thought structure. (285)[148]

Kadir here criticizes, even ridicules, a dominant discourse that views immigrants as traditional and backward in contrast to modern and civilized Sweden. He suggests that

---

[147] "Detta märkliga land som döljer sitt verkliga ansikte. Denna kompakta nation utan nationell känsla. Detta urbaniserade bondeland som inte har hunnit ifatt sin egen utveckling. Detta historielösa folk som sprudlar historia från topp till tå. […] … en förklaring till varför så många utsocknes också häpnar och ofta känner sig "så himla utanför."

[148] "Han är bara en man som försöker garantera sina barns succé i ett traditionstyngt land. Han är en solitär modern kosmopolit i ett barbariskt societet. För detta är sanningen om det land vi kallar Sverige, civiliserat på ytan men barbariskt i tankens struktur."

Abbas' cosmopolitanism represents a more advanced cultural stage than the monoculturalism preferred by many nationals and minorities alike.

Carina Tigervall writes in her 2005 dissertation *Folkhemsk film: med "invandraren" i rollen som den sympatiske andre* (Film-representations of the sympathetic 'immigrant')[149] about how the first stages of such open cosmopolitanism are portrayed in Swedish film. Tigervall argues that the Swedish films with immigrant themes produced in the late 20th century have antiracist and stereotypical tendencies at the same time. On the one hand, these films often emphasize similarity among people of different origin; they have ethnic others as protagonists, many of their representations of immigrants defy stereotypes, and their characters include many "mixed-raced" couples. Tigervall views these aspects of contemporary film production in Sweden to be progressive. Tigervall also criticizes the discourse on immigrants in these films, however, observing that a negative stereotype has been substituted with a positive stereotype. She argues that many immigrant characters in Swedish film from the 1990s are portrayed as sympathetic to the point of not being allowed to be normal. Her findings suggest that the historically developed prejudice against non-Europeans in stereotypical form coexists with active attempts to subvert it, and that yet, the "the ethnic other" is still not integrated into the Swedish norm (356).

This question of normality on the one hand and the changeability of identity on the other are applicable to Khemiri's portrayal of the father in *Montecore*. After several critics addressed what they saw as a stereotypical father figure in Khemiri's first book (the benevolent immigrant who is eager to integrate), Khemiri seems to have consciously

[149] The English title is Tigervall's own and not a direct translation of the Swedish title.

created a somewhat different immigrant father in *Montecore*: a character that consciously defies stereotypes. Abbas has a greater dedication to the pleasures of life (or *joie de vivre,* as he explains it himself) than to religion, politics or tradition. The reason for the father's exile in Sweden is not a state coup, as in the first novel, but love. Somewhat to the son's disappointment, Kadir's emails reveal that the father was neither a former revolutionary nor a political prisoner who had fought for the freedom of his people from humiliating colonization, but a "French-friendly" Tunisian from a family of French collaborators - so called *beni-oui-ouis* - whose taste for good literature, good food, beach life, and foreign women eventually brought him to Sweden. Kadir remarks that to be a cosmopolitan in Algeria in the turbulent 1950s was equivalent to being *against* the liberation movement and Arab-Algerian identity. It was the French culture and the wider western world that had attracted the young men, not the bloody struggle for independence (35-36).

Kadir renounces the rumors of Abbas as "the stud from Jendouba" and "the eternally unfaithful," but at the same time he relates how he and Jonas' father enjoyed the erotic and careless times of their youths with European female tourists seeking uncommitted sexual adventure:

> Does this erotic pluralism sound bizarre? […] Let me explain – that time was widely different from the one we are in now. At that time "Arab" was not a term used as provocation or virus. Rather the contrary. At that time, Arabic identity attracted sexual frequency! […] Plentiful were those female tourists who invited me to their hotel room after I had praised their golden skin. Numerous were those who emitted erotic groans when your father wrote their first names with Arabic letters in the sand on the beach or honored them with made-up Arabic poetry translated into French. (57)[150]

[150] "Låter denna erotiska mångfald bisarr? […] Låt mig förklara – denna epok var brett skiljd från nu. I denna tid var "arab" inte någon beteckning som användes som provokation eller virus. Snarare tvärtom. I denna tid attraherade arabiskhet sexuell frekvens! […] Frekventa var dom turistiskor som inviterade mig till sina nattliga hotellrum efter att jag prisat deras gyllene hyar. Nombrösa var dom turistiskor som suckade

Kadir pokes fun at the naïve but sexually emancipated European women, unused to the insistent male attention that was his and Abbas' courting routine. He also indirectly contrasts such touristic, erotic openness with the comparatively closed society that Abbas finds once he moves to Sweden. In line with his disappointment at his father's un-glorious or un-revolutionary past, Jonas describes his parents' love as a love-affair "which will end in air-travel and moves and love and marriage and conflicts and three confused mixed sons and continuous misunderstandings and an eventual tragic silence between a son and a father" (73)[151]: a quite pessimistic evaluation of a cross-cultural marriage.

In his second novel, Khemiri underscores the fact that the father is not a conservative Muslim but a considerably liberal and modern Muslim. After leaving Sweden, Abbas starts his career back in Algeria as a pornographic photographer. Exploiting the growing antagonism between the West and the Arab world for commercial interest, Abbas produces pornography posing white men in the leading roles and veiled Muslim women as their sexual victims. Abbas appears to have no ideological or political agenda behind this work; he is described as an opportunist who exploits the western desire to violate orthodox Muslim culture. However, when confronted by others and accused of tastelessness, he defends the freedoms inherent to modern liberal societies. He is an enlightened man, he says, who would never declare his models naïve or question their right to their own bodies (346).

---

erotiska stön när din far skrev deras förnamn med arabiska bokstäver i strandsanden eller hyllade dom med påhittad arabisk poesi översatt till franska."

[151] "…som kommer att sluta i flygresor och flyttar och kärlek och giftemål och konflikter och tre förvirrade blandsöner och ständiga missförstånd och slutlig tragisk tystnad mellan en son och en far."

In the end of Khemiri's second novel, the father goes through some drastic changes that further underscore the extent to which identity is changeable and context-bound. After having first lost his idealism in Sweden and then given into opportunism in Algeria, in the last chapter, Khemiri has Abbas suddenly realize the connection between his cosmopolitan vision and global social justice. Abbas leaves his pornographic engagements in Algeria to become a photographer of the victims of globalization. Away from his old selves (in Tunisia, the pleasure seeker; in Sweden, the downtrodden immigrant; in Algeria, the pornography photographer), he starts to document asylum seekers in Holland, victims of American war crimes in Afghanistan, children of Palestine, prisoners in Hong Kong, and illegal immigrants at the Mexican border (350). Kadir explains both the success and tragedy of Abbas' destiny outside Sweden as follows:

> [Abbas knows] with magnificent certainty that he will NEVER be downtrodden again. Never again will your father let himself be duped to conform. Never again will you see him compromise himself in the pursuit of money. It is not worth it. And maybe this is a discovery that he made too late in life… (350)[152]

In the end, both Kadir and Jonas blame Sweden for Abbas' absence. In their view, Sweden had denied him any other identity than that of the compromised immigrant.

*

Does Khemiri anticipate a positively diverse and integrated multicultural Sweden in the near future? Yes and no. On the one hand, both fathers and sons remain outside Swedish identity, regardless of whether they are conformists or rebels. The reader gets the sense that to be Swedish is not compatible with ethnic and cultural diversity. A

[152] "[Abbas vet] med magnifik säkerhet att han ALDRIG kommer låta sig trampas på igen. Aldrig mer kommer din far låta sig duperas anpassning. Aldrig mer kommer du se honom kompromissa sig själv i jakten på finanser. Det är inte värt det. Och kanske är detta en upptäckt som din far gjorde för sent i sitt liv…"

glimpse of hope is offered at the end of *Montecore*, however, when Jonas describes the wild mixture of metropolitan identities in the Swedish community as quite "normal," even if he also admits that, for many, the mix is perceived as something "new." If the young "new" Swedes define themselves as outsiders to mainstream society, their feeling of being "global" lends them a different sense of community:

> Our dads come from Chile and our moms are Swedish conservative politicians and we are born and bred in villas in Täby [considered one of the wealthy parts of Stockholm]. Our parents are experts in Chemistry from Nigeria and we have four brothers and sisters who are the most powerful bouncers in the world and our dads send expensive silk blouses from Singapore. We are born in Pakistan, we have steel rimmed glasses and red-checkered bandanas and dream about becoming the world's first rappers in the language Baluchi. We have Tunisian fathers and Swedish-Danish mothers and are neither entirely Swedish nor entirely Arabic but something different […] a new collective without boundaries, without history, a creolized community where everything is mixed and hybridized. We remind them that their days are counted. […] We are those who will never accept a language constructed to keep us out […] We are the future!" (*Montecore* 292)[153]

Far from Halim's vision of Arab purity, Jonas' hope for the younger generation is predicated on a change of consciousness regarding who and what is considered "Swedish." Emphasizing that "we" are all those things, including conservative and rich, Jonas defies Halim's insular world of rebellion as well as a culturally dominant, ethnically defined Swedish identity. I must admit that Khemiri's invocation of global identities appears to fit Göktürk and Wolbert's idea of an identity that thinks and feels *beyond* the nation ("Introduction" 3). One self-evident contradiction inherent to

[153] "Våra pappor kommer från Chile och våra mammor är svenska moderatpolitiker och vi är födda och uppvuxna i villa i Täby. Våra föräldrar är kemiexperter från Nigeria och vi har fyra syskon som är världens mäktigaste livvakter och våra pappor skickar lyxiga sidenblusar från Singapore. Vi är födda i Pakistan, vi har stålbågade glasögon och rödrutiga bandanas och drömmer om att blir världens första rappare på baluchiska. Vi har tunisiska pappor och svenskdanska mammor och vi är varken helt suedie eller helt arabis utan något helt annat […] ett nytt kollektiv som saknar gränser, som saknar historia, en kreoliserad krets där allt är blandat och mixat och hybridiserat. Vi är påminnelsen om att deras tid är räknad. […] Vi är dom som aldrig kommer att acceptera ett språk som är konstruerat för att sålla ut oss. […] Vi är framtiden!"

Khemiri's global identities, however, is that they are firmly located within the nation as well. Regardless of what Khemiri's fictional character say, they *do* have a history and they *do* have boundaries. Besides, they live in Stockholm and they all communicate in Swedish.

In *After Empire*, in which Paul Gilroy suggests reasons why young men may feel attracted to an extremist ideology, the author celebrates the conviviality of metropolitan culture, asserting the ordinariness and everydayness of multiculturalism and diversity. While the promoters of cosmopolitan ideals can easily be accused of privilege or bourgeois worldliness, something "ordinary" people cannot achieve, Khemiri likewise defends cosmopolitan mixture as something very ordinary and everyday and the cosmopolitan, open-minded outlook as necessary for any envisioning of a less antagonistic world. Gilroy locates hope for the future in urban youth and the spontaneous tolerance, openness and fearlessness toward others that characterize their everyday lives and cultural expressions (*After Empire* 4). Such cosmopolitanism equals solidarity across ethnic and cultural lines. It embraces pluralism, diversity and multiculturalism and disregards "old" ethnic and racial divides.

The bitter facts at the end of Khemiri's second book—that the father, the "most solitary cosmopolitan" (328), who had been eager to integrate into Sweden, has to leave Sweden in order to realize his potential, and that the son Jonas starts an organization, a kind of Swedish *Kanak*-movement dedicated to revolutionizing Swedish identity – may suggest that Khemiri is painting a bleak picture of contemporary multicultural Sweden. The hope, however, remains alive in the message above, which is spoken by one of the members of Jonas' movement. It is also alive in the dialogue between the perspectives of

father and son. While the father's modern, experimental and open attitude toward his identity foregrounds the necessary cosmopolitan outlook for the 21st century, the son's simultaneously reactive and attached identity reveals both the need to feel attached and the deeper causes of his identity politics: prejudice, racism and social outsidership.

Last but not least, it is important to recall that Khemiri skillfully cultivates a certain distance to his artistic creations, both through his experimentation with language and through humor. Characteristically, the second novel ends on an ambiguous note. In the epilogue, the Tunisian friend Kadir, who has just finished reading Jonas's manuscript of the book about his father (i.e., Khemiri's novel *Montecore*), gets the last word. The book is in Kadir's eyes a fiasco, since it portrays Abbas in too negative a light and thus violates the truth and the "authentic" identity of Abbas. Such self-deprecating irony by Khemiri creates an apt balance to the realism of his stories. It also underscores the point that Khemiri himself continues to make in public discussions: immigrants and their children are tired of being categorized as "ethnics" and exoticized as interesting "others": therefore disallowed membership to the Swedish community. In his two novels, Khemiri simultaneously claims Swedishness and questions what Swedishness means in the early 21st century.

CHAPTER 4.

Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Germany: The Art of Loving Playfulness

Answers [to multiculturalism] will not be found in journalism or academic theories. They will require a lot of patience. And even more love. [154]

- Dale Maharidge

Identity Beyond Exoticism

The title of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's first novel is a Turkish proverb: *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai hat zwei Türen aus einer kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich raus* (Life is a Caravansery has two doors I came in one and went out the other)(1992). The book is a socially engaged, action-filled first-person narrative of a Turkish girl's life in the 1950s and 60s. From the very first image in the book, the author evokes intimacy and humor. The narrator is an unborn child of a young Turkish woman, who speaks from within the womb. Once born into the world, the daughter is brought to an open grave and left there by her mother. Eventually, her grandmother finds her in the grave and saves her. The narrator humorously refers to this incident as having been "deprived of her death." Later in life, when she joins her grandmother on her visits to the cemetery--where the old communicates with the dead in Arabic—the narrator imagines how the strange Arabic prayers coming from her grandmother's mouth materialize in the air:

> I saw the letters, some looked like a bird, some like a heart with an arrow through it, some like a caravan, some like sleeping animals, some like a river, some like trees blowing apart in the wind, some like snakes that are walking, some like trees feeling cold in rain and wind. (18)[155]

---

[154] Dale Maharidge, *The Coming White Minority* 312.

[155] "Ich sah die Buchstaben, manche sahen aus wie ein Vogel, manche wie ein Herz, and dem ein Pfeil steckt, manche wie eine Karawane, manche wie schlafende Tiere, manche wie ein Fluß, manche wie im

When the girl later asks her grandmother - whose daily attention to the dead seems remarkable to the little girl - where death is to be found, the grandmother answers: "Death is between eyebrows and eyes, is that far away?" (18).[156]

Such intimate images (even death is intimate) and proverbial wisdom were interpreted as exotic in most German reviews of Özdamar's book. Critics were both thrilled by and patronizing of Özdamar's contribution to German literature. One critic wrote:

> This is really something new for our literature. Another way of thinking, deeply embedded in the words we use every day. A mixture of a child's eye and magic, naiveté and wisdom – she brings something lost back to Germany. (Gutschke, "Wann der Geduldstein dicker wird" 1)[157]

Meike Fessman writes that the "reflective level" in the novel is missing and that the story often lacks "inner necessity." She then compares Özdamar's rich but "kitschy" imagery to that of Garcia Marquez and writes that Özdamar's language "fascinates because it is not a genuine literary language, but rather an artfully noted spoken language": it connects the "archaic imagery" of the Orient with "the storytelling techniques of occidental modernity" ("Als gingen die Wörter" 904).[158] Walter Hinck also attributes the merits of Özdamar's texts to her cultural difference. "This novel," he writes, "has something of the storytelling richness of the oriental fairy tale. The powerful and sensual language did not

---

Wind auseinanderfliegende Bäume, manche wie laufende Schlangen, manche wie unter Regen und Wind frierende Bäume."

[156] "Der Tod ist zwischen Augenbrauen und Augen, ist das weit weg?"

[157] "Das ist wirklich etwas Neues für unsere Literatur. Eine andere Denkweise, tief eingebettet in die Wörter, wie wir sie täglich benutzen. Eine Mischung aus Kinderblick und magischer Beschwörung. Naivität und Weisheit – sie bringt etwas Verlorenes zu Alemania zurück."

[158] "Seine Sprache, die die archaische Bildwelt des Orients mit den Erzähltechniken der okzidentalen Moderne verknüpft […] Eine Sprache, nämlich, die genau deshalb fasziniert, weil sie keine genuine Literatursprache ist, sondern – kunstvoll notierte – gesprochene Rede."

need to copy the jargon of western culture" ("Großmutter und die Bagdadbahn" 34).[159] One critic alludes to a photo of dark-haired and dark-eyed Özdamar as a child in her first book, characterizing her as dark, sad, provocative and witch-like (Sartorius, "Mit Bismillahirahmanirrahim" 15).[160]

I argue that these remarks say more about the exoticism and arrogance inherent in the dominant German discourse about literature by minorities than they do about Özdamar or her novel. The specific class-, gender- and minority identity of Özdamar's protagonists, and the intimacy, humor and creativity with which Özdamar's narrators make familiar the strange world around them--whether it be the Arabic language, the subject of death, or German society--point the way to a very different reading. This chapter will show how Özdamar celebrates the migrant's spirit of perseverance and creativity in her or his quest for a fulfilling life. Her protagonists emerge as socially engaged, playful and loving individuals who always seek to establish a meaningful relationship with the other (whether "the other" is German, a Turkish peasant, Socialist intellectuals, or even so-called fascist Turks).

There is both a tension and a correlation between Özdamar's apparent aim to empower singular and unique minority identities and to display their place in the larger social and political order. Interestingly, despite Özdamar's own emancipatory struggle as a woman in a markedly patriarchal society, as a minority leftist in Turkey, and as a migrant worker in Germany, she is very reluctant to place herself or her literary characters into any specific political or social categories. In interviews, she expresses

---

[159] "Dieser Roman hat etwas vom erzählerischen Reichtum des orientalischen Märchens. Die kräftige und sinnliche Sprache hätte es nicht nötig, nach dem Jargon der westlichen Subkultur zu schielen."
[160] "Und dunkel, traurig, trotzig, hexenhaft sieht sie selbst aus, auf dem Foto, das als Frontispiz der "Mutterzunge" dient."

dislike of identity politics and she always asserts the integrity of the individual. But Özdamar is not naive. A stark and interesting contrast to her own trust in the minority individual's relative independence from categories and collective sensibility is the dire reality of poverty, patriarchal oppression, economic exploitation, and even starvation, that Özdamar's protagonists experience both first- and second-hand. The reality of the disenfranchised appears to challenge Özdamar's own emphasis on the power of the individual. It also challenges those mixed and ambiguous identities currently attributed migrants by many forward-looking academics. Marcia Landy has aptly has said the following about the impact of the disenfranchised on contemporary discourses on identity:

> the refugee, the immigrant, and the increasing unemployed or underemployed population are an affront to the celebration of the fragmented character of subjectivity, of mobility […] since this celebration of difference and hybridity often relies on suppressing vast segments of global populations that are marginalized, criminalized, impoverished, and deprived of life ("On the Road with Lamerica" 154).

Landy, who is interested in what impact an emerging, socially conscious "world cinema" can have on western discourses, suggests a consideration of social class as a necessary element in undermining the postmodern celebration of mobile populations and liberating cultural mixtures.

In this chapter, I bring these two different perspectives on the individual migrant together. On the one hand, I analyze the positive life-scripts in Özdamar's texts, suggesting that Özdamar presents an unusually empowering minority perspective on Germany. As I will show, I have borrowed the expression "loving playfulness" from the Mexican-American Maria Lugones. Lugones has theorized the ability of the female

multicultural subject (and others) to move between different social and cultural worlds and cultivate a sense of flexibility as well as openness and curiosity towards the other. While most protagonists in Özdamar's books are female, she gives all her protagonists this ability, whether they are lower-class guest workers in Germany or lower-middle-class migrants within Turkey.

On the other hand, Özdamar's texts also reveal how limited the individual possibilities are for a vast group of people both within and outside of Germany. Many people in Özdamar's narratives are migrants out of necessity. Due to class belonging, ethnic identity, gender, personality or simply misfortune, they do not cross borders as easily and effortlessly as many of her female protagonists. The poor peasants in eastern Turkey offer the most challenging perspective to the optimistic and forward-looking protagonists in Özdamar's novels. These peasants are deprived of the hope of ever being able to improve their life situation. I argue that Özdamar's focus on optimistic and empowering perspectives on the immigrant on the one hand and the hopelessness of the most disenfranchised on the other, serve to humanize the immigrant and sharpen our perspective of global social justice inherent to the immigrant's life story.

*

Özdamar's personal history marks her literary output, from the short story collection "Mutterzunge" (Mother tongue) (1990), to her novels *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai* (Life is a Caravansery)[161] (1992), *Die Brücke vom goldenen Horn* (The Bridge from Golden Horn) (1998), *Der Hof im Spiegel* (The Backyard in the Mirror) (2001), and *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (Strange Stars Stare at Earth) (2003), to

[161] The book is often referred to by this shorter version of the title.

numerous essays and short stories.[162] There is no clear chronology that structures her texts; each text moves back and forth between the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, between Turkey and Germany. The lasting impression from reading all of Özdamar's texts is the loosely connected whole that they form: a story of a Turkish woman's life from childhood to adulthood and her experiences of migration, within Turkey in the 1950s, between Turkey and Germany in the 60s and 70s, and between the two German states in the 70s. Just like the female protagonists in most of her stories, Özdamar came as a temporary guest worker to Berlin in the late 60s, escaping the difficult political situation in Turkey. In what is perhaps her most autobiographical text –*Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*– her protagonist later arrives at the Volksbühne theatre in East Berlin as an assistant to the Brecht-trained director Benno Besson.

When Özdamar received the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for her first novel in 1992, she was praised for her refreshing take on Turkish-German life. Her work has been widely understood since then as one in which a young Turkish woman finds her identity by engaging in multiculturality and multilinguality. Her ability to synthesize the Turkish with the German through content and language has been viewed as evidence for the Turkish-German symbiosis characteristic of contemporary Germany. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, many critics viewed Özdamar's texts as aesthetically inferior. Kader Konuk writes that Özdamar "irritates" monolingual and bilingual readers alike with her irreverence toward linguistic convention and her "accented writing" (Konuk, "Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai" 152). Özdamar defends her personal style and her at times inarticulate characters, claiming that such language is expressive in its

[162] The four texts that I will discuss in this chapter will be referred to as *Mutterzunge, Karawanserai, Die Brücke,* and *Seltsame Sterne.*

own right, and even organic to the mind of the immigrant. Özdamar's texts have contributed significantly to the growth of interest in Turkish-German and other minority literature in the 1990s, both in Germany and elsewhere, and her work has attracted attention in the academic world. Articles and chapters of dissertations have focused on different aspects of her writing.[163] Özdamar has also acted in several German films and TV series, usually playing the part of, in her own words, "the traditional Turkish woman."[164]

Empathetic World-Travelers

The German interest in Özdamar has probably been fuelled by her positive attitude and her ordinary, common sense approach to Turkish-German relations. Instead of accusing Germans of not opening up to the country's Turkish inhabitants, as Zaimoglu does, she affirms her interest in Germany and the German interest in her and invites the German into her Turkish worlds, both in her literary texts and in her public performances.

Although I will engage with aspects of Özdamar's texts that are directly feminist and woman-oriented, I prefer to view Özdamar's conciliatory and playful attitude toward multiculturalism as an attempt to blur both ethnic and gender divisions. I argue that one of her important contributions to German literature is the loving, appeasing and humorous perspective she and her literary work bring to the discussion of multiculturalism in Germany in general and to Turkish-German relations in particular.

---

[163] See for example: Azade Seyhan, "Lost in Translation: Re-Membering the Mother Tongue in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Das Lebene ist eine Karawanserai." Karen Jankowski, "'German'" Literature Contested: The 1991 Ingeborg-Bachmann Prize Debate, 'Cultural Diversity,' and Emine Sevgi Özdamar," Sohelia Ghaussy, "Das Vaterland verlassen: Nomadic Language and 'Feminine Writing' in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai," Sheila Johnson, "Transnational Ästhetik des türkischen Alltags: Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai."

[164] For example Dorris Dörrie's *Happy Birthday Türke!* (1992), and *Yasemin* (1988) by Hark Bohm.

Before moving into a discussion of Özdamar's work, I will introduce the ideas of two minority women and feminists in the US, who argue for the importance of finding methods for meeting across differences in our contemporary world. Posing a challenge to rational discourse in general and Western knowledge production about non-Westerners in particular, Gayatri Spivak writes that ethics is not a problem of knowledge but a call for a relationship, that the ideal relation to the Other "is an embrace, an act of love" (*The Spivak Reader* 269-270). Having written extensively about how to clear a space for marginalized voices, Spivak acknowledges how Western discourses have attempted to control the otherness of non-Westerners by defining them as different and inferior, both outside and within the West. Spivak therefore argues that an intimate relationship cannot be founded on the benevolence of the more privileged toward the less privileged. To think of the ethical relation as an embrace, according to Spivak, means that each individual (regardless of culture, class, gender) needs to find in others an echo of him- or herself. In a more practical sense, Spivak, who has frequently posed the question of how the most oppressed and exploited women in the world can be heard, emphasizes that a relationship between very different groups or individuals is not established by intellectuals attempting to represent oppressed minorities or pretending that they let the other speak for herself. To engage with the other means not only to talk to her, listen to her, learn from and about her, but also to identify with her.

Maria Lugones has also called for an intimate relationship across cultural, class, and gender borders. She emphasizes that as cultural worlds are becoming increasingly integrated, people must seek ways to facilitate open dialogues that can diminish the effects of cultural dominance. Lugones outlines a pragmatic theory of attitude in her most

influential article, "Playfulness, World-Traveling and Loving Perception"(1989). She suggests that the art of perceiving the world lovingly may be organically connected to the experience of being marginalized. While the expression "world-traveling" may evoke images of privileged tourists or self-sufficient cosmopolitans, she argues that it is not the privileged person who is a typical world-traveler. Rather, it is the person outside dominant society who acquires the flexibility to shift between different worlds. Living and feeling outside of the mainstream, Lugones' traveling multicultural subject develops a many-sided and flexible identity as a matter of necessity and survival. This subject inhabits and animates different worlds, including the stereotypical, but never remains fixed in any world. Her flexibility and playfulness undermine the anger and estrangement otherwise fuelled by injustice and outsidership (282). She can resist what Lugones deems characteristic of the culturally dominant attitude and the antithesis of loving perception: "arrogant perception." "Agonistic travelers," Lugones writes, "fail consistently in their attempt to travel to another world because what they do is try to conquer the other world" (287). In contrast, the playful world-traveler connects to difference by means of openness and a "loving," not "arrogant," perception of the other.[165]

Spivak's and Lugone's minority and feminist sensibility – their emphasis on empathy and openness - is an apt departure for my discussion of Özdamar's texts. I am interested in both the author's open and playful engagement with German and Turkish worlds, and in her border-crossing literary characters, whose ability to meet difference with empathy, humor and identification is remarkable.

[165] See Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, World-Traveling and Loving Perception," and "Purity, Impurity, and Separation."

The openness that Özdamar gives her characters is sometimes attributed to Turkish culture at large, which Özdamar describes as communally oriented, and which she contrasts with a more individualistically oriented German culture. Sometimes it appears to apply mostly to women, as a form of resistance to the powerful, often controlling world of men that they are surrounded by. Other times, it appears to be an important part of the personality of the protagonists. The unnamed protagonist in *Karawanserai,* for instance, lives with her loving parents and grandmother in sometimes-difficult circumstances. The family migrates across Turkey in search for work, and the girl has to learn how to get used to new places and new people. Her loving grandmother plays a major part in her upbringing, but the girl also rebels against her traditional and superstitious ways. Özdamar dedicates a large part of her narrative to vocal engagements between people. The sometimes-difficult circumstances – lack of money, the father's unfaithfulness, the parents' dislike of the girl's extroverted ways – do not hinder the open communication between family members and their feelings and opinions. At the end of *Karawanserai*, the young female protagonist is recruited by the guest worker program and sets out to travel to Germany on her own, also against the wish of her parents.

One important difference between Özdamar's minority perspective on the one hand and those of Spivak and Lugones on the other is that Özdamar never expresses resentment toward the prejudices inherent in both the Turkish and German majority cultures. While Spivak and Lugones regularly employ categories such as "Anglo/white women" or "white hegemony," Özdamar has expressed that she is critical of all forms of categories and instead in favor of the singular and unique experience. According to

Özdamar, the categorical distinctions made within the academy do not always make sense to those who are categorized or even help elucidate their life situation:

> I did not think about that, but only about my characters and my love for my characters. Of course, in the everyday, there is a powerful women's world; just like there is a men's world there is a women's world, and somehow that is also a matriarchy. But you cannot discuss the difference between two different experiences. It is that which is often done by some Europeans or by some Turks about Europeans, without considering that there are differences between two different experiences, and then they want to discuss this, which I think is not possible. You will always have prejudice in such discussions. (qtd. in Wierschke 259)[166]

The claim that she lives without intellectual prejudice can clearly be interpreted as a form of role-play by Özdamar, who, like many writers, is critical of intellectual evaluations of her work. It can also be attributed to her relatively privileged social status today in Germany. At the same time, her emphasis on the integrity of the individual and on the singular experience is refreshing and important for contemporary discussions of multiculturalism.

In line with her open and non-judgmental attitude toward the multicultural world, Özdamar avoids portraying Germany in a negative light or setting up a dichotomy between German and Turkish cultures. In an interview published in Horrocks and Kolinsky's *Turkish Culture in German Society Today,* she refuses to blame a German collective for racism and prejudice. Instead, she emphasizes her attraction to the German language, her love of German literature (Kleist, Hölderlin and Brecht), and the enriching

---

[166] "Daran habe ich nicht gedacht, sondern nur an meine Figuren und an meine Liebe für meine Figuren. Und im Alltag gibt es natürlich diese kräftige Frauenwelt, wie es eine Männerwelt gibt, gibt es auch eine Frauenwelt und irgendwie ist das ja auch ein Matriarchat. Aber man kann die Differenz von zwei unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen nicht diskutieren. Das ist das, was von manchen Europäern oder von manchen Türken über Europäer sehr gemacht wird, ohne zu bedenken, daß es Differenzen zwischen zwei Unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen sind, und dann will man darüber diskutieren, und das ist, glaube ich, nicht machbar. Man wird dabei immer Vorurteile haben."

multicultural experiences she has had while living in Germany. When asked about xenophobia and intolerance in Germany, she broadens the perspective and claims that violence and discrimination are questions rooted in social problems larger than the hostility between native and foreigner. She also points out that the tendency of news media to fuel the polarization between Germans and foreigners has created unhelpful feelings of guilt among Germans, who now curiously feel obliged to demonstrate to every foreigner that they are *not* xenophobic. Similarly to the fathers in Khemiri's books, Özdamar gives emphasis to the accomplishments of European democracies. Turkey, she argues, is the site of significantly more racism and abuse of power than are Germany and other European countries (52-53).

Özdamar's reluctance to criticize Germany directly for its treatment of immigrants, either in interviews or in her literary work, sets her apart from the writers discussed in previous chapters, who display a more provocative and defiant attitude toward the dominant culture. Like Lugones's idea of playful and loving world traveling – the directive to *be creative and loving* in the world – Özdamar's positive attitude can be viewed as a way to resist or defy outsidership on the personal level. Even if Özdamar's texts can easily be placed within a feminist discussion that links gender and other forms of oppression, I also suggest, in line with Özdamar's own refusal to classify, that the affirmative attitude should not be seen as limited to women, minority women or border-crossing multiculturals. Rather, the characteristics of Özdamar and her literary characters indicate the importance, particularly in today's multicultural society, of the individual's active dedication to openness, humor and a loving perception of others. In the words of Terry Eagleton, love is "indifferent to cultural difference": it means "creating a space for

the other," it signifies "the love of strangers" rather than the love of friends: it is "the very model of a just society" (*After Theory* 167).[167]

Görmek and *Kaza gecirmek* – To See and To Experience Suffering

> In my language, tongue means language.
> The tongue has no bones. In whatever direction you turn it, it turns with you.
> I was sitting with my twisted tongue in this city Berlin. ("Mutterzunge" 9)[168]

Özdamar vividly illustrates in the first sentences of her first published short story, "Mutterzunge" (Mother tongue), both the confusion that the immigrant experiences in a new country and the flexibility that this confusion may lead to. In this story, a young, unnamed Turkish woman living in Germany takes Arabic lessons in order to connect to her past. She compares words and concepts in Arabic, Turkish, and German in order to come to terms with the alienation she experiences in Germany. The two verbal expressions *Görmek* and *Kaza gecirmek,* which literally mean "to see" and "to experience life accidents," appear when the protagonist starts comparing expressions in Turkish and German. They serve for the young woman in the story as metaphors-- both for her maturation process as a human being and for the linguistic and cultural integration process she must go through in Germany. "Mutterzunge" and "Großvaterzunge"

---

[167] Özdamar's dislike of identity politics and her past dedication to Socialist ideals align her with a leftist humanist like Terry Eagleton in other ways, too. For Eagleton, the political equivalent to love is the ethics of Marx and Socialism. In his books *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) and *After Theory* (2003), for instance, Eagleton criticizes the "postmodern" direction that both cultural production and cultural theory have taken, suggesting that the postmodern moment signals disorientation rather than emancipation. Without dismissing the rich body of work done on racism, ethnicity, and identity under the name of postmodernism, Eagleton calls for a strengthening of the ideas of solidarity, ethics, disciplined organization and political agency.

[168] "In meiner Sprache heisst Zunge: Sprache / Zunge hat keine Knochen. Wohin man sie dreht, dreht sie sich dorthin. / Ich saß mit meiner gedrehten Zunge in dieser Stadt Berlin."

(Grandfather-tongue), the first two stories in the collection entitled *Mutterzunge*, form a single, larger story. This story, which can be read as an allegory for the exile's arrival into the new society and culture, situate Özdamar as a writer oriented toward her adopted society and culture - Germany – while at the same time portraying the hardship of exile. Rather than reading the story as a multilingual identity search, as many have done, I focus on the human depth that the main character's exploration of language, love and loss signifies.

The seeing and feeling female subject in Özdamar's story is developed through an excursion into the past as well as into isolation. Estranged both from her mother tongue, Turkish, and her new language, German, in which "words have no childhood" (42), the young female Turkish protagonist, who lives in East Berlin and East Germany in the 1970s, experiences a crisis. As an answer to her wish to find the connection to her mother tongue and herself again, she finds another exiled foreigner with whom she develops an intimate relationship. Ibni Abdullah, a learned man, lives and works in West Berlin as a private teacher of Oriental languages. He identifies with the young woman, for he has felt alien to German society and culture for the nine years he has lived there. Moreover, his deep wounds from the past - he lost his seven brothers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – have hindered him from ever "arriving" emotionally in Germany. The desire of the two immigrants to heal their wounded selves and their loneliness helps them form a strong bond. Like him, she has lost dear ones in political turmoil. She has been accused of being a Communist in her home country, he of being a fanatic Islamist in his.

Believing that learning Arabic – referred to as her grandfather-tongue[169] - will help her cope better with her sense of loss, the protagonist travels weekly from East to West Berlin on a visa to see her teacher and connect to her past. At first, the platonic friendship between the two serves as a shield against the hardships of exile. The woman says:

> We are the entire world, he will not come inside of me, we will not make any children, no brothers will be brought into the world to then kill one another, the S-trains will not run anymore, no one will throw themselves in front of them, no more workers will be born, whose tiredness cannot be taken away even by their own death, there will be no more emigrants looking for death between countries. There is only us, we will not be guilty of any corpses… (30)[170]

The experience of exile foregrounded here is reminiscent of Said's cautionary words: "exile in our century cannot be made to serve notions of humanism; exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible" (*Reflections On Exile* 174). Symbolic of defeat and death, exile prevents the afflicted from wanting to reproduce life. At this point of the story, exile is loss, and there is no indication that it can become a force of transformation. The most comforting remedy is to seek and cultivate isolation from German society.

As the strong, almost obsessive attachment between the two exiles strengthens, so does the wall they build to shut out the outside world. Even before they touch for the first time, the narrator describes herself as walking around with her teacher in her body. The

---

[169] Özdamar's narrator is interested in the Arabic language as a means of tracing her Turkish identity and the identity of her Turkish language. After the Turkish republic had been founded in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk initiated a number of westernizing reforms, one of which was the abolition of the Arabic script and the introduction of the Latin script.

[170] "Die ganze Welt sind wir, er wird nicht in mich reinkommen, wir werden keine Kinder machen, keine Brüder werden geboren, die sich töten, S-Bahnen werden nicht mehr arbeiten, keiner kann sich vor S-bahnen schmeißen, es werden keine Arbeiter in die Welt kommen, deren Tod nicht mal ihre Müdigkeit ihnen wegnehmen kann, es wird keine zwischen den Ländern den Tod suchenden Emigranten geben. Es gibt nur uns, wir werden unser Leben keiner Leiche verdanken..."

teacher's need of his student also takes a passionate, obsessive form. Eventually, the platonic, linguistic journey that the protagonist undertakes through her lost mother tongue Turkish and her grandfather-tongue Arabic parallels an equally intense emotional and erotic journey through feelings of dependency and passion for her teacher. The two exiles spend a few weeks in seclusion, studying Arabic, telling stories, reading poetry, and making love. Although in Germany, they hold German society at a distance, for they see it as lacking in humanness: Germany is a cold, capitalist country where money has teeth and where people relate to one another without warmth or love (42). When the teacher eventually locks the door on his student for further lessons in patience and love, the young woman understands the extent of their isolation.

The fantasy of returning to a wholesome past or unbroken identity is shattered at the end of the story, when Özdamar's protagonist escapes the locked room and the relationship with her teacher. The act of learning Arabic, which was meant to be life sustaining, proves insufficient, even destructive, and the teacher's room, initially a safe place to rest, becomes a prison. In a symbolic gesture of freedom from her past, she throws the Arabic texts onto the Autobahn. Only by breaking the strong attachment to the man symbolically representing her grandfather can she begin a new process of acculturation and integration into German society.

Mutterzunge demonstrates how migration unavoidably involves a painful but necessary identity transformation. In the end, the two protagonists choose different attitudes toward German society. While Ibni Abdullah rejects Germany and cultivates isolation, the young woman chooses to open up to her new cultural surrounding. While Abdullah remains a prisoner of his past- and difference-oriented identity, and imposes

this imprisonment onto others, the young woman decides to break free of such negativity. After escaping the locked room, she sits down on a bench next to a young German woman whose boyfriend just committed suicide. Özdamar shows her trust in intercultural encounters in which people "see" one another across borders through their common suffering and their common humanity. The last image of the two women on a bench, not saying much, only comparing the word "soul" in German and Turkish, suggests that the two are connecting on a fundamental level.

A Humorous Twist on the Guest-Worker Experience

If Özdamar's first two stories emphasize the loss and suffering inherent in exile to an extent that most of her other texts do not, and position Özdamar as critical towards a Turkish-German identity too focused on the past or on cultural difference, in her later texts, humor becomes a fundamental component to her stories. Mainly, Özdamar's humor serves the affirmative identity of her characters. It also creates a balance to the often dire or difficult social milieus that Özdamar portrays.

When asked in an interview if there are particularly German or Turkish perspectives through which she writes, Özdamar answered characteristically with an anecdote, figuratively illustrating that her literary work represents that hybridization process of German culture today resulting from the need to relate to one another:

> If I sit in the middle, on one side a German and on the other a Turk, and I have to translate what they are saying, since the two cannot speak directly to one another, then that makes me really tired. To talk Turkish to the left and German to the right, that makes me really tired. Eventually I get so tired I start to tell the German something in Turkish and the Turk something in German. I find it very beautiful, if I can speak this mixed language German-Turkish or also French or who-knows-what directly, and also alive and without restrictions, and that you pick up the

> words even if you don't speak correctly, but make the words your own. What this process exactly entails, I don't know, but I know that it has something to do with the desire to tell the other person something, to communicate. (Wierschke 263-264)[171]

Özdamar suggests that multiculturalism or cultural mixture can represent a sense of freedom and openness from the "tired", unproductive and isolated monoculturalism on both sides of a cultural divide. Özdamar also shows that a sense of humor must be part of such a relationship: the ability, perhaps, not to take one's identity too seriously.

As I already argued in the introduction and in chapter 1, many scholars now argue for the necessity to transcend "symbolic regimes of victimization" (Göktürk, "Strangers" 103) in discussions around multiculturalism. In line with her warning against victimizing portraits of Turkish women, Deniz Göktürk argues for the potential of humor and role-play in fighting racism. In an attempt to move beyond the politics of recognition and the "compassion fatigue" of social realism, Göktürk argues that "humor can be instrumental in releasing tensions and breaking encrusted fixations in the way we perceive ourselves and others" (121-122): it may be an important first step in the development of a "polycentric multiculturalism," where every group is not "a prisoner of their own reified difference"(120).

I made it clear in earlier chapters that while I am sympathetic to lighter modes of dealing with multicultural concerns, I think it is unnecessary to dismiss the genre of

---

[171] "Wenn ich jetzt in der Mitte sitze, auf der einer Seite sitzt ein Deutscher und da sitzt ein Türke und ich soll ihre Sätze übersetzen, weil die beiden ja nicht mit einander reden können, dann macht mich das sehr müde. Links Türkisch und rechts Deutsch zu erzählen, das macht mich einfach müde. Und ich werde so müde dann, daß ich zu dem Deutschen was auf Türkisch erzähle und dem Türken auf Deutsch. Ich finde es sehr schön, wenn ich diese gemischte Sprache Deutsch-Türkisch oder auch Französisch oder was-weiß-ich direkt reden kann und auch lebendig und ohne Grenzen, und daß man die Wörter so schnappt, auch wenn man nicht so ganz richtig redet, aber die Wörter seins macht. Was dieser Prozeß genau beinhaltet weiß ich nicht, aber jedenfalls die Lust, dem Menschen etwas zu erzählen, zu kommunizieren."

social realism just to embrace humor, irony and comedy. I question what the commonly reproduced term "compassion fatigue" means in this context, and why such fatigue (by academics?) justifies a dismissal of art focusing on social problems. I find objectionable Göktürk's ridicule of "politically engaged Germans" and "self-pitying Turks," along with her claim that discourses of imprisonment and exclusion are grounded in "fake compassion, rather than authentic experiences" ("Turkish delight" 11).

Instead, I propose that there can be a strong connection between the playful modes of a literary text and the serious social realities it attempts to thematize. Similar to both Zaimoglu's and Khemiri's projects, in which the sociolects of young non-ethnic Germans and Swedes come to stand for the independence and confidence of marginalized identities, Özdamar reproduces a Turkish-German language meant to give both authenticity and humor to her stories. Özdamar's humorous engagement with the guest worker's reality therefore serves to humanize rather than to stereotype her characters. Özdamar also refuses the reader the class-blind view of Turkish and German mixtures that Göktürk promotes.

In the play "Karagöz in Alemania,"[172] which appears as a story in the collection *Mutterzunge*, Özdamar demonstrates her unsentimental yet respectful attitude toward the migrant experience. Rather than portraying migrant workers primarily as victims, as pawns of capitalism unable to take charge of their own destinies or live enriching lives, she portrays them as the agents of their own lives. Özdamar views the migrant worker Karagöz as a world-traveler:

[172] I will refer to this story as "Karagöz." The play was written in 1982 and had its premiere in 1986 at the Frankfurt Schauspielhaus.

> I wrote [the story] because I had found the letter of a Turkish guest worker. […] The word 'guest worker': I love this word, I see in front of me always two people, one is sitting there as a guest, and the other is working. […] The second thing that I noticed was that he never spoke badly about Germany. He said: "A worker has no home, wherever there is work, that is home." (qtd. in Kolinski/Horrocks 57)[173]

"Karagöz," as it appears in the collection *Mutterzunge*, tells the story of an impoverished peasant from Anatolia, the eastern province of Turkey, who migrates back and forth between Germany and Turkey with his recurrently pregnant wife. At first, rumor has it that it rains pearls in Germany (59), so the peasant leaves with his speaking donkey on a long trip to Europe. At the door to Germany (*Deutschlandtür*), blocked by suitcases, he encounters other waiting people, animals and objects: Turkish women who have come to look for their husbands, tourists, musicians, illegal workers, a lion and a speaking grave stone. The voices of these diverse creatures and animate objects on the move form an absurd cacophony of different views on immigrant life in Germany. They exchange strategies for bargaining one's way across the border and surviving on the other side. They discuss aspects of cultural difference and warn one another about the dangers that both seduce and destroy immigrants in the new country: capitalism, insanity, and atheism. Their language is often blended into an inarticulate but expressive German. One man, fascinated by European toilet culture, explains how to make money in Germany by setting up public toilets in the park:

> You shit good every day […] You go in, you buy tent, put in park, you shit in the middle: ok? Then you wait. People come. Ask: What you see? You say, shit, shit.

---

[173] "Ich habe [die Geschichte] geschrieben, weil ich den Brief eines türkischen Gastarbeiters gefunden hatte. […] Das Wort 'Gastarbeiter': Ich liebe dieses Wort, ich sehe vor mir immer zwei Personen, eine sitzt da als Gast, und die andere arbeitet. […] Das zweite, was mir auffiel, war, dass er an keiner Stelle schlecht über Deutschland sprach. Er sagte: 'Ein Arbeiter hat keine Heimat, wo die Arbeit ist, da ist die Heimat.'"

> Says the truth. Heretics are good men. Heretics love truth. […] How much? You say: 99 Pfennig. Heretic pay. […] 99-99 you make a lot of heavy money. But must have approval from police. If not, nothing – no paper/s. (64)[174]

Özdamar may be playing with stereotypical ideas about inarticulate foreigners by having them speak pidgin German. But she also provides some authenticity with regard to the "poverty role" that befalls the Turk in Germany. While Özdamar is commenting on the reality of the dirty work that awaits many guest workers in Germany, she adds levity to the situation by also showing these workers' intelligence as well as their ability to remain light-hearted. The reference to "paper", possibly referring to both toilet paper and immigration papers, underscores this ability. And, as Özdamar expresses elsewhere about the "invisible" work force of Turkish cleaning ladies, there *is* a certain freedom in having that invisibility as well; a certain kind of seeing and understanding is enabled by such experiences (Wierschke 258).

It is a false assumption, according to Özdamar, that minorities seek to imitate or conform to the majority. When asked by American critics about the exoticizing tendencies of her jokes and anecdotes as well as the pidgin German that some of her characters speak, Özdamar claims that there is an authentic quality to the humorous events in her stories as well as to the language that some of her characters employ. "I always find it too bad," Özdamar says in an interview, "that people want you to become a better monkey and speak exactly like a German or an American. Why?" (qtd. in

[174]"Du gut scheisst [...] Du gehen rein, du kauft Zelt, stellen im Park, in Mitte scheißen: alles klar? Dann warten. Leute kommt. Fragt: Was gibt sehen? Du spricht Direk, Dreck. Sagen Wahrheit. Ketzer sind Gutmann, Ketzer lieben Wahrheit. […] Was kostet? Du sagen: 99 Pfennig. Ketzer bezahlen. […]99-99 du machen viel schwer Geld. Aber müssen haben Bewilligung von Grosspolizei. Nix so, nix – kein Papier."

Wierschke 265).[175] In the same interview, she describes another scene in the story "Karagöz" where a Turk with a broken car, coming back to his village, first wedges a brick onto his accelerator and then drives his car in reverse into the village. While some people choose to interpret this as if she is making fun of the primitive and backward Turk, she says, she defends her portraits as self-irony: "It all depends on how you read it" (qtd. in Horrocks 59). Furthermore, Özdamar explains the language mistakes of migrants not as *lacking identity* but as *identity*. In her literary texts, they become part of an aesthetic that gives voice and integrity to migrant identities:

> I mean the situation in the train, where the people from different countries tried to translate the images from their own language to German, because there were always mistakes in these translations. And I liked these mistakes a lot, because I noticed that it is really a new language, spoken by about 5 million people and that the mistakes that we make in this language, in German, are our identity. Therefore, I used the mistakes as an aesthetic and I played with them. (Wierschke 264-265)[176]

Just like *Kanaksprak* and *blattesvenska,* Özdamar's pidgin German is not only an artificially constructed language serving an aesthetic effect; it is also meant to reflect the identity of large group of people whose inflection of the standard language signify their foreign background. Whether they master the standard language, like Khemiri's Halim, or not, like Özdamar's newly arrived guest workers, the very act of speaking "differently" signals an authentic difference - i.e. identity - rather than inferiority.

---

[175] "Ich finde es aber immer sehr Schade, daß Leute wollen das man ein besserer Affe wird und genauso redet wie ein Deutscher oder Amerikaner. Wieso denn?"

[176] "Ich meine die Situation im Zug, wo die Leute aus verschiedenen Nationen versucht haben, auf Deutsch ihre Bilder aus ihren eigenen Sprachen zu übersetzen, denn dann sind immer Fehler drin. Und diese Fehler habe ich sehr gemocht, weil ich gemerkt habe, daß das eigentlich eine neue Sprache ist, die von ca 5 Mill. Gastarbeitern gesprochen wird und daß die Fehler, die wir in dieser Sprache machen, in der Deutschen Sprache, unsere Identität ist. Und ich habe deswegen Fehler als Kunstform benutzt und damit gespielt."

To further undermine the stereotype about the downtrodden Turk, by the end of the story "Karagöz," Özdamar's Turkish protagonist returns to Turkey a rich man. The tale paints in the end a humorous picture of a man who has lost himself to the temptations of capitalism. Ultimately sleeping with his things in his bed instead of with his wife, he is described as "a different human being - a human being with a car" (99). Also his donkey watches sadly as the man tends to the Opel Record that has replaced him as means of transportation. The donkey scorns his owner for having alienated himself from both his family and his former Socialist ideals. As Karagöz in the end returns to Germany in his car, driving backwards all the way, the absurd tale comes to an end, giving an ambiguous answer to the question whether it was worth going to Germany for a materially better life.

*

In the introduction to her translation of Zafer Senocak's *Atlas of a Tropical Germany* (1992), Leslie Adelson asks the pertinent question of where to locate the Turks on the map of a newly unified Germany. The essays in Senocak's book, written between 1990 and 1998, serve as an intervention into Turkish-German relations insofar as they envision a change of consciousness, an erasure of "the wall in the head" (xi) – here a reference not only to the lingering prejudices between East and West but also to the prevailing division between Germans and its Turkish minority.

While Senocak has taken a leading role in advancing this changing view on Turkish-German life and culture in German public discussions, Adelson has taken on this role within German Studies in the US. Adelson is particularly concerned with models that stress the differences between the two cultures. In several articles, as well as in her book *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (2005), she argues that Turkish-

German literature must be interpreted as an inextricable part of German culture and therefore as contributing to a re-imagining of a German past and present. Also Senocak seeks the newness of this historical juncture, Adelson observes, without exactly knowing what that newness is (Senocak, "Atlas of a Tropical" xxiv). As Adelson points out, Senocak's work points the way not to understanding cultural difference but to understanding German culture differently (xxxvii).

Adelson and Senocak's attempts to seek complexity and interconnectedness within as well as between German and Turkish culture are welcome. The risk with Adelson's and to some extent Senocak's approach to contemporary German identity is that because of their complex methods and analyses, they generally fail to draw any conclusions beyond the tautological observation that "German identity is complex." Adelson suggests, for instance, that a shift of metaphors from "bridge" to "touch" will help us view Turkish-German relations differently: "the concept of touching tales [is] an alternative organizing principle for considering 'Turkish' lines of thought" ("Touching Tales" 20). How, exactly, such a slight semantic shift will lead to a significant improvement in our understanding of this complexity remains unexplained. By calling politically motivated theories about the Turkish migrant worker outdated and by questioning the existence of a German majority culture (123), they also risk neglecting the political and social facts behind migration as well as the continued ethnic marginalization in Germany.

Özdamar's approach to Turkish-German reality and the changing cultural identity of Germany is different. She recommends that instead of focusing on the complexities of cultural interaction, we should focus on the ordinariness of human interaction. One

example of Özdamar's open and honest treatment of the German multicultural reality – including all of its tensions - can be found in a story that she wrote for *Die Zeit* in 1992. In a German political climate in need of a "new," "multicultural" consciousness, Özdamar was invited by the newspaper to comment on German-Turkish relations. Instead of polemicizing *against* xenophobia, or *for* multicultural respect, as the publishers may have expected, Özdamar decided to give the readers a humorous account of her production of the play *Karagöz*, with the apparent aim of simplifying the question of multicultural Germany and defusing it of its divisive and confrontational energies.

The cast rehearsing the play is a microcosm of an ethnically and culturally mixed Germany. National or ethnic stereotypes – caraway-chewing Turks (*Kümmeltürke*), vain Latinos, fascist Germans and animal-loving Germans - are used as mutual insults by the members of the cast both to express and to work through tensions and disagreements during rehearsals. The animals' behaviors seem likewise to reflect a world of national stereotypes: "A Turkish donkey would never do such a thing," claims a Turkish actor when the donkey bites a colleague in the back. Whereby the diplomatic and animal-loving German actor responds: "I will have a word with the donkey" (Horrocks 62). Poking fun at the German gestures, Özdamar warns that acts of benevolence can also be patronizing, such as the German manager's attempt to erase the word "fuck" from the play, for fear of giving the audience the wrong impression about the foreigners participating in the play. The manager also wants to distribute a pamphlet to the audience at the first performance, explaining, or rather excusing the "culturally different" logic of the play.

In contrast, the openness and spontaneity with which the members of the cast discuss their differences and confront one another – whether regarding headscarves, homosexuality, jealousy, or sex – suggests a healthy way to deal with a culturally diverse social reality. If the well-meaning German manager represents multicultural management - the attempt to harmonize the diverse or the multicultural by erasing, downplaying or explaining differences - the spontaneous reactions of the cast represent an honest willingness to create meaning together, across various differences. The friendships that the actors develop are not the polite kind of friendships. They are fraught with confrontations and jealousy. Still, Özdamar writes, many years after the production, the members of the cast are "pursuing one another as lovers" (63). Özdamar's anecdote can be interpreted as a metaphor for "the real multicultural project," where people from different backgrounds in actuality connect on a level more fundamental than the superficial stereotypes and prejudices uttered between them.

The story is reprinted with commentary in Horrocks's and Kolinsky's book on Turkish-German culture, and my analysis of the story is not very different from theirs. However, while they emphasize how multicultural conflict gives way to love and understanding (*Turkish Culture* 64), I wish to add that the stereotypes, prejudice and "ethnic humor" that surface in the story are part of the intimate human interactions that occur on- and backstage. Özdamar shows that love does not equal lack of conflict or difference; the directness and honesty with which the actors express themselves in Özdamar's story, even while insulting each other, open up rather than close down communication.

Slavoj Zizek's provocative defense of the "loving insult" helps illustrate my point about Özdamar's story. Zizek, an outspoken provocateur of those who promote benevolent multicultural tolerance, explains that the one measure of love in a multicultural context is that you can exchange brutal jokes with the other:

> Another thing that bothers me about this multiculturalism is when people ask me: 'How can you be sure that you are not a racist?' My answer is that there is only one way. If I can exchange insults, brutal jokes, dirty jokes, with a member of a different race and we both know it's not meant in a racist way. If, on the other hand, we play this politically correct game - 'Oh, I respect you, how interesting your customs are' - this is inverted racism, and it is disgusting. (qtd. in Reul, "The One Measure of True Love")

Reminiscent of the tone of many of Zaimoglu's and Besigye's provoking statements, Zizek views "multicultural tolerance" with cynicism and claims that it condones not the "real" other but only the folklorist's other, deprived of its substance. Although there is a certain humor in Zizek's proposal that we exchange brutal jokes with one another, he legitimately suggests that it is ethically more defensible to admit the existence of prejudice than to hide it behind politeness. Özdamar is not as cynical, and she does not go as far as Zizek in her provocation or her dislike of benevolent multicultural respect. She does, however, suggest that crudeness and stereotypes do not necessarily serve division; rather, once differences and prejudices are openly expressed, mocked, or re-appropriated, they start to lose their humiliating, hurtful or divisive potential.

As Horrocks and Krause observe in their commentary on this story, Özdamar shows that neither a detached intellectual attitude towards multiculturalism (as exemplified by the German manager) nor a mere naïve dedication to love one another across borders will lead to a greater understanding of others (64). More productive is the courage of different parties to engage with one another and pronounce disagreements and

prejudice - thus allowing tensions to come out in the open. Özdamar's story can be favorably interpreted as a promotion of open discussion of difference and prejudice under the premise of equality.

The Disenfranchised and Social Responsibility

When the young female protagonist in the novel *Karawanserai* visits her grandfather in the east of Turkey - referred to as "another planet " - she becomes aware of a deep social and ethnic division between west and east: while western Turkey is secular and modern, the Kurdish east is traditional and backward. Poverty goes hand in hand with cultural backwardness; her grandfather has several wives, the women wear veils, and her relatives are guided in their lives by superstition. When she returns to Istanbul, described as "blackened" from the sun, she also discovers the racism inherent in westerners' attitudes. Her teacher asks her if she has a tail on her ass, since she is Kurdish. Gaining an understanding of both class-, gender- and ethnic-prejudice, the young girl comes to describe people in Istanbul as "the developed pictures, which you put on the wall", and the people in the east as "the negatives, which you left somewhere in the dirt and forgot about"(48).[177] The mother notices that the girl has picked up the dialect of her family in the East and subsequently warns her that in order to succeed in life she needs to rid herself of her eastern identity. In many of Özdamar's works, the difference between the developed West and the non-developed non-West is striking. "To have seen Europe is a nice thing," says a woman in Özdamar's second novel, *Die Brücke*: "you can see on a

[177] "Die Menschen in Istanbul waren die entwickelten Photos, die man gerne an die Wand hängt, und die Menschen in Anatolien waren die Negative, die man irgendwo im Staub liegenläßt und vergißt."

person's face if they have seen Europe. The Europeans are advanced, we are standing in the same place and move one step ahead and two back" (107).[178]

In Özdamar' second novel, *die Brücke*, which is in many ways a sequel to Karawanserai, the second-hand experience of poverty serves to deepen the young woman's sense of fairness. It also triggers her dedication to Socialist ideals. In *Die Brücke,* Özdamar's protagonist travels to eastern Turkey as a young woman during the political turmoil in the late 1960s. The trip occasions her political awakening and triggers her attraction to literature with revolutionary ideas:

> Poverty was like a contagious disease on the streets. […] It was very difficult to look the poor in their eyes. […] All those people who had been killed, strangled, beheaded, who had not died in their beds, stood up in these years. Poverty was on the streets, and the people who had done something against it and therefore had been killed, were now books on the streets. (229)[179]

The girl subsequently starts collecting books with leftist political messages, and soon she has incorporated these messages into her personal life. Özdamar humorously describes people filling their houses with books with revolutionary ideas from all over the world (by Lorca, Sacco, Robespierre, Nazim Hikmet, Pir Sultan Abdal, Rosa Luxemburg and many others) and returning to the streets *as* these revolutionaries (230). Allegedly inspired by Tolstoy, who gave away land and money to poor farmers, the young woman starts giving her clothes away, "like a real leftist" (230). Her parents accuse her of fanaticism when she chastises them for filling their fridge with meat and fruit when they

---

[178] "Europa gesehen zu haben, ist eine feine Sache. Man sieht einem Menschen im Gesicht an, daß er Europa gesehen hat. Die Europäer sind fortschrittlich, wir treten mit unseren Füßen auf der Stelle und bewegen uns einen Schritt vor und zwei Schritte zurück."

[179] "Die Armut lief wie eine ansteckende Krankheit durch die Straßen. [...] In die Augen der Armen zu gucken, war sehr schwer. […] Alle getöteten, erwürgten, geköpften Menschen, die nicht in ihren Betten gestorben waren, standen in diesen Jahren auf. Die Armut lief auf die Straße, und die Menschen, die in ihrem Leben dagegen etwas hatten tun wollen und deswegen getötet worden waren, lagen jetzt als Bücher auf die Straße."

know the country is starving. News from other parts of the world keeps reminding the young woman and her like-minded friends that they are not alone in their anger and dedication. They feel aligned internationally with the black protesters in Chicago after Martin Luther King's death, with students worldwide protesting the Vietnam war, with the South Americans arrested for protesting against military rule, with Ché Guevara, Robert Kennedy, and Salvador Allende, whom they mourn as fallen comrades. Özdamar's texts are full of references to champions of democracy across the globe, and each death of a revolutionary is a devastating blow to the young Turks' sensitivities and democratic mission.

Accompanied by a like-minded friend and theater colleague, as well as by the books *Das Kapital* and *Staat und Revolution,* the young woman later returns to eastern Turkey to follow worker demonstrations and write a report about starving peasants. Constantly monitored by a hostile police force, the girl and her friend, who are called "Sartre's innocent children" by a traveling journalist, are constantly told that their cause is a lost one. After having seen the undignified life of the poor peasants, they eventually return to Istanbul and an increasingly volatile political climate. Shortly after they publish their article, three young leaders of their leftist group are captured and hanged for crimes against the Turkish state. After the military putsch, the young girl is also forced to hide and burn her books; she is taken into custody and brutally interrogated by the police. Once released, she decides to migrate to Germany.

The political struggle of the young leftist Turks in *Die Brücke* forms a very important, if depressing, part of Özdamar's work as a whole. It is also important to recognize that as in a *Bildungsroman*, the political realities serve the personal

development of Özdamar's protagonist. Her protagonist is a sensitive and curious heroine in search of both knowledge and challenges, who through her confrontation with the social and political order gains experience and maturity. Ironically, compared with Zaimoglu's, Besigye's and Khemiri's challenges to marginalization and ethnic discrimination in German and Scandinavian society, Özdamar's texts, which represent a more affirmative and optimistic attitude, are grounded in arguably more acute social and political injustices outside of Germany. This difference partly explains why Özdamar, as representative of an older generation of immigrants, praises western democracy while the three younger men, who grew up in western democracy, criticize it. Özdamar's worldly outlook on Europe lends her texts a certain wisdom, which is often, but not always, lacking in the younger men's texts.

*

I want to return to the question of gender and womanhood raised at the beginning of this chapter. The fact that Özdamar's protagonists are mostly women adds an important aspect to the positive and engaged subjectivity in her texts. The fact that they are strong, independent women who challenge discrimination and resist all kinds of unfairness has resulted in many feminist readings of Özdamar's texts. Here, it is worth noting that Özdamar feels uneasy about many (western) feminist claims about her work, because she thinks they indirectly assume a correlation between womanhood, especially Turkish womanhood, and weakness. Özdamar is also reluctant to make comparisons between women's and men's experiences, even if she views them as markedly different. Özdamar makes an effort to view female identity as a social asset rather than a limitation. Her women characters cultivate their individual freedom from an oppressive political and

cultural climate while at the same time not giving up their love and understanding of men and women who are conventional or unable to fully embrace modern ideas. Özdamar thereby echoes what many women from non-Western countries have argued, namely that gender equality cannot be based merely on the western ideal of equal rights but must always be seen in relation to ethnicity and class: as part of a greater liberation struggle.[180]

Since there is ample evidence of oppressive patriarchal structures in Özdamar's texts, it is quite remarkable that her protagonists do not cultivate anger or antagonism toward their oppressors: i.e. their fathers, their mothers, their grandmothers, the men in the political organizations, or the Communist managers in the German hostels. While realizing the inferior status they are assigned by the powers that be, Özdamar's protagonists often act with a pretense of indifference toward such power structures, upheld both by men and women.

The young girl in *Karawanserai*, for instance, enjoys enough freedom to go out at times she is not expected to; in her father's eyes she behaves just like a boy. Her grandmother calls her *orospu* (someone who "whores with language") and thereby marks the inappropriateness of women engaging too freely with life or language. In *Die Brücke*, the girl drops out of school to go work at a theatre, she breaks off her engagement to a man, and she starts calling herself a Communist, all to her family's deep disappointment.

[180] In Chandra Talpade Mohanty's introduction to the book *The World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991), for instance, the author argues extensively against the typically western feminist perspective on women's liberation. Such a perspective would be the view that third-world women are necessarily traditional and victims of patriarchy, while western women are secular and liberated. Mohanty claims that the term "feminism" is often questioned by minority and third-world women because of its traditional focus on middle-class, white women's lives. Mohanty's idea reverberates through the work of minority feminists in the US in general. Writers like bell hooks, Maria Lugones and Gayatri Spivak are all inserting specific "non-white" and "non-middle-class" perspectives into discussions on gender equality. Since there is no unity to these different perspectives, what they demonstrate is the context-specific nature of women's struggle and how different power structures intersect with one another.

Having landed in Germany away from her parents, the protagonist actively seeks lovers so that she can rid herself of her "diamond"--that embarrassing virginity that keeps her from experiencing life or womanhood to the fullest. Never having wanted "to sell herself as a virgin" to a marriage (165), she sees her newly won sexual freedom as a symbol of her wider freedom as an individual. She gets pregnant twice, the first time without knowing whom the father is, and both times she aborts her child illegally. Ironically, the "whoring" that her grandmother accuses her of when she is young later becomes a metaphor for her rebellion against all limiting social and cultural norms.

The emancipation that Özdamar's characters impersonate suggests the importance of women fighting their own battles against tradition by "living differently" and cultivating alternative subjectivities from those they are assigned by tradition, both at home and in public life. Surrounded mainly by men in the organized Socialist groups, Özdamar's protagonists experience that the party program is mainly defined by men as well, many of whom still think of "their" women as guardians of Turkish culture. At the beginning of *Die Brücke*, the young guest worker protagonist lives at a hostel, where the female residents are looked after like children by the Communist manager: "Many of the single women had, according to the men, rid themselves of their Turkish honor as you rid yourself of clothes, and the men in particular wanted them to get dressed again" (113).[181] Despite these constraints, however, the young female guest workers in Özdamar's narrative all cultivate their independence by *doing* and *living* otherwise. They go out at night, invite men to their hostel and engage in relationships with male workers from other

[181] "Manche der alleinstehenden Frauen hatten nach ihrer Meinung ihre türkische Ehre in Berlin wie ein Kleid ausgezogen, und besonders die Männer wollten ihnen dieses Kleid wieder anziehen."

floors. Özdamar shows that their worlds are filled with "alternative visions" and independent acts, including sexual explorations with both women and men.

Özdamar's Anti-Elitism: The People vs. The Elite

Connected to the peaceful noncompliance with convention in Özdamar's texts is the author's outspoken anti-elitism and even anti-intellectualism. The involvement of Özdamar's protagonists in Socialist and Communist groups reflects Özdamar's own political involvement and aligns the author with the left both in Turkey and in Europe in the 1970s. In many of her books, her protagonists are part of a Turkish left that unsuccessfully attempts to prevent the 1971 military coup. Özdamar's protagonists also develop a critical distance to the party organizations and their intellectuals, however. They remain critical both of the male-centeredness of Socialist politics, and of the intellectuals within the left who define the macro-perspectives and political programs. Although sympathetic to their cause, Özdamar's narrators often poke fun at them and their distanced, sometimes arrogant evaluations of the world.

Such ridicule of the intellectual elite and their privileged, detached engagement with the multicultural world is an aspect of Zaimoglu's, Besigye's, Khemiri's and Özdamar's projects alike. Their critical stance toward cultural dominance in general makes them especially sensitive to the dominance expressed through intellectualism and academic knowledge. Their various criticisms of intellectual and academic culture and of extreme rationalism suggest that they associate knowledge production with the dominant class and the dominant ethnicity. They also provocatively question who produces knowledge about marginalized groups of people and to what extent such knowledge

continues to subordinate and objectify the marginalized, who have traditionally been excluded from the institutions of knowledge. By often framing their criticism in humor, irony or even ridicule, these writers also attribute lifelessness and poverty to the dominant intellectual perspectives, suggesting that from 'other' perspectives, the dominant perspective can be viewed as meaningless, rigid or even false.

Özdamar expresses her anti-intellectual stance primarily through her criticism of the intellectuals within the political left. This is particularly true at the end of *Die Brücke*, when the protagonist joins the leftist political struggle against the Turkish regime in earnest. Clearly on the pragmatists' side, Özdamar's narrator satirizes those detached intellectuals in the movement whose empty rhetoric fails to engage with the truths of a dire social reality. For instance, when Özdamar's protagonist joins a meeting of the Turkish Socialists as the only woman, she characterizes the intellectuals as "scissors" whose discussions resemble an endless line of interruptions. In one-and-a-half pages of "one scissor said, the other scissor said….", interrupted sentences, interspersed with words like feudalism, farmers, worker's party, colony, the people, and capitalism, appear as symbolic of the failure of the Socialist or leftist intellectual to go beyond rhetoric to reach practical conclusions (232). Özdamar also ironizes those book-learned intellectuals she runs into in Turkey, Germany and France, for whom to be a Socialist means to hate the middle-class, to talk a lot about revolution, and to be sexually promiscuous.

Özdamar is not hostile to all kinds of intellectualism. She makes a clear distinction between disengagement and engagement on an intellectual level, between dishonest and honest intellectuals. She shows great admiration for intellectual artists (for example Brecht, Lorca, Joyce, and Gorki) whose honest dedication to their convictions

and to life in their art reflects integrity. “The bourgeoisie only play Socialism,” a friend of the protagonist warns her when she falls in love with an intellectual leader of the left (286), suggesting that democratic action need to be rooted in experience and not in the theories of the privileged.

There is also a connection between artistic endeavor and Özdamar’s ridicule of “enlightened” people. In *Die Brücke*, Özdamar’s protagonist is working on and off as an actress at a theatre. Although her passion for the theatre--in particular the plays of Brecht and other socially conscious playwrights--fuels her political convictions, it also sets her apart from many of her fellow leftists. She feels inspired by the Brechtian creed that art is politics, and by the words of a actor friend who says that she should stop believing in political texts and instead choose art, for “all poetry is a sketch of a future reality” (298). The connection of art to life is exemplified in the actress’ quest for authenticity: when she needs to understand her role as a prostitute in Brecht’s *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (The Good Woman of Sichuan), she goes to where the prostitutes are in order to experience their reality. She contrasts the knowledge this experience gives her with that of the intellectuals in her political organization, and asks whether their theories are a result of experience or inexperience. Özdamar suggests not only that intellectual knowledge is inferior to organic forms of knowledge based on experience, but also that the price the detached intellectuals pay for the “knowledge” they produce is a lack of intimacy with the world.

A dialogue in “Karagöz” between a man referred to as “the enlightened” and a speaking donkey exemplifies Özdamar’s ironic portrayal of intellectuals. In the story, the intellectual is humorously exposed as an authoritarian hypocrite, claiming to care about

the difficult situation of guest workers, but at the same time initiating intellectual projects that serve to further objectify and stereotype the guest worker. The intellectual says:

> Do you understand how important it is to do something for these people. *Are you feeling that*? What do you think, the culture shock of the guest workers questions everything. *Economical – cultural – political* [my emphasis – the words italicized here are in English in the original German text]. […] We should arrange a poetry competition among the guest workers, or we should have a competition of clothes making. Then we could evaluate how they sew their clothes from the German material; then we could see how much of their identity is still there. (92)[182]

The intellectual, typically fluent in several languages and using the jargon of the English-speaking world, expresses his or her intellectual interest in the identity of guest workers. Reminiscent of similar ironies in other chapters of this project, Özdamar here ridicules the benevolent "multicultural" interest in the exotic other, even as he or she is examined and evaluated by the allegedly political intellectual. Since Özdamar never reveals whether "the enlightened" is a German or a Turk, she emphasizes the tendency of the leftist intellectual, whatever his or her nationality, to view guest workers only as victims (of capitalism) or as objects (of anthropological discourse). Özdamar echoes critics of *Gastarbeiterliteratur* here; she warns against the one-sidedness with which such political engagement frames the lives and identities of Turkish guest workers. The poetry and clothes competitions are probably a direct reference to the literary competitions that were organized for writers of non-German background in the 1980s by promoters of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*.

[182] "Versteht ihr, wie wichtig es ist, für diese Leute was zu tun. Are you feeling that? Was meint ihr, der Kulturschock der Gastarbeiter stellt alles in Frage. Economical – cultural – political. […] Man müßte under den Gastarbeitern ein Gedicht- oder Kleidernähwettbewerb machen. Dann könnte man prüfen, wie sie aus deutschen Stoffen ihre türkischen Kleider nähen; so könnte man sehen, wieviel von ihrer Identität noch da ist."

When the leftist intellectual, in the same story, lectures about the plight of the poor, the donkey interrupts him:

> Poor people, you say? Maybe our inner life is very poor. My good friend Don Alfredo said once to a guest worker that he should be a Socialist. Then the other said: Give me 10,000 DM. and I will do you the favor. (93)[183]

Özdamar underscores the point later in the story, when Karagöz seeks help from a Socialist intellectual in order to decide whether his pain should be explained by his lower class status or the fact of his wife's unfaithfulness. Özdamar's empathy lies with the farmer and guest worker, who seek to shape and improve their own lives according to their own experiences, rather than according to the dictates of the Socialist intellectual.

*

Özdamar shows that disadvantaged groups of people do not lack understanding of their situation. At the beginning of *Karawanserai*, the protagonist's grandfather, a poor man and member of the Tscherkess minority in eastern Turkey, tells a vivid and metaphorical story of the birth of the Turkish nation. This story, enveloped in a description of a Turkish carpet, becomes a parody of the official version of history. It suggests that since the poor are excluded from the official version of history, only they can tell a truthful version of history. The grandfather knows that the price of Turkish modernization was paid by the poor and the minorities, and also, as a bitter irony, that these same marginalized groups are now blamed for the shortcomings (their backwardness) of the Turkish secular democracy.

---

[183] "Arme Menschen, sagen sie? Vielleicht ist unser Inneres sehr arm. Mein guter Freund Don Alfredo sagte einmal zu einem Gastarbeiter, er solle doch Sozialist werden. Darauf meinte der andere: 'Gib mir 10.000 DM. Dann tue ich dir den Gefallen.'"

The grandfather starts his story near the end of the nineteenth century, in Anatolia, where he lived and farmed peacefully with his family. As Turkish and German flags flutter in unison, hand-grenades start to fall, Bismarck builds the road to Baghdad, and Europeans fight to gain access to the oil in the area. The story culminates in the formation of the Turkish republic in the 1920s. This transformation is described as abrupt and violent. The European influence is attractive because Europe is modern, but unwelcome because of the destruction that came with it:

> Religion and state are separate things, they said, and threw the Arabic alphabet into the ocean, and brought over the Latin alphabet with European airplanes, took the veils from the women, and they let the minarets fall apart, and in the ballrooms they danced to European music. (41)[184]

The grandfather's story emphasizes the intersections of Turkish and German history. It also suggests that the ordinary Turk is very well aware of the European influence in the development of the Turkish nation. However, the emphasis is on "they", not "we"; the grandfather does not identify with the nationalists of the new republic, suggesting a deep divide between the Europeanized elites, who were in the position to enjoy the European gift of emancipation, and a large part of the people, who were not.

Özdamar also gives history lessons to her readers. She informs them, among other things, about colonial relations between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, and how this exploitative relation has left its concrete marks on Turkey. The grandfather mockingly calls the First World War the "oil-bucket war" (*Öleimerkrieg*) and refers to the countries

[184] "Religion und Staat sind getrennte Sachen, sagten sie und warfen die arabische Schrift auch ins Meer und holten mit europäischen Flugzeugen die lateinische Schrift in das Land, nahmen den Frauen ihre Schleier weg, und die Minarette ließen sie verfaulen, und zu europäischer Musik tanzten sie auf den Bällen."

of England, France, Italy and Germany as "buckets" that came to secure access to the oil in Turkey. The girl continues to relate his story:

> Germans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Italians turned their buckets upside-down, put them on their heads as helmets, pulled out their hand grenades and weapons from their pockets and the oil-bucket-war started in Turkey. […] The grandfather had to go to war for the German buckets in the war; he ran screaming on the carpet between the flames and burning animals and people. From his hip came blood that flowed onto the carpet and colored a triangular space red, then big flames became small flames, and the Germans had to go. Their buckets rolled with them back to Germany; the French, the English, the Italian buckets divided the country among themselves; the Sultan was sitting in the palace with three buckets; one day he cleaned his face in the French bucket, the next in the English, then in the Italian…. (39-40)[185]

Evident in this passage is not only the corrupting influence of Europe in the history of Turkish nation-building, but also Özdamar's ability to envelop historical facts in fantastic and humorous tales, making the historical lesson amusing while at the same time not allowing the reader any escape from the facts. In this narrative of the Turkish nation, the grandfather's blood soaked into the carpet, signifies the mark of human sacrifice to the modernization project of Turkey, following the colonial presence of the Europeans. The image of the naked sultan in the passage, washing his face in European pails, signifies the elite's betrayal of its own people.

[185] "Deutsche, Engländer, Franzosen, und Italiener kehrten ihre Eimer um, setzten die Eimer als Helme auf ihre Köpfe, zogen ihre Handgranaten und Waffen aus ihren Hosentaschen, und in der Türkei fand die Öleimerkrieg statt. [...] Der Grossvater musste für die deutschen Eimer in den Krieg, auf dem Teppich zwischen Flammen und brennenden Tieren und Menschen lief Grossvater, schreiend. Aus seiner Hüfte fliessendes Blut färbte im Teppich ein Dreieck rot, dann wurden grosse Flammen zu kleinen Flammen, die Deutschen mussten raus. Ihre Eimer rollten sich mit ihnen bis nach Deutschland zurück, die französischen, englischen, italienischen Eimer teilten sich das Land, der Sultan sass nackt im Palast mit drei Eimern, einen Tag wusch er sein Gesicht im französischen, am nächsten Tag wusch er sein Gesicht im englischen, dann im italienischen..."

A Childlike Relation to the World

If cynicism, arrogance and intellectual detachment often accompany elitism, Özdamar presents the opposite: the childlike optimism accompanying the curious individual's engagement with the world. Özdamar argues in an interview that rather than categorizing contemporary multicultural Germany, she thinks about culture as consisting of people who share a certain fundamental "childlikeness" (*Kindlichkeit*). Culture is *people*, she claims:

> to see people without judging them, to want to find the tragic and the comic in their life moments, that you always assume that every person is a novel and that every person's life is a novel. And that you never lose your curiosity about in this novel. And that you also look for all and want to find all the large feelings in the life of this person. (Wierschke 263)[186]

In line with her view of culture as "people," Özdamar says that her texts should be thought of neither as typically Turkish nor as typically German, but rather as typically childlike (*kindlich*) (Wierschke 258). Noting the difference between "*kindlich*" (childlike) and "*kindisch*" (childish) in the German language, she suggests that "the childlike" works in literature in general, and in her novels in particular, as a mode of relating to the world and other people. Moreover, the childlike becomes an aesthetic through which Özdamar's characters engage with life. According to this aesthetic, it is always possible to see the world from unlearned, "childlike eyes," to resist classification and instead favor and savor the unique experience.

[186]"die Menschen zu sehen, ohne sie zu beurteilen, das Tragische und das Komische in ihren Momenten finden wollen, daß man immer davon ausgeht, daß jeder Mensch ein Roman ist und das Leben eines jeden Menschen ein Roman ist. Und daß man die Neugier auf diesen Roman nicht verliert. Und daß man alle großen Gefühle in dem Leben dieses Menschen auch suchen und finden möchte."

There is certain kinship between Özdamar and her protagonists' "childlike" relation to the world and Maria Lugones's "loving playfulness":

> Positively, the playful attitude involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction and reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the "worlds" we inhabit playfully. Negatively, playfulness is characterized by uncertainty, lack of self-importance, absence of rules or a not taking rules as sacred, a not worrying about competence, and a lack of abandonment to a particular construction of oneself, others, and one's relation to them. ("Playfulness" 288)

As opposed to Lugones's playful world-traveler, however, who chooses carefully which worlds to enter and who does not foolishly enter playfully into those worlds characterized by agon, conquest and arrogance (289), Özdamar appears less sensitive to such distinctions. Lugones's theory of world-traveling, as Lugones explains honestly, has developed as part of her conscious attempt to overcome her own arrogance toward her uneducated mother as well as her own resentment of the lower class, which her mother represents. Ironically, Lugones can only learn from her mother's world how to overcome her own arrogance toward that world, suggesting in this process that her privilege (education) also represents a great loss. Özdamar and her protagonists, on the other hand, do not appear to suffer from this complex. Instead, the author communicates a deep sense of respect for people, both in interviews and in her literary texts.

Özdamar's and Lugones's attitudes toward the lower class or the poor therefore appear significantly different. While Lugones's theory of playfulness appears considerably calculated, in that it actively seeks to overcome the shame and guilt that Lugones herself suffers from, the childlike attitude that Özdamar's protagonists embody appears less self-conscious. For example, when the young protagonist in *Die Brücke* is traveling through the war-ridden eastern parts of Turkey, she openly carries her books by

Marx. She also imparts her socialist ideals unto those her friend considers fascists. Even when their behavior borders on foolishness, Özdamar's characters are lovable precisely because they do not set themselves apart from the people they meet; their encounters with others are characterized by identification and playfulness.

Similar illustrations of loving playfulness in the context of social limitations can be found in all of Özdamar's books. At the beginning of *Die Brücke*, when the young Turkish woman has just arrived in Berlin to work in a factory, there are many humorous descriptions of the guest worker women navigating lightly through their German surroundings with no knowledge of German:

> In order to describe sugar, we did as if we had coffee, then we said Schak Schak. To describe salt, we spit on Hertie's [a German department store] floor, stretched our tongues out and said "eee." To describe eggs we turned our backs to the salesperson, shook our behinds and said "Gak, gak, gak." We got sugar, salt and eggs, but with the toothpaste it did not work. She gave us tile cleaner. So my first German words were Schak Schak, eee, gak, gak, gak. (19).[187]

While certainly emphasizing the cultural-linguistic outsidership of the girls, Özdamar also shows that the inarticulate foreigners are able to communicate. By emphasizing their creativity rather than their limitations, she lends these descriptions more humor than sadness.

Furthermore, Özdamar alludes in this passage to the aforementioned question of an identity beyond language – the notion that the well-being of migrants is not only a

---

[187] "Um Zucker zu beschreiben, machten wir vor einer Verkäuferin Kaffeetrinken nach, dann sagten wir Schak Schak. Um Salz zu beschreiben, spuckten wir auf Herties Boden, streckten unsere Zungen raus und sagten: "eee". Um Eier zu beschreiben drehten wir unsere Rücken zu der Verkäuferin, wackelten mit unseren Hintern und sagten: "Gak, gak, gak." Wir bekamen Zucker, Salz und Eier, bei Zahnpasta klappte es nicht. Wir bekamen Kachelputzmittel. So waren meine ersten deutschen Wörter Schak Schak, eeee, gak, gak, gak."

question of "perfected language", or of living up to the standards of the majority, but also a question of attitude. Özdamar suggests that migrants' attitudes may be rather independent, even disassociated from the majority's hostile expectations of migrants and foreigners – such as that they integrate, that they learn the language or that they become or act more "German-like." Lugones also comments upon this relative freedom of the "arrogantly perceived subject" that according to a majority discourse is classified as victim but in reality may be a creative, lively being and constructor of visions. Lugones emphasizes the gaps in our knowledge and understanding of others: "without knowing the other's world, one does not know the other," who is "there creatively," who is "not passive" ("Playfulness" 288-289).

*

One of my arguments in this chapter is that Özdamar lends agency to her migrant and minority subjects without giving up her criticism of a society deeply divided into haves and have-nots. In her most recent novel, *Seltsame Sterne Starren zur Erde* (Strange Stars Stare at Earth), she explores the border-crossing potential between East and West Berlin in the 1970s and thereby expands and strengthens her open perspective on German society and identity. She provides a unique picture of a welcoming East Germany from the perspective of a young Turkish actress who just escaped a Turkey in political turmoil. The book portrays the young Turkish woman's arrival in East Berlin in the late 1970s, where she hopes to work as an assistant to Heiner Müller and Benno Besson, for "Turkey needs Brecht's theater" (34). The novel is written as a diary, following the young woman's assistantship at the *Volkbühne* at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. It includes various

sketches of rehearsals and personal observations, including descriptions of her travels across the border to the other Berlin.

Moving between East and West during a period of a few years, Özdamar compares and contrasts the two Berlins, often in favor of the East. West Berlin is represented through an unheated, chaotic WG (*Wohngemeinschaft*) filled with politically conscious but unreliable and lazy hippies. Whenever the narrator goes to the West (she has a work visa that allows her to travel) she is bombarded with sad news from a troubled world, including the threats of terrorism in West Germany, and she experiences occasional racism when she is mistaken for a Jew. The East, on the other hand, is largely portrayed as a quiet retreat. She finds people to love, and she finds the sparseness and seclusion beautiful and less stressful in comparison to the West. One among few foreigners, she becomes "exotic" in a positive sense, a "phenomenon" who has "the warmest eyes in the city," says Heiner Müller (215).

There is also certain seriousness about the people in the East that the hippies in the West lack, and a reliability that reminds the protagonist of people in Turkey. When her friends in West Berlin claim that people look so sad in the East, Özdamar's protagonist views this difference with the eyes of an artist: "I did not see this sadness, their faces were secretive, like Rembrandt's portraits, archaic…" (19).[188] One of her West German friends agrees that it is West Berlin that is depressed, cut off from the rest of Germany and filled with people who lack a calling and only want to experiment with life (52). In the words of Heiner Müller, with whom Özdamar's protagonist (a.k.a. Özdamar) works, there is a relationship between sparseness and depth of meaning. Words, he says,

[188] "Ich sah diese Traurigkeit nicht, ihre Gesichter waren geheimnisvoll, wie Rembrandt's Selbstportraits."

have meaning in East Germany, while in the West they are lost in the stream of information (215). Turkish guest-working men prefer the East and the relationships they can form there. According to one these men, Mustafa, East German people appear more open to immigrants than West Germans and the liberal multicultural West has allowed too much freedom for conservative Muslims. He argues against most westerners' opinion about the East: everyone may be locked in, he says, but at least they share a common ground (70).

There is an undeniable *Ostalgie*[189] about Özdamar's portrayal of East German life. Just like the East Germans, Özdamar has experienced different types of society and can compare them, drawing from them what she finds positive. Özdamar also gives her Turkish outsider characters certain insights into both East and West German society by virtue of their being outsiders to both. The woman protagonist, obviously sympathetic to socialist ideals, appreciates the advantages of a political system in which equality is an esteemed value: "Would a worker in Turkey dare to go into a book store in work clothes?" she asks herself, and "A cucumber is here 40 Pfennig everywhere, in Turkey it is different in each place" (87).[190] These subjective evaluations are contradicted by her East German friend, however, who reminds the protagonist of her privileged position of an outsider: "You normalize the wall. For you, to be here is to expand your opportunities, to work and live. Others see their opportunities limited" (182).[191]

---

[189] *Ostalgie* refers to the nostalgia for certain aspects of East German life and culture that has disappeared after the unification of Germany in 1990. The term is also used to refer to the nostalgia for life under Socialism in general, in particular in the Soviet Union and Poland. Some aspects of this nostalgia are the longing for a more protected life and for community.

[190] "Würde in der Türkei ein Arbeiter sich trauen, in Arbeitskleidung in einen Buchladen zu gehen? Eine Gurke kostet hier überall vierzig Pfennige, in der Türkei überall unterschiedlich viel."

[191] "Du normalisiert die Mauer. Für dich bedeutet hier zu sein eine Erweiterung deiner Möglichkeiten, zu arbeiten und zu leben. Andere aber sehen ihre Möglichkeiten beschränkt."

The fact that Özdamar's narrator is capable of normalizing the East German existence, that she finds things that are good and familiar in it, that she moves effortlessly between the two Berlins, appreciating each as it is, also further illustrates the open and affirmative subjectivity that characterizes Özdamar's narratives in general. Özdamar's narrator appears to move across boundaries without much regard for those boundaries. Her normalization of the wall keeps her from becoming resentful or afraid; she treats the guards as friends, jokes or flirts with them, even when she smuggles books across the border. If she is caught, she uses her sense of humor or she lies. In the end, there is a link between an affirmative subjectivity and the artistic creativity, which Özdamar's protagonists apply to their everyday life situations. In *Seltsame Sterne*, Özdamar explains the connections between life-style and artistry as follows; giving a positive meaning to that innocence that enhances "seeing" and disarms fear:

> I want productive friendships. […] To change, to share experience with others, is very important. But never change someone with violence. Take away the fear from people. Remain naïve for art. My father once brought a religious man to our house. I was ten years old, just came from school. My father wanted to look for a treasure with the help of this man. I should look into a glass of water and see where the treasure was. My father introduced me to the man. 'Here is the most naïve of my children.'(133)[192]

Here it is important to remember the tension that exists in Özdamar's texts between hopeful perspectives and stark realities. These realities suggest that there is something extraordinary, rather than ordinary, about Özdamar's female characters. Obviously, the optimism of her young protagonists clashes with the hopelessness of the

[192] "Ich möchte produktive Freundschaften [...] Sich verändern, die Erfahrung mit anderen teilen, ist sehr wichtig. Aber niemanden mit Gewalt verändern wollen. Den Menschen die Ängste nehmen. Für die Kunst naiv bleiben. Mein Vater hat einmal einen religiösen Mann nach Hause gebracht. Ich war zehn Jahre alt, kam gerade aus der Schule. Mein Vater wollte mit der Hilfe dieses Mannes einen Schatz suchen. Ich sollte in einer Tasse Wasser sehen, wo dieser Schatz versteckt war. Vater stellte mich dem Mann vor. 'Hier ist das naivste meiner Kinder.'"

poor in eastern Turkey or of the guest workers like Karagöz, whose migrancy destroyed their families and alienated them from their own culture. In *Seltsame Sterne*, those Germans falsely imprisoned by the Stasi also defy the innocence and ease with which the young Turkish woman appears to move between East and West. Furthermore, the imprisonment that the young woman in "Mutterzunge" experiences appears to be a light version of the isolation and violence also associated with Turkish women's lives in Germany, mentioned by some of Zaimoglu's female subjects, or thematized by films like *40qm. Deutschland*. Other women in Özdamar's books, such as the mother who tries to commit suicide, or the Turkish women in "Karagöz", who travel to Germany to look for their men and their new families, also represent women who suffer rather than benefit from exile.

The numerous repressed, subjugated, or unauthorized voices of women, peasants, and guest workers in Özdamar's texts signal the concern on the part of the author with how power and dominance affect the singular individual, in particular the minority individual. By focusing on describing her characters as empowered human beings, however, Özdamar shows how people in their daily lives find strategies to resist dominance and move forward despite hardships. Starting with the failed search for a stable identity in the story "Mutterzunge", what eventually materializes from Özdamar's stories is a humorous, creative and loving subjectivity. The ability of Özdamar's protagonists to deal with newness and cultural difference in a creative and affirmative manner, facilitated by an optimistic attitude towards the world and people, is a powerful antidote to developments in the opposite direction: attitudes that signal the closing of borders, the cultivation of difference, segregation, reactive anger and bitterness.

Özdamar's work suggests the importance of *not* giving in to cynicism, reactive resentment and blame. She suggests that an optimistic and humanist perspective on the multicultural world in Germany is preferable to cynicism. As a result, Özdamar strikes a chord for the humanness of the immigrant and the German alike, and suggests that we must dare connect through our singular cultural and ethnic differences as far as that is possible, as well as attack those negative social facts that still assign people to undignified lives (poverty, exploitation, racism and discrimination). Through her action-oriented, open-minded and socially concerned protagonists, Özdamar holds out the hope for a future multicultural world beyond domination and prejudice.

EPILOGUE.

A Multiculturalism for the 21st Century

> *Now the new Millennium has begun. I hope it will be a good one – something no one can say about the last. Even if every indication suggests otherwise, we still have to hope.* [193]
>
> - Kemal Kurt

In early 2006, the German publishing company Kiepenhauer & Witsch released Feridun Zaimoglu's book *Leyla*. In this novel, Zaimoglu distances himself from his erstwhile image as a provocative cult writer. It is a grand-scale family saga, told from the perspective of a female protagonist with a submissive role within the patriarchal social order. The book follows a young woman, who begins her childhood in the Anatolian provinces in eastern Turkey, moves to the metropolis of Istanbul, and later migrates to Germany in search of a better life. Shortly after the novel was published, Zaimoglu was accused of plagiarizing Özdamar's *Karawanserai*, written 14 years before. A Germanist, who had compared plots, imagery and metaphors in the two books concluded that the similarity was too great to be dismissed as a coincidence. Zaimoglu claims his story is his mother's, who was born in the same village as Özdamar only a few years earlier. He claims that he wrote the book from taped interviews and that he has never read any of Özdamar's books (Söhler, "Zaimoglu: Faule Aprikosen aus Malataya"). Özdamar never made any accusations herself and did not show any interest in following up on the Germanist's findings. It is not a surprise, however, that she has referred to Zaimoglu's

[193] "Nun hat das neue Jahrhundert begonnen. Hoffentlich wird es ein gutes – was man von dem alten Jahrhundert beim besten Willen nicht behaupten kann. Zwar sprechen alle Anzeigen dagegen, doch hoffen müssen wir trotzdem" (Kemal Kurt, *Ja, sagt Molly* 150).

school of *Kanak Attak* as a "narrow" approach to multiculturalism (Cheeseman *Akcam* 2).

For the purposes of this project, what is more interesting than controversies about whether or not Zaimoglu actually plagiarized Özdamar, or whether the stories were similar for other reasons, is the shift in Zaimoglu's subject matter and attitude that *Leyla* represents. Zaimoglu, who after his two books on *Kanaken* had mainly continued to depict the adventures of young Turkish-German men in urban worlds and who had been identified as provocative, "masculine" and male focused, now turned to the "traditional" story of exile and his mother's experience of migrancy. Gone is the vulgarity and provocative tone that characterized his *Kanak* texts, gone is the pornographic content of many of the novels he wrote in the 1990s.

One suspects that Zaimoglu's change of focus not only demonstrates his versatility as a writer but also suggests his need to engage more sensitively and affirmatively with immigrant and minority identity. He may also have felt the need to emancipate himself from the *Kanak*-label and the one-sided and narrow approach to Turkish-German identity that it had come to represent. Zaimoglu sees no contradiction, however, in writing sensitively about his mother's migrant experience and simultaneously doing provocative identity politics. Just like his earlier books, he claims, *Leyla* portrays lower-class immigrants who struggle with both oppressive Turkish tradition and a discriminating German culture. Zaimoglu's point is that the minority identities of Leyla and the *Kanaken* are more similar than they are different.

Interesting for this project is also the transformation that the Kanak-identity has undergone since Zaimoglu introduced it in the mid-1990s. An increasingly diverse group of people, including ethnic Germans, is now claiming the political label *Kanak*. *Kanak*

Attak is explained on the current webpage in a manifesto written in German, Turkish, French and English:

> Kanak Attak is a community of different peoples from diverse background [*sic.*] who share a commitment to eradicate racism from German society. Kanak Attak is not interested in questions about your passport or heritage, in fact, it challenges such questions in the first place. Kanak Attak challenges the conservative and liberal orthodoxy that good "race" relations is simply a matter of tighter immigration control. Our common position consists of an attack against the "Kanakisation" of specific groups of people through racist ascriptions, which denies [*sic.*] people their social, legal and political rights. Kanak Attak is therefore anti-nationalist, anti-racist, and rejects every single form of identity politics, as supported by ethnic absolutist thinking.[194]

What is described here is a broad social movement that unites young Europeans across ethnic and national lines against racism and other forms of discrimination. This "new" transnational minority, somewhat comparable to Gilroy's idea about a metropolitan convivial culture, based to some extent on class and to some extent on an honest identification across different groups of marginalized people, is a sign of the value of minority perspectives to the larger democratizing process of a multicultural European society.

Another interesting connection between Zaimoglu's and Özdamar's projects and their different approaches to multiculturalism is the *Volksbühne* theater, where Özdamar worked on Brecht's "worker plays" in the 1970s, and where in 2001 *Kanak-Attak* staged a multimedia show about the struggles of guest workers. These events, taken together, suggest that the guest worker theme of the 80s and the immigrant experience that it represented are by no means irrelevant to contemporary Germany. A parallel reading of these *Volksbühne* events also suggests that a premature dismissal of the provocative side

[194] http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/about/manif_eng.html. 10 April 2008.

of Zaimoglu's and *Kanak-Attak's* projects may be as false and dishonest as an uncritical embrace of Özdamar's or Zaimoglu's later, more traditional narratives of exile. What these examples are meant to show is that different minority experiences and perspectives connect on fundamental levels. They also, however, present a picture of contemporary multicultural Europe very far from any simple pluralism or diversity.

*

Henry Luis Gates argued in 1992 that the central problem of the 21st century would be "the problem of ethnic difference or "the matter of multiculturalism" (*Loose Canons* vii). A typical argument today, expressed for instance by the Turkish-German Zafer Senocak, is that in order to solve this "problem," we must say farewell to the notion of unbroken identity – both on an individual and national level - and instead envision a "new," mixed and ambiguous identity. This reorientation, Senocak argues, must find connections between the problems of the foreigners and those of the natives, it must enrich the natives with the cultural legacy of the foreigners and it must grant the second generation the space it needs to find its own way (*Atlas of a Tropical* 5). Senocak writes:

> Where does one stand as a German Turk within a German-Turkish dialogue? In the middle perhaps? Or maybe even off to the side? If one presumes that identities exist in fixed, unbroken ways, then from the vantage point of a German Turk, the German-Turkish encounter becomes a nightmarish phantasm. The question – who and what is a German or a Turk – stands stubbornly and unmasked in the room. (91)

Zaimoglu, Besigye, Khemiri and Özdamar all show that the comprehensive change of consciousness or reorientation that Senocak proposes, *is* taking place in Germany and Scandinavia. It *is* becoming more and more "normal" to be a Turkish-born

writer of German literature, a Ugandan-born writer of Norwegian literature or a Swedish bicultural writer pushing for a Swedish identity accepting of its global influences.

But Gates probably had something quite different in mind with "the matter of multiculturalism" than the mere ethnic and cultural mixtures that the phrase easily calls to mind. Multiculturalism is, according to Gates, more than a liberal dream of a cultural mosaic or the promotion of foreign or different cultures. A multicultural consciousness also relies on a critique of cultural dominance. Multiculturalism thus prescribes "diversity within culture" rather than "difference between cultures." Multiculturalism thus understood is a democratic force that seeks to transform the larger society by uprooting all forms of structural inequalities and prejudice (racism, sexism, classism, homophobia).

This "other," more challenging side of the matter of multiculturalism--the question of true equality-- is engaged by Zaimoglu's angry Kanaken "rapping back" to a discriminating German culture, by Besigye ironically attacking the Norwegian white middle-class culture, by Khemiri's Halim cultivating an alternative and insular, non-Swedish ethnic identity and by Özdamar's female protagonists defiantly crossing borders and identifying across borders. The writers discussed in this project show that they have certain shared experiences by virtue of their relationship to a dominant culture, which has historically marginalized minority voices and continue to do so. Although different in content, style and tone, their texts invite the reader to admit the real and continuing damage being done to immigrants and ethnic minorities. The fact that these writers all appear more or less skeptical of sanguine ideas of "pluralism" suggests that such ideas often disguise the perpetuation of exclusion rather than engage minority perspectives honestly. In the end, a multiculturalism worth defending is one that critiques persisting

ethnic and racial inequalities while it at the same time expands the horizons of our cultural, national and individual identities.

*

An increasingly internationally oriented young generation will play the most important role in the development of a multicultural and ethnically diverse Germany and Scandinavia. As I have shown, this generation is starting to voice its impatience with the paradigms and biases of past generations with both confidence and humor. Claiming a less exclusive minority identity than the one assigned to her, the Kurdish-Swedish Dilsa Demirbag-Sten wrote in the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* in 2003:

> Who are the immigrants? Are those who are called immigrants by the SCB [state authority for statistics] interested in the frames shaped by the Swedish cultural establishment? Can there be Arabs who appreciate Strindberg at Dramaten? Are all Kurds interested in dramatic art that mirrors culture conflict? ("Dilsa Demirbag-Sten om mångkultur")[195]

The younger generation of "new" Germans and Scandinavians such as Demirbag, Zaimoglu, Besigye, and Khemiri naturally pushes for both ethnic equality and its own "global" definitions of national identity.

Perhaps the most visionary aspect about the minority writers engaged in this project is their attempts to envision positive and meaningful life-scripts different than those sanctioned by the dominant culture. These life-scripts appear to shun the elitism, conformism, social hierarchy and materialism characteristic of the dominant class in favor of communal, personal and pleasurable life-styles. They show that any viable

[195] "Vilka är invandrarna? Är de som enligt SCB kallas invandrare intresserade av de ramar som svenskt kulturliv format? Kan det finnas araber som uppskattar Strindberg på Dramaten? Är alla kurder intresserade av scenkonst som speglar kulturkonflikter?"

humanism in the eyes of minorities is one, which critiques all forms of domination and seeks alternative ways to live a good life. For instance, Özdamar reveals the independent and affirmative visions of guest workers in Germany or migrants within Turkey. Her characters often defy the limited life-scripts assigned to them by their social status, and contrary to the dominant perception of minority identities in Germany, they "shine" as creative beings. From Özdamar's very first story "Mutterzunge", in which the protagonist symbolically escapes a past-oriented and insular worldview and learns to "see" and "feel" the other (the German), Özdamar's protagonists are always capable of seeing their identity and the identity of others as open, affirmative, unfinished and, most importantly, as indelibly connected to other people.

*

Literature by minority individuals will not give us an answer to what, exactly, a multicultural Germany and a multicultural Scandinavia will mean later in the third Millennium. Neither will it solve the contemporary "multicultural" problems of social marginalization, prejudice and racism. But literature by minorities will continue to affect our understanding of culture and it will challenge the dominant discourses and prejudices of the dominant group. On the one hand, the literature discussed in this dissertation legitimizes the pluralism of an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse German and Scandinavian world. These authors relate the burden of subjugation that all Western societies have forced and continue to force ethnic minorities to bear. The extroverted and even contestable minority voices that these writers represent also resist the marginalization imposed on them and insist on their own cosmopolitan visions of German and Scandinavian society. Many reviewers of Khemiri's *Ett öga rött*, for

instance, hinted at the invaluable contribution of a new generation of writers of foreign background to a new Swedish self-conception. Not only because of the sharpness and honesty with which they observe and criticize Swedish society but also because of the skill with which they open up our image of, as one critic said, "that increasingly difficult-to-define concept called Sweden" (Rabe, "Vasst på bruten svenska").[196]

In line with my obvious preference for the literary over the theoretical, I would like to end on a literary note--a note as gently optimistic as the one on which Kemal Kurt began the chapter. In *Seltsame Sterne* (2003), Özdamar makes an excursion back to the 1970s and to a young Turkish woman in East Germany, for whom East Germany is already part of a larger world. Özdamar has her narrator spend evenings in East Berlin after rehearsals alone, listening to Mozart while remembering a Turkey filled with poverty, political unrest and death. While homesick and lonely, she acknowledges that her exile in Germany allows her both deeper knowledge and transformation. Perhaps she remembers what she had thought about Brecht's play many nights before: that while many people had started to complicate reality, Brecht had always meant that it was simple and real (42). Remembering her friends' sacrifice for justice, instead of seeing darkness and coldness in the Berlin winter night, she sees beauty and softness. Eventually, she thinks to herself, people will learn to conquer injustice. Emphasizing the qualities of the words "soft" and "rich," as well her multicultural experiences, Özdamar invites her readers to imagine a maturing human identity:

> I did not move backwards. I fled forwards, everything is okay. […] How beautiful the nights in Berlin are, when it is snowing. It has a soft heart, Berlin, the children aren't cold, the cold is for them a winter's fairy-tale. […] I greet the beautiful day. I throw away the idealistic thoughts. They also belong to life, those stories from

[196] "det där alltmer svårdefinierade konceptet som kallas Sverige."

Turkey that made me so sad. The doors to our mistakes have to close. It is time now to become softer and richer through knowledge. (104-105)[197]

[197] "Ich bin nicht rückwärts gegangen, ich bin nach vorne geflüchtet, alles in Ordnung. […] Wie schön sind die Nächte in Berlin, wenn es schneit. Es hat ein weiches Herz, Berlin, die Kinder frieren nicht, die Kälte ist für sie ein Wintermärchen. […] Salut dem schönen Tag. Ich zerreiße das idealistische Denken, sie gehören auch zum Leben, die Geschichten, die mich so traurig gemacht haben, in der Türkei. Die Türen der Fehler sollen sich schließen. Jetzt ist es Zeit, durch Wissen weicher zu werden, reicher zu werden."

WORKS CITED

Ackermann, Irmgard, and Harald Weinrich, eds. *Eine nicht nur deutsche Literatur. Zur Standortbestimmung der "Ausländerliteratur."* München: R. Piper GmbH & Co., 1986.

Ackermann, Irmgard, ed. *In zwei Sprachen leben: Berichte, Erzählungen, Gedichte von Ausländern*. München: dtv, 1983.

---., Türken deutscher Sprache: Berichte, Erzählungen, Gedichte von Ausländern. München: dtv, 1984.

Adelson, Leslie. "Migrants' Literature or German Literature: Torkan's *Tufan:Brief an einen islamischen Bruder.*" *The German Quarterly* 63. 4 (1990): 382-389.

---. "Opposing Oppositions: Turkish-German Questions in Contemporary German Studies." *German Studies Review* 17 No.2 (1994): 305-330.

---. "The Price of Feminism: Of Women and Turks." *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of Nations*. Eds. Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller. Providence: Berghahn, 1997. 305-319.

---. "Touching Tales of Turks, Germans, and Jews: Cultural Alterity, Historical Narrative, and Literary Riddles for the 1990s." *New German Critique* 80 (2000): 93-124.

---. The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2005.

Akkaya, Cigdem. "Ausdifferenzierung der türkischen Migration in Deutschland." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. 20 March 1999: 91.

Alakoski, Susanna. *Svinalängorna*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 2004.

Ålund, Alexandra, and Carl-Elrik Schierup. *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism.* Aldershot: Avebury, 1991.

Andersen, Hadle Oftedal. "Endelig Besigye." *Dag o Tid Online* 12. 22 March 2003. 4 Aug 2005.

Angelou, Maya. *The Complete Collected Poems by Maya Angelou*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Anyuru, Johannes. *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*. Göteborg: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2005.

Appiah, K. Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York/London: Norton, 2006.

---. "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction." *Multiculturalism*. Eds. Taylor, C., & Gutmann, A. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. 149-163.

Bagher, Reza. *Vingar av glas.* Bromma: Sonet Film, 2000.

Bahtiari, Marianeh. *Kalla det vad fan du vill*. Stockholm: Ordfront, 2005.

Baser, Tevfik. *40m2 Deutschland*. German Film Export Union, 1986.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "The Making and Unmaking of Strangers." *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. Eds. Pnina Wernber and Tariq Modood. London/New Jersey: Zed, 1997. 46-57.

Becker, Lars. *Kanak Attak.* Becker & Häberle Filmproduktion Gmbh, 2000.

Besigye, Bertrand. *Krystallisert sollys*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003.

---. *Og du dør så langsomt at du tror du lever*. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1993.

---. *Svastikastjernen.* Olso: Aschehoug, 2005.

Bhabha, Homi. "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences." *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995. 206-209.

---. "Culture's In-Between". *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: Sage Publications, 1996. 53-60.

---. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Birro, Peter, and Lukas Moodysson. *Det nya landet*. Bromma: Sonet Film, 2000.

Bohm, Hark. *Yasemin*. Hamburg: Hamburger Kino Company, 1988.

Caldwell, Christopher. "Islam on the Outskirts of the Welfare State." *New York Times Online* 5 Feb 2006. 6 Feb 2007.

Can, Mustafa. "Folkpartiet har blivit populistiskt." *Dagens Nyheter Online* 10 July 2007. 25 July 2007.

Carlbom, Aje. *The Imagined Versus the Real Other: Multiculturalism and the Representation of Muslims in Sweden*. Stockholm: Soc. Inst., 2003.

Carlbom, Mats. "Blatte och svensk på samma gång." *Dagens Nyheter Online* 7 Apr 2006. 7 Feb 2007.

Carp, Ossi. "Ett språk för miljoner." *Dagens Nyheter Online* 17 May 2006. 7 Feb 2007.

Cheesman, Tom. "Akcam – Zaimoglu – 'Kanak Attak': Turkish Lives and Letters in German." *German Life and Letters* 55: 2 (2002): 180-195.

---. "Talking 'Kanak': Zaimoglu kontra *Leitkultur*." *New German Critique* 92 (2004): 82-99.

Clifford, James. "Diapora." *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-338.

Collin, Lars. “Kulturelitens nya kelgris.” *Svenska Dagbladet Online* 8 April 2003. 6 Apr 2007.

Dahlstedt, Magnus, and Ingemar Lindal. *Det slutna folkhemmet: Om etniska klyftor och blågul självbild.* Stockholm: Agora, 2002.

Demirbag-Sten, Dilsa. “Dilsa Demirbag-Sten om mångkultur.” *Svenska Dagbladet Online* 16 Jan 2006. 27 Jan 2008.

Dörrie, Doris. *Happy Birthday Türke!* Cobra Film Gmbh, 1992.

Dyson, Michael Eric. “Rethinking Black Identity.” *Lecture, Boston College*. 31 Jan 2005. 18 Jan 2007 <www.frontrow.bc.edu/program/dyson/>.

Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*. New York/London: Routledge, 2003.

---. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Ehn, B., J. Frykman and O. Löfgren. *Försvenskningen av Sverige*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1993.

Fachinger, Petra. *Rewriting Germany from the Margins*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill University Press, 2001.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Mask*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Fares, Josef. *Jalla Jalla.* Bromma: Sonet Film, 2000.

Fessman, Meike. “Als gingen die Wörter von Mund zu Mund.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 23 May 1998: 904.

Fish, Stanley. “Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech.” *Critical Inquiry* 23.2 (1997): 379-393.

Freihow, Halfdan, and Michael Konupek. *Et dussin trekkfugler*. Oslo: Aventura, 1990.

Gates, Henry Luis. "'Ethnic and Minority' Studies." *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures.* Ed. Joseph Gibaldi. New York: Mod. Lang. Ass. of Amer., 1992. 288-303.

---. *Loose Canons*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Ghaussy, Sohelia. "Das Vaterland verlassen: Nomadic Language and "Feminine Writing" in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai." *The German Quarterly* 72.1 (1999): 1-16.

Gilroy, Paul. *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholy*. London: Taylor & Frances Ltd., 2004.

---. *Against Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Göktürk, Deniz. "Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy." *New German Critique* 92 (2004): 100-122.

---. "Turkish delight – German fright: Migrant Identities in Transnational Cinema." 4 Apr 2008 <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/mediated.pdf>.

---. Göktürk, Deniz, and Barbara Wolbert. "Introduction: Multicultural Germany: Art, Performance and Media." *New German Critique* 92 (2004): 3-4.

Grive Madeleine, and Mehmet Uzun, eds. *Världen i Sverige.* Stockholm: En bok för alla, 1995.

Gröndahl, Satu. *Litteraturens gränsland: invandrar- och minoritetslitteratur ur nordiskt perspektiv.* Uppsala: Multiethnic Papers 45, 2002.

Gullestad, Marianne. "Blind Slaves of our Prejudices: Debating 'Culture' and 'Race' in Norway." *Ethnos* 69.2 (2004): 177-203.

Gutschke, Irmtraud. "Wenn der Geduldstein dicker wird." *Frankfurter Allgemeiner Zeitung.* Literaturbeilage 30 Sep. – 5 Oct. 1993: 1.

Günther, Manuela. "'Wir sind bastarde, freunde…': Feridun Zaimoglu's Kanak Sprak und die performative Struktur von Identität." *Sprache und Literatur in Wissenschaft und Didaktik* 83 (1999): 15-28.

Hall, Stuart. "The Multicultural Question." *Pavis Lecture.* Walton Hall Campus – Open University 19 Oct 2000. Ed. Simon Hesmondhalgh, 2001. 27 Jul 2006 <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/pavis/papers.php>.

---. "Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: Sage Publications, 1996. 1-17.

Hargreaves, A.G. "Beur Fiction: Voices from the Immigrant Community in France." *The French Review* 62:4 (1989): 661-668.

---. "The Beurgeoisie: mediation or mirage" *Journal of European Studies* 27 (1998): 89-102.

Hesse, Barnor. *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms. Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions*. London: Zed Books, 2000.

Heyman, Viveka, and Siw Widerberg. Eds. *Flykten valde oss: Poesi om att fly sitt land*. Stockholm: En bok för alla, 1999.

Hinck, Walter. "Großmutter und die Bagdadbahn." *Frankfurter Allgemeiner Zeitung*. 13 Oct 1992: 34.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

---. *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990.

Horgar, Farten. "Den nye vins martyrer." *Adresseavisen* 27 Feb 2003: 20.

Horrocks, David, and Eva Kolinsky, eds. *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*. Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996.

Huntington, Samuel. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

---. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 72. 3 (1993): 22-49.

Jacobsen, Eigil Osman. "Bertrand Besigye." *Filologen* 2, 1999. 7 Jul 2003. <http://www.hf.uio.no/ff/filologen/99-2/besigye.html>.

James, Steve. "Mass protest against racist murder in Norway." *World Socialist Website* 13 Feb 2001. 26 Feb 2007.

Jankowski, Karen. "German" Literature Contested: The 1991 Ingeborg-Bahmann_Prize Debate, "Cultural Diversity," and Emine Sevgi Özdamar." *The German Quarterly* 70:3 (1997): 261-76.

Johnson, Sheila. "Transnational Ästhetik des türkischen Alltags: Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai." *The German Quarterly* 74:1 (2001): 37-57.

Jonsson, Stefan. "Litteratur som gränsvakt." *Dagens Nyheter Online*. 31 Jul 2007. 15 Aug 2007.

---. "Vart är folkpartiet på väg?" *Dagens Nyheter Online*. 23 Dec 2005. 15 Jul 2007.

Kamali, Masud, and Paulina de Los Reyes. *Bortom vi och dom: Teoretiska reflektioner om makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering*. SOU Nr. 41: Stockholm, 2005.

Kapoor, Nita, and Fakhra Salimi, eds. *Ord i bevegelse. Dikt og tekster skrevet av kvinner innvandret til Skandinavia.* Oslo: Cappelen, 1995.

Khemiri, Jonas Hassen. *Ett öga rött*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 2003.

---. *Montecore*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 2005.

Kongslien, Ingeborg. "Dei nye stemmene i norsk samtidslitteratur. Innvandrarlitteratur i Norge." *Norsk Litterær Årbok.* Det Norske Samlaget: Oslo, 2002. 174-190.

---. "Innvandrarlitteratur i Norge." *Litteraturens Gränsland*. Ed. Satu Gröndal. Uppsala: Multiethnic Papers 45, 2000. 243-256.

---. "New Narratives in Norwegian and Nordic Multicultural Literature, Or: 'Rewriting What it Means to be Norwegian.'" *Scandinavica* 44.2 (2005): 143-162.

---. "New Voices, New Themes, New Perspectives. Contemporary Scandinavian Multicultural Literature." *Scandinavian Studies* 3 (2007):143-162.

Konuk, Kader. "Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai: Heim-at bei Emine Sevgi Özdamar." *Kein Land in Sicht: Heimat – weiblich?* Ed. Gisela Ecker. München: Fink, 1997: 143-158.

Kotsinas, Ulla-Britt. "Kravet på en god svenska." *Tidskriften Socialpolitik*. 1-2 (1996): 34-36.

Kumar, Amitava. "A Bang and a Whimper: A Conversation with Hanif Kureishi." *Transition* Vol. 10.4 (2001): 114-131.

Kunisch, Harald. "Eine Ankunftsliteratur anderer Art." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. 22 March 2000: 56.

Kureishi, Hanif. *The Black Album*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

---. *The Buddha of Suburbia.* New York: Faber and Faber, 1990.

---. *My Son the Fanatic*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.

Kurt, Kemal. *Ja, sagt Molly.* Berlin: Hitit, 1998.

Kurzke, Hermann. "Verlorene Zunge." *FAZ* 17 Dec 1990: *Page nr. missing.*

Landy, Marcia. "On the Road With Lamerica: Immigrants, Refugees and the Poor." *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race*. Eds. Maria Margaroni and Effi Yiannopoulou. Editions Rodopi BV, 2006. 141-158.

Levin, Mona. "Å dikte det er å leve…" *Aftenposten* 20 Oct. 1993: 18.

Lappalainen, Paul. *Det blågula glashuset – strukturell diskriminering i Sverige*. SOU 56. Stockholm, 2005.

Loden, Eirik. "Bertrand Besigye: Krystallisert sollys: blondinevitser og brunettedikt." *Aftenbladet*. 24 March 2003. Online 5 Oct 2006.

Loentz, Elisabeth. "Yiddish, Kanak Sprak, Klezmer, and HipHop: Ethnolect, Minority Culture, Multiculturalism, and Stereotype in Germany. *Shofar*: *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25.1 (2006): 33-62.

Löffler, Udo. "Sprache ist der Büchsenöffner." *Tageszeitung*. 8 Jan 2003. Bildung: 14.

Lönnroth, Lars. Ed. *Den svenska litteraturen*. Band III. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1987-1990.

Lottman, Joachim, ed. *Kanaksta: Von deutschen und anderen Ausländern*. Berlin: Quadriga, 1999.

Lugones, "Playfulness, "world"-traveling, and loving perception." *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Eds. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. 275-90.

---. "Purity, Impurity, and Separation." *Signs* 19: 2 (1994): 458-479.

Maharidge, Dale. *The Coming White Minority: California, Multiculturalism and America's Future*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

Manz, Stefan. "Constructing a Normative National Identity: The *Leitkultur* Debate in Germany, 2000/2001. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 25. 5-6 (2004): 481-496.

McEachrane, Michael, and Louis Faye, eds. *Sverige och de Andra: Postkoloniala perspektiv*. Falun: Natur och Kultur, 2001.

Moestue Bugge, Erle. "Refser velferdsapati – fordømmer ingen." *Aftenposten*. 18 Aug 1993: 16.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Introduction -- Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. 1-47.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Darkness: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. London: Pan Books, 1993.

Müller, Christine. "Immigrants Who Can Do More Than Just Rap." Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch: Qantara Online 29 July 2005. 20 May 2008 <http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-310/_nr_208/i.html>.

Niemi, Mikael. *Populärmusik i Vittula*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 2000.

Nilsson, Per. *Svenne*. Stockholm: Raben & Sjögren, 2006.

Ødegård, Knut. "Ekstatisk livsdyrking." *Aftenposten Morgen* 28 Feb 2003: 12.

Özdamar. Emine Sevgi. *Die Brücke vom goldenen Horn*. Köln: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1998.

---. *Der Hof der Spiegel*. Köln: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2001.

---. *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai hat zwei Türen aus einer kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich raus.* Köln: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1992.

---. *Mutterzunge*. Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1990.

---. *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*. Köln: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2003.

Parsa, Reza. *Före stormen.* Trollhättan: Felicia Film/Film i Väst, 2000.

Pazarkaya, Yüksel. "Ohne die Deutschen wäre Deutschland nicht so übel: Der Gastarbeiter und seine Erfahrungen als strittiges Thema der zeitgenössischen türkischen Literatur." *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustauch* 31 (1981): 314-318.

Pred, Alan. *Even in Sweden*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Punter, David. *Postcolonial Imaginings*. Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2000.

Rabe, Annina. "Vasst på bruten svenska." *Svenska Dagbladet Online*. 4 Aug 2003. 6 Sep 2007.

Reul, Sabine, and Thomas Deichmann. "The one Measure of True Love is: You can Insult the Other." *Spiked Online* 15 Sep 2001. 27 Feb 2007 <http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/00000002D2C4.htm>.

Rojas, Mauricio. *I ensamhetens labyrint.* Halmstad: Brombergs bokförlag, 1993.

---. "Invandrarnas tystnad om brott ett svek mot demokratin." *Dagens Nyheter Online* 19 Sep 2005. 15 July 2007.

---. "Kulturarv ligger bakom invandrares brottslighet." *Dagens Nyheter Online* 5 Dec 2005. 15 July 2007.

---. "Rättvisepolitik." *Dagens Nyheter Online*. 29 July 2007. 15 Aug 2007.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991.* Granta, 1992.

Sabo, Anne. "Ari Behn's *Bakgård*: The latest contribution from a Norwegian bohemian tradition." *Scandinavian Studies* 2 (2005): 275-286.

---. "The Status of Sexuality, Pornography and Morality in Norway Today." *NORA – Nordic Journal for Women's Studies* (2005): 36-47.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

---. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Salimi, Khalid. Ed. *Roser i snø. Dikt og tekster skrevet av innvandrere i Norge, Sverige og Danmark*. Oslo: Cappelen, 1988.

Sandemose, Aksel. *En flykting krysser sitt spor: Espen Arnakkes kommentarer til Janteloven.* Oslo: Aschehoug, 1962.

Sartorius, Joachim. "Mit Bismillahirahmanirrahim in seine zitternde Arme." *Tageszeitung Berlin.* 1 Oct 1992: 15.

Sæterbakken, Stig. "Mitt hjärta tillhör Europa – mitt hjärta är krossat." Trans. Malin Lundh. *Glänta* 3 (2006): 62-67.

Scheinhardt, Saliha. *Frauen die sterben, ohne daß sie gelebt hätten.* Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1993.

Schumann, Andreas. "Der Gast der keener mehr ist. Neue Tendenzen in der Migrantenliteratur." *Deutsche Literatur Online*. 8 July 2007 <http://www.litrix.de/magazin/panorama/ueberblick/de16785.htm>.

Sen, Amartya. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York/London: Norton, 2006.

Senocak, Zafer. *Atlas of a Tropical Germany*. Trans. Leslie A. Adelson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

---. "Wann ist der Fremde zu Hause?" Betrachtungen zur Kunst und Kultur von Minderheiten in Deutschland." *Atlas des Tropischen Deutschland*. Berlin: Babel, 1993. 64-75.

Seyhan, Azade. "Lost in Translation: Re-Membering the Mother Tongue in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Das Lebene ist eine Karawanserai." *The German Quarterly* 69:4 (1996): 414-426.

Sjöholm, Cecilia. "Att hata sitt land: Mångkulturalism och Europas mörka skugga." *Glänta* 3 (2006): 56-61.

Söhler, Maik. "Zaimoglu: Faule Aprikosen aus Malatya." *Netzzeitung*. 14 Jun 2006. 29 March 2007 <http://www.netzeitung.de/feuilleton/39fragen/405429.html>.

Sørensen, Sigmund. "Nattas ridder." *Dagbladet Magasinet Online*. 7 Apr 2003. Online 17 Mar 2007.

Spivak, G. C. *The Spivak Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Steyerl, Hito. "Gaps and Potentials: The Expedition Heimat Kunst – Migrant Culture as an Allegory of the Global Market." *New German Critique* 92 (2004): 159-168.

Teraoka, Arlene. "*Gastarbeiterliteratur*: The Other Speaks Back." *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 77-101.

---. "Multiculturalism and the Study of German Literature." *A User's Guide to German Cultural Studies.* Eds. Scott Denham, Irene Kacandes and Jonathan Petropolous. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. 63-78.

Tigervall, Carina. *folkhemsk film: med "invandraren" i rollen som den sympatiske andre* Umeå: Sociologiska Institutionen 38, 2005.

Tomassen, Richard. T. “How Sweden Became So Secular.” *Scandinavian Studies* (2002): 61-88.

Torvund. Helge. “Virile vers og visjonar.” *Dagbladet*. 10 Mar 2003: 46-47.

Tuschik, Jamal. *Morgenland: Neuester deutsche Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer tb, 2000.

Veteto-Conrad, Marilya. *Finding a Voice: Identity and the Works of German-Language Turkish Writers in the Federal Republic of Germany to 1990*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Wallraff, Günther. *Ganz Unten.* Köln: Kiepenhauer & Wietsch, 1985.

Wendelius, Lars. *Den dubbla identiteten*. Gävle: Gävle Offset AB, 2002.

Wierschke, Annette. *Schreiben als Selbstbehauptung: Kulturkonflikt und Identität in den Werken von Aysel Özakin, Alev Tekinay und Emine Sevgi Özdamar*. Diss. University of Minnesota, 1994: Minneapolis: UMI, 1994.

Wikan, Unni. *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Witt-Brattström, Ebba. “Miljonsvenskan – en mediebluff.” *Dagens Nyheter Online* 13 May 2006. 7 Feb 2007.

---. “Vem äger svenskan?” *Dagens Nyheter Online* 26 Mar 2006. 7 Feb 2007.

Zaimoglu, Feridun. Abschaum*: Die wahre Geschichte von Ertan Ongun*. Berlin, Rotbuch Verlag, 2000.

---. *German Amok*. Frankfurt: Fischer, 2004.

---. *Kanaksprak*. Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995.

---. *Kopf und Kragen: Kanak-Kultur-Compendium*. Hamburg/Frankfurt am Main: Rotbuch/Fischer Verlag, 1997.

---. *Koppstoff*. Kanaka Sprak vom Rande der Gesellschaft. Berlin, Rotbuch Verlag, 1998.

---. *Leinwand*. Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2003.

---. *Leyla*. Frankfurt: Fischer, 2007.

---. *Liebesmale, Scharlachrot*. Kiepenhauer &Witsch, 2002.

---. *Rom Intensiv: Mein Jahr in der ewigen Stadt.* Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2007

---. *Zwölf Gramm Glück: Erzählungen*. Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2005.

Zizek, Slavoj. "The One Measure of True Love Is: You Can Insult the Other." *Eurozine: Interview by Sabine Reul and Thomas Deichman.* 15 Nov 2001. 20 Jun 2007 <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-03-15-zizek-de.html>.

---. "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 28–51.