

MIGRATION AND INTERLANGUAGE: TRANSLATIVE WRITING IN OSMAN ENGIN'S SATIRICAL TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

The prose works *Deutschling* (1985) and *Oberkanakengeil* (2003) by the German-Turkish novelist Osman Engin satirically invert reigning stereotypes against Turkish immigrants. In both works, Turkish and German act as cultural and linguistic reference systems, which are subverted through the strategy of translatory mimicry. This mimicry is an integral element of the narrative structure of Engin's works and becomes a stylistic singularity, which unbalances the German language and undermines it in its seeming naturalness. Through a close reading of Engin's works, the contribution aims to offer a deeper understanding of the extent and nature of the unbalancing of cultural and linguistic points of reference, which implies a deconstruction of collective identities and fixed ideas. In addition to the metalinguistic markings in the hybridized German-Turkish interlanguage of the author, as we will show, the constant alternation between object level and meta level plays an important role in the narrative structure of the texts, resulting in the continuous consideration of the mother tongue's significance and the issue of intralingual translation.

Key Words: Osman Engin. Interlanguage. Satire. German-Turkish Literature

RESUMO

A obra em prosa *Deutschling* (1985) e *Oberkanakengeil* (2003) do romancista turco-alemão Osman Engin inverte satiricamente os estereótipos reinantes contra os imigrantes turcos. Em ambas obras, o turco e o alemão como sistemas de referência cultural e linguístico são subvertidos pela estratégia do mimetismo da tradução. Esse mimetismo é um elemento integral da estrutura narrativa das

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obras de Engin e se torna uma singularidade estilística que desequilibra a língua alemã e a enfraquece em sua aparente neutralidade. Por meio de uma leitura atenta dos livros de Engin, este artigo visa oferecer uma compreensão mais profunda da extensão e da natureza do fato de desequilibrar os pontos de referência culturais e linguísticos, o que implica uma desconstrução de identidades coletivas e de ideias fixas. Além das marcas metalinguísticas na interlíngua híbrida germano-turca do autor, como mostraremos, a constante alternância entre o nível objeto e o meta-nível desempenha um papel importante na estrutura narrativa dos textos, resultando na consideração contínua do significado da língua materna e a questão da tradução interlingual.

Palavras-chave: Osman Engin; Interlíngua; Sátira; Literatura Alemã-Turca.

OSMAN ENGIN: MIMICRY AND TRANSCULTURAL LITERATURE

The Turkish-German novelist Osman Engin was born in 1960 near Izmir and came to Bremen when he was twelve. He studied social science at the University of Bremen and became known for his satirical short stories and radio comments. In his stories, he gives a humorous take on Turkish life in Germany. He was awarded several prizes, like the ARD-Medienpreis in 2006. In his satirical short stories, as Ali Sirin has it, the I narrator is the

protagonist Osman Engin, who as family patriarch does nothing and walks all over his family members. There is the usual everyday racism, shown in all its banality in the arbitrary acts of officials and bureaucrats. There are the Turkish rituals, such as the sometimes onerous family visits, well known to many Turkish readers. It is hard to tell if the author is caricaturing himself, or if he mixes in his own experiences, or if he is describing the life of a friend under a pseudonym.²

The I narrator in the short stories is neither an autobiographer nor the same I as in autobiographical stories that render his life as a work of art by means of literature. By choosing the I form, the author presents himself as a spokesman of many German Turks (cf. Buz, 2003, p. 72). He has written about 14 collections of short stories, of which two will be discussed more closely in this contribution: *Deutschling* (1985) and *Oberkanakengeil* (2003). In both works, Turkish and German act as reference systems and the strategy of translatory mimicry appears to have a subversive effect at the imagery level. This mimicry is an integral element of the narrative structure of Engin's works and becomes a stylistic singularity, which unbalances the German language, and undermines it in its seeming naturalness. The author's translation practices between languages and cultures, which do not appear to merge culturally but seem to be in constant conflict with each other, can be considered an accumulation of transcultural experience.

Rafik Schami, a German-Syrian author, sees literature – comparable to Osman Engin – as the only possible way for transcultural writers to overcome the inner conflict between two worlds with different languages, cultural traditions and ethical value systems and to achieve a “synthesis between there and here”.³ The German-Turkish writer Aras Ören also regards ‘migrant literature’

² Ali Sirin: “Osman Engin: a Turk who writes in Germany” URL: <<http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/article/osman-engin-a-turk-who-writes-in-germany.html>>. (Last access: April 4, 2018).

³ Rafik Schami quoted in ARENS, H. (2005). *Writing Outside the Nation: Schnittstellen zwischen interkulturellen Gärten und transnationaler deutschsprachiger Literatur von Einwanderinnen* (p. 3). München: Stiftung Interkultur.

as a kind of bridge between cultures. However, he emphasizes even more clearly its function as a “third space” in which the bridge acquires an independent existence:

But in the course of time it turns out that the two ends of the bridge are no longer connected to their banks. This they could not be any longer. One should not imagine here that the bridge has grown shorter. On the contrary, it seems to me as if the bridge has grown longer and continues to expand while the two banks on which it is built have moved further apart with ever-growing speed. In the course of time the bridge has become an independent part of reality.⁴

According to Carmine Chiellino, the “third space” can also be found in language itself: “The site of literature is the language in which the work is created and not the cultural otherness of the locations, the figures or the authors.”⁵ In this connection, Feridun Zaimoglu refers for his part to the creolized language of the third generation. This generation very consciously uses a mixed language, which is neither purely Turkish nor purely German, but lies somewhere in between. With this everyday language culture German-Turkish young people strive to achieve a decentering of the *Leitkultur* and its dominant national language. This carnivalization and decentering has direct implications for the formulation of one’s minority identity.

The issue of formulating personal identity and of the relationship between language and identity, is easily passed on to the literature of minority authors as it is thought that their literature which is, after all, written from a ‘recognizable’ specific socio-cultural position, can only be identified by its development context. Yet, the presupposition that literary texts marked as minority literature *can* or *will* answer identity questions, can often not be reconciled with the literary singularity of these texts, or of literature at all. Literature has consequently become the bearer of an ethnic identity and is even apportioned an ‘ethnic’ style, a criterion that does not exist for ‘autochthonous’ Western literatures. In this context, Zafer Şenocak (2000, pp. 77-78) writes:

In the case of authors who live outside their native linguistic geography, questions about belonging threaten to obscure other biographical details. The mythic foundations of their work disappear completely from view. [...] One does not read an author’s texts, but rather, the biography written onto his body. Genealogy substitutes for biography. The body of the text - with its own patterns, its own concealed forewords, disappears behind the image of the author. What motivates this type of reading? Fear of wonder? Fear of understanding or not understanding, a sense of strangeness, real or imagined?⁶

As a result, the singularity of the work’s literariness is levelled out and a form of identity thinking is carried on of which it is precisely minority literature research that tries to demonstrate its imperative nature. Understanding minority literature as the product of minority authors and maintaining it as a separate literary category implies reducing literature to a cultural manifest and

⁴ „Aber mit der Zeit stellte es sich heraus, dass die beiden Enden der Brücke nicht mehr mit ihren Ufern verbunden waren. Sie konnten es nicht mehr sein. Dabei darf man sich nicht vorstellen, dass sich die Brücke verkürzt hätte. Im Gegenteil, es kommt mir so vor, als wäre die Brücke immer länger geworden, sie dehnt sich noch nach wie vor aus, doch mit noch größerer Geschwindigkeit rücken die beiden Ufer auseinander, denen sie auflagen. Im Laufe der Zeit ist die Brücke ein unabhängiges Stück Wirklichkeit geworden.“ ÖREN, A. (1977). *Privatexil. Gedichte* (p. 70). Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag. [postface].

⁵ CHIELINO, C. Interkulturalität und Literaturwissenschaft. In C. Chiellino (Ed.). (2000). *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch* (p. 391). Stuttgart: Metzler.

⁶ ŞENOCAK, Z. (2000). *Which Myth Writes Me? Atlas of the Tropical Germany. Essays on Politics and Culture 1990-1998* (pp. 77-78). Trans. Leslie A. Adelson. London-Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

is often the result of inaccurate reading. Translation theory literature focusing on the rhetorical and linguistic – narrative – construction of literature will demonstrate the text's recalcitrance to univocal identity labels.

This contribution aims to show how in *Deutschling* (1985) and *Oberkanakengeil* (2003), Osman Engin satirically inverts reigning stereotypes against Turkish immigrants. Through a close reading of both works, the contribution offers a deeper understanding of the extent and nature of the unbalancing of cultural and linguistic points of reference, which implies a deconstruction of collective identities and fixed ideas. In addition to the metalinguistic markings in the hybridized German-Turkish of the author, as we will show, the constant alternation between object level and meta level plays an important role, resulting in the continuous literary consideration of the mother tongue's significance and the issue of intralingual translation.

GERMAN-TURKISH INTERLANGUAGE AND WRITING BACK

In *Sprachkontaktforschung*, Caudia Riehl (2004, p. 123) lists the main linguistic features of German-Turkish “interlanguage”, comprising among others the following elements:

- One word sentences (e.g. “Blume” instead of “Das ist eine Blume”)
- Elimination of verbs (e.g. “jetzt Pause”)
- Absence of the definite and indefinite article (e.g. “mit Zug”)
- Absence of inflections (e.g. “vielleicht morgen niks arbeit”)
- Use of the infinitive (e.g. “Hier alles sauber machen”)
- Generalization of the feminine article “die” (e.g. “mit die Kind kommen”)
- Use of “viel” to express a degree (e.g. “viel kalt”)
- Use of “niks”/ “nix” as a word and sentence negation (e.g. “niks/nix Arbeit; niks/nix mehr zurück”)

By literising this interlanguage in Engin's literary texts, a new world of associations comes into being creating the effect of alienation and disillusionment. The effect is ambivalent: it feeds a sense of exoticism on the one hand, whereas the importance of language with respect to understanding the other exotic way of living and thinking becomes clear on the other hand. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989 [2002], p. 66) emphasize the linguistic autonomy of hybridized language: “The concept of an interlanguage reveals that the utterances of a second-language learner are not [per se] deviant forms or mistakes, but rather are part of a separate but genuine linguistic system.” This is equally what Feridun Zaimoglu expresses in his first book *Kanak Sprak* in 1995, when he attempts to express the authentic, tough, and subversive power of slang language spoken by young Turkish male youth in Germany and calls for a new self-confidence by means of this vernacular.

In the main short story in *Deutschling*, “Der Deutschling”, the protagonist and authorial I narrator, Osman Engin, bearing the same name as the real author, returns to Turkey with his family

after a long stay in Germany. In Turkey people call them – in Osman's words and re-translated into German – "Deutschlinge", a non-existing, ungrammatical word, coined from the antiquated German "Fremdlinge" (strangers). In this very word, there's the fusion of being "fremd" but at the same time being "deutsch", showing the hybrid situation of being foreign in Germany, but being considered German in Turkey. As he is used to being called "Ausländer" (foreigners) in Germany, Osman did not want to use the word "Ausländer" anymore to describe his situation, due to the racist tone of it. Instead, the ungrammatical *Deutschling* expresses far better his existential feeling of 'being between'. Osman will return to Germany, because as a *Deutschling* he feels he fits in better in German than in Turkish society. Not only the father, but also Osman's son Mehmet speaks this interlanguage, this "gebrochen Türkisch [...] anstatt fließend Deutsch" (broken Turkish instead of fluently German).

Franco Biondi, another German bicultural author, of Italian descent, calls this "Zwischensprache" (interlanguage) a "Kunstsprache" (artificial language)⁷, a term he uses to counter the stereotypical judgment of the lack of aesthetic quality of migrant literature by mainstream literary culture, still often heard in 1980's, when also Engin's *Deutschling* was published. Osman Engin uses this Interlanguage to characterize his literary figures and, most of the time, to satirically deconstruct the cliché of poorly educated migrants who cannot speak 'proper' German. The satirical foundation in the short stories is emphasized through the excellent German the I-narrator and protagonist Osman Engin uses and the flawed *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* (Guest Workers' German) which he often uses to communicate with Germans. The Turkish-German vernacular is not a sign of inability but a communication mode with Germans, who expect this language to be used by the protagonist and his family.

Engin inverts all stereotypes against Turkish immigrants. In the next example, a door-to-door salesman, whom Osman and his family have mistaken for a new neighbour with welcoming gifts, consciously speaks a kind of *Gastarbeiterdeutsch*, which he thinks Osman will understand:

The neighbour came into the living room and took his coat off. I greeted him, 'I, Osman Engin, welcome, neighbour.' [...] Our dear neighbour gleamed at me friendly and asked: 'You wanting everything?' (Welcome gifts from neighbours should never be rejected, because this shame would be unforgivable!), 'I want have, I thanking much' [...].⁸

There's a tension between the language used by the I-narrator and the protagonist. Although both share the same name, the I-narrator seems to be referring to the author – through a number of autobiographical items of information – whereas the protagonist is much more a reflection of the symbolic imagination of the Turkish migrant by German mainstream society, and thus also of the author Osman Engin. The same kind of dynamic is seen when the protagonist tries to be more German than the Germans in his new job as an office clerk. In his imagination of how the typical German is, he tries to dress like a one, talk like a one, walk like a one. And he feels he can, but he

⁷ AMODEO, I. Interview mit Franco Biondi. Literatur ist Gedächtnis. In Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (Ed.). *Dossier: Migrationsliteratur – Eine neue deutsche Literatur?* (p. 10). [Online available at: http://www.migration-boell.de/web/integration/47_1990.asp]. Last access: 15 March 2018.

⁸ „Der Nachbar kam ins Wohnzimmer und legte den Mantel ab. Ich begrüßte ihn: ‚Ich, Osman Engin, Willkommen, Nachbar.‘ [...] Unser lieber Nachbar strahlte mich freundlich an und fragte: ‚Du alles haben wollen?‘ (Willkommensgeschenke von Nachbarn sollte man niemals zurückweisen, denn diese Schande wäre unverzeihlich!), Ich wollen haben, ich danken vielmals' [...].“ ENGIN, O. (1985). *Deutschling: Satiren* (p. 22). Berlin: Express Edition.

is rejected. Therefore, he prefers sliding into his role of a *Deutschling* again, because at least like this he feels – in an ambivalent way – accepted:

In my everyday clothes, no one would have thought I was a clerk. I'm tearing this unlucky suit off my body. Then I hand the bundle together with 17 files over to the doorman. 'Here I bring interpreters and files! Me foreigner, I not understand nothing!' I run out into the street, in underpants, relieved, under the amazed eyes of the doorman.⁹

In *Oberkanakengeil*, the protagonist is German at last. He has obtained a German passport. To show his Germanness, he wants to help German neo-Nazis in the purification of the "German race". But at the same time, there's his family constantly reminding him of his Turkishness. His assimilated daughter Zeynep wants to be a procuress to make as much money as possible, his son Mehmet is a communist, and his daughter Nermin is lesbian. Given his traditional Turkish upbringing, he has a hard time accepting the – what he calls – "deviant behaviour" of his family.

When his 6-year old daughter Hatice, returns from her first day at school, Osman asks her how her day was:

„Well, Hatice, how's school going?“, I asked her.
 „Oberkanakengeil ey“, she shouted.
 „What?? What kind of an ober?!“
 „Oberkanakengeil!“
 „Hatice, what does this exactly mean, if I may ask?“
 „It means, as good as it can possibly be, when you're a Kanake in Germany“
 „Oh, that's really great, my sweet little Kanake girl.“¹⁰

Again the concept of 'Kanakan' is used in a subcultural manner, but always in an ambiguous way. In German youth language, the expression "oberaffengeil" means "really cool". In the altered form "oberkanakengeil", used by the little girl, racism is implicitly present, in that "affe" (ape) is replaced by "Kanakan".

Another way to experiment with the German language, is the play with grammatical constructions. The protagonist is particularly interested in alternative interpretations of the German case system, of which German natives would never think. When Osman's son Mehmet, tells his father that he'd like to go into politics (literally: "in die Politik gehen"), his father asks him if he wants to go „[z]u Fuß oder mit dem Bus“¹¹. The construction "gehen in + accusative", which in general marks movement, is here interpreted literally, but also to express the lack of belief in the possibility that his son Mehmet will be given the opportunity to be politically active. The Turkish protagonists in Engin's stories collect their experiences of heteroglossia, piece them together into a patchwork.

⁹ „In meiner Alltagskleidung hätte mich niemand für einen Beamten gehalten. Ich reiße mir diesen Unglücksanzug vom Leib. Dann übergebe ich das Bündel zusammen mit 17 Akten dem Pförtner. ‚Hier ich bringen Dolmetscher und Akten! Ich Ausländer, ich nix verstehen!‘ Ich renne erleichtert, unter den verblüfften Augen des Pförtners, in Unterhosen hinaus auf die Straße.“ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰ „Na, Hatice, wie läuft es denn in der Schule?“, frage ich sie.
 „Oberkanakengeil ey“, ruft sie.
 „Waas? Was für ein Ober?!“
 „Oberkanakengeil!“
 „Hatice, was heißt das genau, wenn ich fragen darf?“
 „Das heißt, es geht mir so gut, wie es einem Kanaken in Deutschland überhaupt gehen kann!“
 „Oh, das finde ich aber schön, mein kleines Kanakchen!“ Engin, Osman (2003). *Oberkanakengeil* (p. 32). Berlin: Espresso Verlag.

¹¹ Ibid.

From their personal transcultural locations formed out of multiple connections and allegiances, each protagonist reinvents the German-Turkish multilingual space he inhabits, endowing it with deeply personal meaning coloured by the diverse cultural strands deriving from his experience.¹²

Yet another way of deconstructing or alienating German literary language is the construction of neologisms. Mehmet is bored of spending his times in these German bars and expresses his unwillingness to hang around in bars anymore: „keine Lust mehr, in Kneipen-Mneipen rumzuhängen.“¹³ He gives his father the following explanation: „Kneipe-Mneipe heißt: Kneipe oder so was Ähnliches. Man könnte auch sagen: Papier-Mapier. Oder Buch-Much! Das heißt dann, Buch oder Ähnliches.“¹⁴ ‘Kneipe’ (bar), a common word in German, is deconstructed in the sense that, for Osman’s son, it could just as well have been ‘Mneipe’, just another foreign word, sounding just as anomalous and foreign as ‘Kneipe’.

In using these strategies, Osman Engin has contributed to the transformation of German literature and, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989 [2002], p. 76) also have it in *The Empire Writes Back* with regard to post-colonial literature, “to the dismantling of those ideological assumptions that have buttressed the canon of that literature as an elite Western discourse”.¹⁵ The same kind of translative writing occurs in the following books. In *Dütschlünd, Dütschlünd übürüllüs* (1994), the first verse of the German anthem (Deutschland, Deutschland über alles) is paradoxically ‘turkified’, or in *West-östliches Sofa* (2006), Goethe’s canonical work of world literature, *West-östlicher Diwan*, “Diwan” is replaced by a German everyday semi-synonym “Sofa” (couch). Thus, fundamental German references to national identity – German “Erinnerungsorte”, lieux de mémoire, such as Goethe or the national anthem – are being alienated.

DECONSTRUCTIVE SATIRE OF DOMINANT CULTURE

Osman Engin is regarded as one of the most important German-Turkish satirists of the last decades. His stories make fun of both German habits and Turkish customs. He also takes up topics such as the increasing hostility towards foreigners in Germany. Among other things he attacks the naivety of the Turkish immigrants.¹⁶ This is revealed primarily in the naive figure of the protagonist Osman Engin, who is continually confronted with problems or at least with embarrassing situations on account of his guilelessness. For example, he confuses a peddler with a neighbour¹⁷ and is regarded as a thief by the police when he attempts to use a man’s own briefcase to protect him from a bucket of water which has just been tipped out of a window.¹⁸ Engin also makes fun of the immigrants’ positive image of Germany by presenting the Germans usually as perfect, almost

¹² As is the case for postcolonial francophone literature, for instance, Engin’s satirical texts, different though they may be in content, context and form, also “resist and ultimately exclude the monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: ‘in between’, at once capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the reading experience” (Mehrez, 1992, p. 122).

¹³ Engin, *Oberkanakengeil*, p. 32.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See SEPP, A. (2018). Moving Texts: The Representation of the Translator in Yoko Tawada’s and Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s Stories. In J. Woodsworth (Ed.). *Transfiction 3. The Fictions of Translation/Les fictions de la traduction*. Benjamins Translation Library, 139. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, p. 149.

¹⁶ See id., *Oberkanakengeil*, p. 209.

¹⁷ See id., *Deutschling*, p. 22.

¹⁸ See id., *Oberkanakengeil*, pp. 139-141.

supernatural beings. In contrast to the Turks, they are “a progressive people”¹⁹ who only wish the best for the Turks.²⁰

In the first story of *Deutschling*, “Drei schwarze Oliven und Urin” (Three Black Olives and Urine), the felt superiority of the Germans over the Turks is clearly thematised. The story describes the medical examination to which the Turkish candidates for immigration are subjected. This selection process was introduced because at that time there were four times as many applicants for jobs in Germany as positions to be filled. The medical examination is described by many as humiliating.²¹ This atmosphere can be found in Engin as well, but it is played down as a result of the naive belief of the Turks in the goodness of the Germans. The image of the “Aryan” German is harshly counterpoised here to that of the Turks, who wait in their underpants until it is their turn to be examined. The doctors assign those who are not physically fit for immigration to the “rotten ones”²² and show their feelings of superiority over the Turks by regarding them as worthless.²³ In spite of the multi-faceted nature of the genre, Robert C. Elliott (1962, p. 22) sees the basic critical societal impetus of all satire in its harsh attack against perceived injustices:

I can compare hundreds of different responsible uses of the term satire, trying to find common properties among them; but after my search I will be forced to conclude that there are no properties common to all the uses; or, if I could find an essential property, it would be so general as to be useless for purposes of definition: ‚All satire attacks something,‘ for example.

With regard to the Germans, Engin satirically pillories above all their hostility towards foreigners. Occasionally, however, he waters down the problem.²⁴ For example, in *Deutschling*, the main character sees a working week of 35 hours as more problematic than the increasing xenophobia: “I have the feeling that I must leave Germany. I fear the worst for this country, not because of the rockets or the extreme hostility towards foreigners but because the conflict over the 35 hour week bothers me.”²⁵ Elsewhere the xenophobia even seems imaginary to him. For example, when Osman sees a street sign on which the name of the street has been changed to „Ausländer-raus-Straße“ (Foreigners Out Street)²⁶, he dismisses this hostile slogan as “childish nonsense”. Here not only German xenophobia but also the naive attitude of the Turks towards racism is pilloried. This is only possible from Engin’s intermediate position. In the following passage, which not by chance bears the title “Ausländerfeindlichkeit, gibt’s die?” (Xenophobia: Does it Exist?), this twofold criticism is again illustrated:

¹⁹ Id., *Deutschling*, p. 15.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 17.

²¹ For more information on the medical examinations as experienced by Turkish immigrants, see HÜHN, K. (2005). »Nächstes Jahr kehren wir zurück...«. *Die Geschichte der türkischen »Gastarbeiter« in der Bundesrepublik* (pp. 88-91). Göttingen: Wallstein.

²² Engin, *Deutschling*, p. 15.

²³ See *ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ Osman Engin’s texts as satire were also examined in Daems, Ellen: *Leben und Schreiben im Dazwischen. Betrachtungen über die Sonderposition der deutsch-türkischen Migranteliteratur anhand Osman Engins Kurzgeschichten*. Antwerp: University of Antwerp 2013 [unpublished Master’s thesis].

²⁵ „Ich habe das Gefühl, daß ich Deutschland verlassen muß. Ich ahne Schlimmes für dieses Land. Nicht etwa wegen der Raketen oder der extremen Ausländerfeindlichkeit, sondern dieser Streit um die 35-Stunden-Woche macht mir [sic] zu schaffen.“ Engin, *Deutschling*, p. 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Sometimes I hear voices which somehow sound hostile towards foreigners. I often see slogans on the walls such as “Foreigners Out” and alongside them a strange kind of cross with some hooks added on. I hear that foreigners have been beaten up, that they are blamed for the high level of unemployment. But for me this is all claptrap and unimportant for, after all, all German politicians guarantee that there is no xenophobia in the German Federal Republic!²⁷

Engin also thematises the hostility by treating the prejudices directed primarily at the Turks in a satirical way. Above all, he places the idea that the Turks are uncultivated in the foreground. In one passage, Osman and his family and all the other “foreigners” in his street are invited to a fashionable hotel for three days. The invitation is part of a social project designed to examine “how much comfort and good life style a simple foreigner can bear when he is allowed to live like a civilized person after an arson attack.”²⁸ The scene in which Osman receives a telephone call from a stranger is closer to everyday life. The conversation begins as follows:

“Good evening, Mr Engin. May I ask you something?” – “Of course you may. But, by the way, who am I speaking to?” – “That doesn’t matter at all. You’re Turkish aren’t you?” – “I believe so. At least my parents insist that I am.” – “I’ve just read an article of yours in the newspaper. I didn’t even know that Turks could write”.²⁹

The caller asks Osman to write a story which would drive all the Turks out of Germany. When Osman asks him for arguments he could use in his story, the man can find nothing that bothers him, even though Osman makes many suggestions such as noise nuisance, taking jobs off Germans or personal annoyance. The funniest thing about this scene is probably the fact that Osman is not indignant about the proposal of the caller, but even regards it as a good idea. Engin further develops this behaviour to an extreme in the stories “Frisch integrierter Freier” (Freshly Integrated Suitor) and “Osman der Skinhead” (Osman the Skinhead) in which Osman even turns out to be a racist skinhead, as soon as he has acquired German citizenship in *Oberkanakengeil*. He even calls himself Gottlieb Echtdeutsch (literally ‘Godlove Truegerman’) and insists that the rumour that he once was Osman Engin is a “rotten lie and an unbelievable slander on the part of people who are consumed by envy and are abysmally nasty”.³⁰ He no longer feels attached to the migrants and characterizes them as “foreign idiots”³¹ and “depraved wog birds”³² and even poses as the “Leader”³³ of a group of skinheads aiming to send the “pack of foreigners” back home.³⁴ When the skinheads want to know where they are heading for and he cannot give a meaningful answer, he leads them

²⁷ „Manchmal kommen mir Stimmen zu Ohren, die irgendwie ausländerfeindlich klingen. Häufig sehe ich an den Wänden Parolen wie ‚Ausländer raus‘ und daneben ein seltsames Kreuzzeichen mit ein paar Häkchen dran. Ich höre, daß Ausländer verprügelt werden, daß sie für die Schuldigen an der hohen Arbeitslosigkeit gehalten werden. Aber für mich ist das alles Geschwätz und unwichtig, denn schließlich garantieren alle deutschen Politiker, daß es in der BRD keine Ausländerfeindlichkeit gibt!“ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁸ Id., *Oberkanakengeil*, p. 73.

²⁹ „Guten Abend, Herr Engin, darf ich Sie mal um etwas bitten?“ – „Aber gerne! Übrigens, mit wem spreche ich eigentlich?“ – „Das tut doch nicht zur Sache! Sie sind doch Türke, nicht wahr?“ – „Ich glaube schon, meine Eltern bestehen zumindest darauf.“ – „Ich habe gerade einen Artikel von Ihnen in der Zeitung gelesen. Also ich wußte gar nicht, dass Türken sogar schreiben können!“ Id., *Deutschling*, p. 81.

³⁰ Id., *Oberkanakengeil*, p. 36.

³¹ Ibid., p. 37.

³² Ibid., p. 39.

³³ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

to his own house in Karnickelweg (Bunny Lane). However, it is clear that the skinheads do not take it serious at all, as they alternate in their slogans between “Germany for the Germans-Foreigners Out” and “Germany for the Non-Germans – Foreigners In” to avoid boredom.³⁵ It is impossible to overlook the satire here. Engin does not merely exaggerate; he reverses the situation by letting a Turk attempt to drive out his own family as foreigners. A further example of this reversal technique which, like exaggeration, serves to underline the absurdity of racism, can be found in the history of Ali, a Turkish schoolboy, who is no longer accepted by the Turkish community after acquiring a new status as a German:

Ali is the best pupil in the school, better than all the German children. His teacher says: “Ali, you are as hardworking as only the Germans can be. For this reason I hereby declare you to be a German. From now on your name is no longer Ali, but Klaus.” Ali brings home the good news to his mother that he is no longer Turkish but German. His mother is angry and hits him on the head with a wooden spoon. When he comes home in the evening Ali’s father tans his backside. “My boy, you were born as a Turk and you will remain a Turk.” The next day the teacher asks: “Well, Klaus, what was your first day as a German like?” He shakes his head and answers: “No sooner do you become a German - and you immediately have trouble with those Turks”³⁶

On the one hand this scene holds a mirror up to the Turks, who are no different from the Germans in insisting on their nationality and rejecting alien elements. On the other hand the Germans are also criticized on account of their contradictory naturalization policy. Although German society is hostile towards Turks and other migrants, it is all too ready, according to Osman Engin, to accept these same migrants as Germans if they achieve something positive and come in useful for Germany.

CONCLUSION

In the final chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward W. Said not only criticizes national frames of thought, but, moreover, emphasizes the plurality and complexity of both personal and collective, which have been denied and reduced to a mere us-them binary in colonialism:

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁶ „Ali ist der Beste in der Schule, besser als alle deutschen Kinder. Seine Lehrerin sagt, ‚Ali, du bist fleißig, so wie es nur die Deutschen sein können, deshalb ernenne ich dich hiermit zu einem Deutschen. Ab sofort heißt du nicht mehr Ali, sondern Klaus!‘ Ali überbringt seiner Mutter die frohe Nachricht, daß er nicht mehr Türke sei, sondern stattdessen Deutscher. Die Mutter ist verärgert und schlägt ihm mit dem Kochlöffel auf den Kopf. Am Abend kommt der Vater von der Arbeit und verhaut Ali den Hintern. ‚Junge, du bist als Türke geboren und du bleibst Türke!‘ Am nächsten Tag fragt die Lehrerin: ‚Na Klaus, wie war denn dein erster Tag als Deutscher?‘ Er schüttelt den Kopf und antwortet: ‚Kaum ist man Deutscher – und prompt hat man nichts als Ärger mit diesen Türken.‘“ Id., *Deutschling*, pp. 83-84.

³⁷ SAID, E. W. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism* (p. 407). London: Vintage.

In a similar fashion, the ethnic categorization of transcultural literature in Germany is radically opposed by the Turkish-German author Güney Dal, who advocates an aesthetic reappraisal of his literary texts beyond the ethnic matrix: “Dal does not wish to be a ‘bridge between Turkey and Germany’ or a ‘demonstrative Turk’ [...]” (Broder, 2007, p. 421). He protests against a reception that levels out the singularity of the work’s literariness by emphasizing the socio-political impetus of his texts, as opposed to the primarily aesthetic and individual nature of his writing: “I write novels, and I express myself through novels. That is all.”³⁸ As early as 1982, in an interview with journalist Klaus Pokatzky, Akif Pirinçci, author of novels such as *Felidae* (1989) and *Francis* (1993), sheds a critical light on the ethnic re-appropriation and the corresponding effacement of his individuality by the West-German press: “I am a token Turk, [...] but whether they see me as a Turk or a German doesn’t really matter to me; my culture consists of those things that I do.” (Pirinçci in Pokatzky 2007, p. 389)³⁹ Authors such as Akif Pirinçci, Güney Dal, and also Osman Engin reject a hermeneutics of transcultural literature that is solely focused on “questions of belonging” at the expense of the literariness and singularity of their texts.

The ethical dimension of a hermeneutics of translingual literature cannot be underestimated in this context. Indeed, as Rita Wilson (2011, pp. 244-245) notes, the utopian horizon of texts by authors such as Osman Engin points to the multi-faceted nature of society and the fecundity of *métissage*: “[T]he function of translingual literature is not primarily a pragmatic, but an aesthetic and an ethical one. Its aim is more symbolic than realistic: it symbolizes the variety, the contact and the crossing of cultures and languages.”

In an article on the German-Turkish author Güney Dal, originally published in *Der Tagesspiegel*, Henryk M. Broder (2007, p. 421) criticizes the tendency of the German reception of transcultural literature to stress cultural and linguistic boundaries, rather than re-evaluating and relativizing them. According to Broder, German-Turkish literature has come to represent the collective identity of German Turks for the German reading public. By contrast, as a translator of translingualism, Osman Engin rather seeks to destabilize the foundations of the antagonism between ‘ego’ and ‘alter’. His unbalancing of cultural and linguistic points of reference implies a deconstruction of identities and fixed ideas. It cannot be separated from centre-periphery issues in general, and as such, it offers a window onto the intricate relationship between nation, language, and identity.

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³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ In *Kanak Sprach*, Feridun Zaimoglu criticizes this reading and interpreting mode, which is, according to him, characterized by ‘political correctness’: “The ‘better Germans’ are touched by these artifacts [...]. The Turk is seen as the epitome of emotion, a sloppy nostalgia and a lazy ‘exotic’ magic.” [Die ‚besseren Deutschen‘ sind von diesen Ergüssen ‚betroffen‘ [...]. Der Türke wird zum Inbegriff für Gefühl, einer schlampigen Nostalgie und eines faulen ‚exotischen‘ Zaubers.] (Zaimoglu, 2004, p. 11) The originally derogatory term “Kanak” was adopted by Turkish-German subculture and used positively as a term of self-identification. This third generation very consciously uses a mixed language, which is neither purely Turkish nor purely German, but lies somewhere in between.

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