

Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Berlin:
Linking Migration and Home in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*

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“Berlin war für mich wie eine Straße gewesen. Als Kind war ich bis Mitternacht auf der Straße geblieben, in Berlin hatte ich meine Straße wiedergefunden.” (193)

- E. S. Özdamar, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998)

Emine Sevgi Özdamar's semi-autobiographical novel *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998) traces the migration of a young Turkish woman from her native Istanbul to West Berlin, first as a “guest worker” and later as an actress, during the politically volatile late 1960s and early 1970s. In the passage above, Özdamar's protagonist crafts a metaphor out of a childhood memory to convey a sense of belonging she feels in the city of Berlin. By equating Berlin with a familiar street, the protagonist connects a foreign city – something large and potentially impersonal – with the characteristics of intimacy, security, and home.

Born in Malatya, Turkey in 1946, Özdamar herself emigrated from Turkey to then West Germany in the late 1960s, where she lives today. As one of the most important writers in Germany's intercultural¹ literary scene, she is the author of numerous German-language essays, dramas and novels, and the recipient of various literary prizes, including the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 1991 and the Adalbert von Chamisso Prize in 1999.² Her novel *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* is a narrative of motion, restlessness, and searching; it is a text in which the protagonist forms attachments to people and plants roots in places she encounters in her journey. As the central text in a semi-autobiographical trilogy that begins with *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* (1992) and concludes with *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (2003), *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* is pivotal in tracing the parallel processes of migration and coming-of-age.

With this text, Özdamar creates a narrative space in which migration and home – motion and rootedness – are intimately linked. For her protagonist, both home and migration are dynamic processes, involving acts of changing, creating and imagining.³ In this paper's two central sections, I examine the protagonist's active engagement with the physical and social spaces she inhabits in her adopted city of Berlin. I demonstrate the ways in which she reimagines these spaces in order to

create a hybrid, malleable, and highly personal sense of home within her experience of migration.

Özdamar's work has been the subject of a number of recent studies emerging out of German Studies in both North America and Europe. The bulk of this scholarship has focused on the hybridity of language⁴ and culture⁵ in Özdamar's texts. Further studies have examined gender⁶ and analyzed the role of national identity⁷ and historical events⁸ in the texts. Still others have incorporated a study of Özdamar's texts into a broader exploration of transnational literature and autobiography.⁹ In this paper, I shift the focus to examine spatiality in Özdamar's novel. Since little work has been done in this area, I rely on the scholars B. Venkat Mani and Monika Shafi only as touchstones. I look instead to scholarship from the field of human geography and cultural studies to guide my literary analysis. I engage with scholarship on space and place, drawing especially on Edward Soja's theory of "Thirdspace" and the work of Henri Lefebvre on social space, but also referring to the work of Yi-Fu Tuan and Gillian Rose on social and corporeal space. Nadje Al-Ali, Homi Bhabha, Vilem Flusser, and Christopher Wickham inform my discussions of the link between migration and home.

A Personal Topography of Berlin: Home and City Spaces

"Jeder hat in einer Stadt seine persönliche Stadt" writes Emine Sevgi Özdamar in a short prose piece entitled *Der Hof im Spiegel* (17). She recounts a story in which several people are asked to draw up personal maps of a city; each map, of course, is distinctly different, highlighting the places that hold meaning for the individual. I begin my literary analysis with an examination of the physical spaces Özdamar's protagonist encounters, engages with, and recreates for herself. In *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, the protagonist creates a personal topography of the city of Berlin, weaving the geography of selected physical spaces she inhabits into her own identity, and connecting her own life with her physical surroundings. In doing so, she creates a sense of home in the foreign city spaces she encounters.

My examination of the protagonist's engagement with Berlin spaces is informed by Edward Soja's concept of "Thirdspace." In what he terms a "trialectics of spatiality," Soja argues that space can be understood in three ways. First, it is *perceived*, or directly experienced,

mapable and physical. It can be 'read,' explained, and described. Second, space is *conceived*, or imagined and created, symbolic and metaphorical. Conceived space is concerned with images, representations, and thought processes. Third and most importantly, space is *lived*. Inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre, Soja introduces the concept of "Thirdspace" as a new way of looking at our world, one that pushes beyond a simple dichotomy of perceived and conceived space. Thirdspace, or lived space (Lefebvre's "*espace vécu*"), he writes, is complex and contradictory. It is simultaneously "oppressive and liberating, passionate and routine, knowable and unknowable, real-and-imagined, at the edge and at the center" (Soja 276). Thirdspace points to the fullness of lived experience: "It can be mapped but never captured in conventional cartographies; it can be creatively imagined but obtains meaning only when practiced and fully *lived*" (Soja 276). By rooting herself firmly in the present, by living space instead of just observing it, and by employing agency and creativity in her interactions with new spaces – as I will demonstrate – Özdamar's protagonist begins to build a strong sense of place, and, in turn, a sense of home for herself in the city of Berlin.

One of the first physical spaces the protagonist encounters is the railroad car on the night train she rides to Germany. The narrative is framed by rail travel; both the protagonist's first journey and her ultimate return to Germany are by train. In literature as in life, trains have often served as signifiers of a societal or collective transition. Even as the traveler is given a pause, a time for reflection, she cannot stop the train from speeding mercilessly toward an uncertain future. With this first train scene, Özdamar sets her protagonist, the individual traveler, into a collective migration, that of Turkish workers to Germany. This railroad car is a dimly lit, enclosed space filled with strangers. Mourning the loss of her old home, the protagonist connects her observations of the traveling strangers to memories of her mother, and the train car to the front hallway in her parent's apartment. In one instance, she notes, "Eine [Frau] hatte Fersen wie meine Mutter" (14-15). Though she misses her mother, the protagonist exhibits no desire to return to her old home. Instead, her detailed description of the faces, bodies, and gestures of the strangers around her takes on a closeness and intimacy that indicates a desire for familiarity with the present space. The protagonist places herself firmly within this space, rooting herself in the present and living the space around her. Thus the space of the railroad car becomes one in which the boundaries between the familiar past, the uncertain present, and the unknown future are ruptured.¹⁰ The railway car, a moving space which is only temporarily inhabited, becomes a first,

if inadequate, substitute for home. It is a space of transition, a space of *becoming*. From the novel's beginning, familiarity and foreignness, home and movement are closely connected. With this opening, Özdamar introduces the theme of home in the context of migration, and indicates that the very concept of home is undergoing a process of transition.¹¹

The protagonist first describes her perception of the physical space of Berlin as small and confining. "In den ersten Tagen war die Stadt für mich wie ein endloses Gebäude," she says, alluding to her repeated path from the dormitory to the bus to the factory and back (18). The dormitory itself, inhabited only by female guest workers, is a Turkish microcosm within a German city. B. Venkat Mani even writes that the dormitory functions as an ironic, modern version of an Ottoman harem, an all-female space secluded from the rest of society (40). Gradually, however, the protagonist resists this seclusion and begins to gather experiences from outside and to bring them inside. First, she and her friends turn on the television, beginning a habit of dressing up at night to go down to the common room and watch TV. By dressing up as if to go out, they treat the semi-private space of the common room as a public space. This action allows them to imagine an expansion of their inhabited spaces. As the weeks pass and the protagonist places herself in the city, the physical space she describes expands further. She and her friends leave the dormitory at night to visit an *Imbißwagen*. They begin to explore the city: "Wir brachten [...] neue Adressen aus Berlin mit: KaDeWe, Café Keese, Café Kranzler..." (41). Before actively placing herself in the city, the protagonist gradually gathers up these images of Berlin spaces to take home to the dormitory with her. Before fully immersing herself in the new space, she creates a real-and-imagined patchwork of familiar and new, of outside and inside spaces to wrap herself in.

The protagonist's increased interaction with the new spaces around her is a performance that she herself conceives and reconceives. Vilem Flusser writes of migration as just such a performance, as a "creative endeavor" (17). Finding a home in her life of motion is a creative process that involves a reinterpretation of her surroundings. Using her own creativity, the protagonist transforms the image of unfamiliar spaces in order to inhabit them. Her sense of place is rooted in the visual. Her description of the factory where she works, for example, is detailed, creative and personal: "Während der Arbeit wohnten wir in einem einzigen Bild: unsere Finger, das Neonlicht, die Pinzette, die kleinen Radiolampen und ihre Spinnenbeine [...] Wenn die türkische Dolmetscherin kam und ihr Schatten auf dieses Bild fiel, zerriß

das Bild wie ein Film, der Ton verschwand, und es entstand ein Loch” (17). Here, the factory workstation, an otherwise public and generic space, becomes personal. The protagonist recreates her workplace as an image, a single frame in an otherwise constantly moving film. She stops time for a moment and imagines herself inside this frame, simultaneously creating and inhabiting the unfamiliar space.

During her first months in Berlin, the protagonist and her friends repeatedly explore groups of buildings and a train station that have been ruined in the fighting of World War II. Their exploration of and continued return to these spaces links a discourse on migration to a discourse on home. They claim the ruins of the broken-down *Anhalter Bahnhof* as a space of their own, calling it “unser beleidigter Bahnhof” – a Turkish-German word play (34).¹² From their position on the margins of German society, the girls reinterpret the function of this train station. It is no longer a place to begin and end journeys, but a destination itself, a space to be explored and claimed. Özdamar’s protagonist later returns to the ruined train station whenever she misses her family, as if this physical space allows for a connection of past and present, of home and away. As a ruin, the old *Anhalter Bahnhof* gains an inadvertent social function: it becomes a space of solitary contemplation for a young Turkish girl. This once public space, a symbol of the old Berlin and heavy with national significance, becomes a private and transnational space. Its decay reminds us of the temporariness and malleability of physical structures. Here, architecture is a body with which the protagonist and her friends are in dialogue. It is a process: originally created by humans, its form has been changed by social action (war); as a ruin, it is reclaimed by the young protagonist who seeks a place of contemplation. bell hooks writes that a space on the margins of society holds the potential to be a site of radical openness and possibility, a creative space (153). In the case of Özdamar’s protagonist, her position on the margins becomes a locality which can simultaneously house the past and the present, home and away.

Özdamar’s protagonist is at first an observer and gatherer of images, and gradually becomes actively engaged in the spaces around her. She gives strangers in a train car characteristics of familiarity; she anchors herself in her dormitory and place of work through a reinterpretation of language and image; she connects her own life with the architecture she explores. In doing so, this protagonist recreates spaces for herself, claiming them as her own and allowing the inhabited space to merge with her own identity. She recreates Berlin as an intimate and personal space in which she roots herself.

“Thr Rücken war unser Berlin-Stadtplan”: Creating a Social Space of Belonging

Spatiality, writes Henri Lefebvre, is not merely a physical, mapable thing, but is also a product of social activity. He argues that space is simultaneously created by social action and in turn reacts back on social action (26). Lefebvre's exploration of the interaction between social and physical space is key to understanding the meaning of 'home.' Writing about *Heimat*, Christopher Wickham points out that a sense of home is composed of not only physical, but social space (34). Villem Flusser, in turn, writes: “‘Heimat’ sind für mich die Menschen, für die ich Verantwortung trage” (26). I agree with these scholars that social interaction lies at the heart of the process of home building. Consider, for example, the space in which you live. It is probably a physical structure located at a certain street address. Lived in, it becomes a home filled with memories, sensations, images, smells and sounds associated with social interactions. Through interaction with its inhabitants, the lifeless structure of bricks and mortar becomes the object of emotions too complex, personal and nuanced to ever be fully conveyed except by those who live in it. Here, home is not a static concept, but an interaction, a dialogue, and an ongoing dynamic process.

Human relationships are a driving force of Özdamar's narrative. Upon her arrival in Berlin, the protagonist's interaction with fellow migrants and her identity as a member of a group are especially vital in her search for a sense of belonging in the new city. Beginning with the train scene early in the novel, Özdamar sets her protagonist, the individual traveler, into a collective migration, that of Turkish workers to Germany. As soon as she arrives in Germany, the first person narration changes from singular to plural, from individual to collective, from “I” to “we,” indicating the importance of her membership in a group. This, then, is a story of an individual whose identity and sense of place is developed through connection with the people around her.

Upon arrival in Berlin, the protagonist and her friends first look for the familiar in their foreign social space: “Wir Frauen suchten in den anderen Frauen die Mütter, die Schwestern oder die Stiefmütter” (36). What soon follows, however, is a gradual process of letting go of ties to people who are not physically present. The protagonist's discussion of a phone booth as an imagined link between herself and her mother is particularly significant: at first, she and her friends make a point to speak loudly in the presence of the phone booth, imagining that their

mothers in Turkey can hear them. With increasing connections to the social and physical spaces around them, the girls begin to whisper around the telephone booth, as if hiding their new lives from their mothers.

As time passes, the protagonist and her friends begin to build social relationships that help them navigate and claim the foreign space of Berlin. Older Turkish men play a central role in making the protagonist feel at home in Berlin. Two men, one of whom the protagonist calls “*unser Hirte*” (36) are instrumental in guiding her and her friends into the city. As they follow the two around Berlin, the protagonist notes: “[*Atamans*] Gesicht hatte die Farbe der Berliner Straßen” (59) and comments, “*Ihr Rücken war unser Berlin-Stadtplan*” (72). The protagonist connects the streets of the foreign city with the familiar bodies of her friends. By drawing this relationship between social and physical space, she is able to form a connection to the physical spaces she encounters on these journeys. These same friends, mainly older Turkish men, introduce the protagonist to the German language, to cafes, to the Brechtian theater, and to political discussion groups she eventually becomes active in. The words of these men take on a weight and physicality that help her orient herself in her new space. Later she adopts these words and uses them to give voice to her own political consciousness and developing identity. Geographer Gillian Rose argues convincingly that space cannot exist without bodies. She sees space as “the articulation of collisions between discourse, fantasy, and corporeality” (247). The links between the physical spaces of Berlin, her social experiences, and her experience and observations of corporeality are necessary to help the protagonist find a sense of home in Berlin.

Sexual experience is an important part of the protagonist’s personal identity creation away from the traditional notions of family and nation. B. Vankat Mani argues that, for the protagonist, “sexuality becomes a turning point for the registering of personal history” (41). Indeed, her process of coming of age sexually is also a process of cutting ties from her family and native culture. Through a great concern for her own sexuality, she lives more and more in the present and is not nostalgic for the family and nation that constituted her original home. Monika Shafi even argues that the protagonist’s sexual desire is a driving force of her migration (203). Indeed, gaining sexual experience is the express goal of her second trip to Germany: “*Ich wollte Deutsch lernen und mich dann in Deutschland von meinem Diamanten befreien, um*

eine gute Schauspielerin zu werden" (108). Here, the diamond refers to the hymen; freedom from the diamond refers to a loss of virginity.

Berlin – with its promise of "loss of one's diamond" – becomes a sexually liberating zone, one which will allow the protagonist to reach her ultimate goal of becoming a good actress. As she chooses a man for her first sexual experience, the protagonist defines sex as the ticket to freedom from potentially restrictive gender roles: "...wenn du dich nicht heute Abend von deinem Diamanten befreist, wirst du dich nie retten, dann wirst du als Jungfrau heiraten und dich als Jungfrau einem Mann verkaufen" (162-63). With sexual experience and its expected physical change to her body, she hopes to mold herself into an independent and modern woman, "ein Mädchen mit Bewußtsein" (217).

The gaining of sexual experience is one driving force for the protagonist's migration. Expression of sexuality, however, represents a moment of rest in the protagonist's life of motion: the sexual relationships she has with various men allow her to center herself in the body that is otherwise always moving from one place to another. Through intimate relationships, the protagonist forms multiple allegiances to people and localities. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes that our bodies, as they move through space, chose specific points of rest to focus on. These pauses in movement, these objects, relationships, and experiences that come to the forefront of our senses take on an increased weight and personal value. Points of rest, Tuan writes, help us to develop a sense of 'place' or home (6, 36).

Özdamar marks these points of rest with a shift in tone and slowing in the pace of the narrative. When the protagonist stays in a room with a lover for three days, for example, the pace of the narrative slows. In contrast to the relatively realistic descriptions in the rest of the novel, the love scenes evoke magic realism: the protagonist's and her lover's skin grows together; one lover pours great quantities of fruits and flowers onto the bed with her; she and another have bodies that seem to multiply, and suddenly there are two of each of them. Here, the very boundaries of the body are fluid. Judith Butler writes just this, that the body is a fluid entity: she argues that "this movement beyond boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies "are" (ix). The protagonist's sexual body is a fluid and changing space. Sexual expression, for her, is both motion and pause in motion; it holds the potential for both an expansion of a professional and personal identity and a grounding of the self in intimate space.

The protagonist experiences the physical space of Berlin through engagement with the people around her: interactions with older

Turkish workers comfort her during her first weeks in Berlin; her friends introduce her to the streets and cafes of the city; sexual relationships become both a driving force and a point of rest for her in Berlin. This protagonist is seldom nostalgic for the past. By forming social and intimate relationships, she remains firmly rooted in locality and able to engage critically with her surroundings. Through this engagement with people around her, Özdamar's protagonist creates for herself a shifting, flexible, and personal sense of home.

Engagement, Agency, and Locality: Toward a Rewriting of Cosmopolitanism

In this article, I have examined various techniques used by Özdamar's protagonist to remap the city of Berlin as a highly personal space of home. She engages creatively with the new physical spaces she encounters, endowing these spaces with personal value and recreating them as spaces of belonging. By forming social and intimate relationships, she roots herself firmly in locality and is able to engage actively and critically with her surroundings.

With her novel *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, Emine Sevgi Özdamar promotes not the abstract cosmopolitanism of "being at home in the world," but a very real and highly personalized engagement with the people and places, and issues of locality (Shafi 206). Historically, this term "cosmopolitan" has been understood as an allegiance to humanity as a whole, rather than loyalty to a particular nation or culture (Nussbaum 4). Cosmopolitanism has traditionally indicated universalism as opposed to nationalism, detachment as opposed to rootedness (Rabinow 258), and spectatorship as opposed to participation in history and culture (Robbins 4). With her novel, Özdamar questions these assumptions and rewrites the very concept of cosmopolitanism. She constructs a new, locality-based cosmopolitanism that is made up of active engagement with physical space and multiple social attachments.

In recent years, a number of scholars have convincingly argued for a rethinking of cosmopolitanism that embraces just such experiences. In his article "Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism," Bruce Robbins explores a concept he terms "new cosmopolitanisms" (1). His use of the plural form indicates the multiplicity, uniqueness, and locality of cosmopolitan experiences. Robbins sites Homi Bhabha's idea that cosmopolitanism can be "vernacular" (150) and explores Mitchell Cohen's argument that it can be "rooted" (252). In these rewritings of

cosmopolitanism, multiple allegiances take the place of than no allegiance at all, patriotism directed at a regions or social groups takes the place of abstract universalism, and “portable” and “long-distance nationality”¹³ takes the place of supra-national allegiances. In Özdamar’s text, cosmopolitanism is particular, personal, and individual, rather than universal and abstract. The protagonist’s success in building a sense of home in her life of motion is possible through her active engagement with the people and places that surround her.

In this article’s opening quote, Özdamar’s protagonist reduces her personal city of Berlin to a single street: “in Berlin hatte ich meine Straße wiedergefunden” (193). She places her sense of belonging within locality rather than within the whole cosmopolitan city. Her new and particular perspectives come out of allegiances to a variety of localities, and from real and imagined “double locations” such as this one. Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* links migration and home in a way that rewrites cosmopolitan identity as a highly personal, malleable, and multilayered reality.

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Notes

¹ Özdamar’s work has been discussed extensively in the context of the literature of migration and transnational/transcultural literature. Social criteria – the shared experience of migration – have often served to define migrant writers as “other.” Monika Shafi writes, and I agree, that “In order to evaluate migrant literature as a constitutive part of contemporary German literature, it is therefore necessary to take aesthetic, not social criteria as a starting point” (194).

² The debate on the “Germanness of German literature” that was sparked by Özdamar’s historic achievement in the Bachmann Prize competition, and the debate that surrounded the inception of the Chamisso Prize – a prize awarded specifically to non-native writers – reveal that much progress has yet to be made in expanding the German literary and cultural canon. See Karen Jankowsky for a detailed discussion of the Bachmann Prize and Carmine Chiellino (440-41) for an analysis of the Chamisso Prize.

³ Al-Ali and Koser write that “conceptions of home are not static but dynamic processes, involving acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving ‘homes’” (6).

⁴ A number of scholars write on Özdamar’s innovative use of the German language. Sohelia Ghaussy uses nomadism as a metaphor to describe Özdamar’s creative, dynamic, and hybridized German prose. Bettina Brandt discusses the role of Arabic as a mediator between Turkish and German in *Mutterzunge*. Azade Seyhan writes that

Özdamar's work "challenges the reader to engage in a genuine conversation of cultural bilingualism" ("Scheherazade" 247).

- ⁵ Özdamar's protagonists have been examined by various scholars as cultural performers. In *The Turkish Turn*, Leslie Adelson writes that Özdamar's work portrays "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (33). B. Venkat Mani writes about Özdamar's critical engagement with both Turkish and German traditions of performance, and notes that she employs the idea of cultural performance to escape the writing of a victimized narrative.
- ⁶ Özdamar has been identified as a feminist writer who challenges "both the logic of [her] own cultural history as well as the myth of western notions and practices of women's liberation" (Seyhan, "Scheherazade" 236). Sohelia Ghaussy argues that Özdamar's "highly embodied prose [...] stresses corporeality and remains in flux, creating shifting and contingent meanings which decenter authoritative masculinist discourses" (9-10). Monika Shafi discusses the protagonist's performance of gender and cultural identity as a critical engagement in locality.
- ⁷ Karen Jankowsky discusses the debate on national and canonical literature that surrounded Özdamar's historic victory in the Bachmann Prize competition. Moray McGowan analyses the creation of a European identity in Özdamar's texts.
- ⁸ Özdamar's texts engage with the political events in Germany and Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s. For one analysis, see Mahmut Karakuş's study of the international student movement as portrayed in Özdamar's *Brücke*.
- ⁹ See especially Azade Seyhan's *Writing Outside the Nation*. Comparing Mexican-American and Turkish-German literature, Seyhan creates an interdisciplinary analysis of what she calls "transnational narrative."
- ¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha writes that migrants themselves are "marks of the shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" ("DissemiNation" 315).
- ¹¹ These ideas were sparked by my reading of Simon Ward's article on trains in Post-1989 fiction.
- ¹² The protagonist explains that the word for "broken-down" also means "offended" in Turkish; thus, the train station is renamed "beleidigter Bahnhof."
- ¹³ These are Benedict Anderson's terms. See Anderson's Introduction (8-9) and "Ice Empire" (150).

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