

**A Staged Migration to Europe:
Özdamar's *Perikızı* and Transgenerational Trauma**

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This paper examines the nexus of migration, language, and trauma in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's play, Perikızı (2010). More specifically, it posits that Özdamar uses medial elements unique to the theater to position migration as both a source of trauma and a catalyst to engage with multigenerational traumatic family histories. In doing so, Özdamar uses the play to comment on the role of the theater as a medium that allows for modes of embodied storytelling in response to failed, misunderstood, or stolen language. Embedded as it is within the larger framework of Homer's Odyssey, the play suggests that the eponymous narrator's perilous experience of migration serves as both a source of trauma and an access point to her family's traumatic history. The theater gives voice and vision to this complexly layered multigenerational story as it unfolds across generations, cultures, and geographical boundaries.

Jocelyn Aksin's research is based in Turkish-German studies with a focus on transnational memory. She has published on the role of Turkish newspapers in Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn and Bitteres Wasser by Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and received her Ph. D. from Washington University in St. Louis in 2014 with a dissertation on representations of memory in Turkish-German novels by Zafer Şenocak, Aras Ören, Feridun Zaimoğlu, and Emine Sevgi Özdamar. Jocelyn began studying Turkish as a graduate student in the German program at Washington University, and was awarded a fellowship from the American Research Institute in Turkey for advanced Turkish language study at Boğaziçi University (Bosphorus University). After spending nearly eight years in Istanbul where she completed her dissertation and worked as a language teacher, Jocelyn relocated to Greensboro, N.C. and joined the German Program at UNCG as a lecturer in 2018.

In 2010, six cities in Germany's Ruhr district served collectively as the European Capital of Culture. One of the events planned to commemorate this occasion was the so-called *Odyssee Europa*, for which six authors were selected to write plays that reinterpreted the myth of Odysseus. Each play was performed in a different city or town of the Ruhrgebiet, and the promotional materials included a map that depicted the region's cities and towns as an archipelago of islands, calling to mind the epic journey of Odysseus. Emine Sevgi Özdamar was among those six authors, and her play, entitled *Perikızı*, is a dream-play (*Traumspiel*) that follows the path of an eponymous female protagonist who travels from Istanbul to a strange, mythologized Europe (Germany) with the hope of working in the

theater. As Lizzie Stewart notes in her dissertation chapter on *Perikızı*, the Odyssey as a theme “provided an image of a European identity both bound to ancient Greece, the supposed ‘origin’ of Western theatre and democracy, and characterized by a cosmopolitan freedom of movement and thought.”¹ Yet, the project also garnered considerable criticism for its somewhat naïve celebration of the migratory experience and its consequent failure to distinguish between different forms of migration, problematically eliding economic migration, tourism, and asylum. The high price of tickets was also noted by critics, who pointed out the disparities between the affluent audience members who were able to afford the price of admission and the subject matter of a play like *Perikızı*, which ultimately portrays migration in a more ambiguous and troubling light. Finally, the interactive nature of the production for *Odysee Europa* (at Schlosstheater Moers directed by Ulrich Greb) invited the audience to “migrate” with the protagonist through different areas of the performance space, allowing audience members to connect on a physical level through a passive form of participation in the play, yet problematically encouraging the overwhelmingly affluent audience members to play-act an experience of migration.²

Özdamar’s contribution to the Odysee-Europa project largely reworks and adapts material from her earlier novels to the stage, drawing principally on *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998). Scholarly reception of Özdamar’s prose has often made note of her novels’ own inherent theatricality,³ and certainly Özdamar herself is no stranger to the stage, having worked as an actress, playwright, and dramaturg in Germany and Turkey after studying acting at a drama school in Istanbul. Her experiences working alongside Benno Besson, Matthias Langhof, and other luminaries of the East-German theater while employed at the Volksbühne are the material for her third novel, *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*, and she is the author of at least six plays⁴, one of which pre-dates her career as a novelist. In short, Özdamar’s theatricality in her prose, as well as her actual theatrical output, have received considerable scholarly attention. Likewise, it has been noted that the intertextual nature of Özdamar’s works makes them migratory on a structural level, in addition to thematizing the history of migration within Turkey (*Karawanserei*) and from Turkey to Europe (*Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*) on a textual level.⁵

Özdamar's treatment of migration in her earlier prose works has been described variously as "defined not exclusively or even primarily by loss, exclusion, and discrimination, but by love, desire, and agency," and as an example of "productive dimensions of textual elements on the move rather than the recuperation of lost histories."⁶ Yet in her interpretation of *Perikızı*, Stewart notes that Özdamar's portrayal of migration in the play is "darker and more traumatic"⁷ than in the earlier novels, and points to a "refunctionalisation of textual scenarios which, in their first incarnation in Özdamar's novels, functioned to embed the Turkish author in both the German Alltag, and German history."⁸ Certainly migration as a theme is portrayed through a darker lens in *Perikızı*: the heroine's opening argument with her parents is more protracted than in the novel, and the break from them is more painful; the train ride to Germany carries Perikızı through a hellish landscape that has been ravaged by war, while the prostitutes with whom she shares a compartment are unsympathetic to her excruciating homesickness; and in Germany, she is surrounded by Turkish nationalists on the one hand, and by native-born Germans who are unable to break free of clichés surrounding immigrants and migration on the other. The play is also more autobiographical,⁹ as Özdamar uses *Perikızı* to reflect on the troubling reception of minority authors in Germany in general, and on her own harrowing experience during the plagiarism controversy with Zaimoğlu in particular.¹⁰ In what follows, I contend that Özdamar's *Perikızı* positions migration as both a source of trauma and as a productive framework for engaging with multigenerational traumatic family histories. Furthermore, I suggest that Özdamar uses the play to comment on the role of the theater as a medium that allows for modes of embodied storytelling in response to instances of failed, misunderstood, or stolen language. Embedded as it is in the framework of Homer's *Odyssey*, Perikızı's journey to Europe bears traces of inevitability: as the play's ending reveals, it is only through migration that the protagonist is able to access knowledge of her family's traumatic history. The theater gives voice to this complexly layered multigenerational story as it unfolds across generations, cultures, and geographical boundaries.

Özdamar foregrounds the theater and theatricality immediately from the opening scene of the play, as Perikızı rehearses lines from a scene of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* at home in Istanbul. Perikızı's grandmother overhears her speaking the

lines from the play and mistakenly assumes that they are Perikızı's own thoughts, to which the heroine clarifies: "Mein Mund, der so spricht, ist nicht meiner" (*Perikızı*, 274). This seemingly innocuous statement describing an actor's art could, if interpreted differently, serve as a leitmotif for the treatment of trauma in the play, as it foreshadows several incidents in which Perikızı inexplicably finds herself retelling grandmother's stories in grandmother's voice. The first instance of ventriloquism takes place immediately after grandmother's retelling of the traumatic story of her husband's death in World War I. Just one page after grandmother's monologue, Perikızı retells the same story word for word in the voice of grandmother. Once the episode ends, a bewildered Perikızı awakens as if from a trance, asking: "Warum rede ich wie meine Großmutter? Mein Mund ist nicht mehr der meine" (281). Mirroring her earlier explanation to grandmother of the process of speaking lines from a dramatic text, Perikızı's statement after this initial voice transfer suggests a new level of meaning to the notion of speaking the words of another, in another's voice. No longer merely a reference to the theater, Perikızı's ventriloquistic reiteration of grandmother's story suggests that this traumatic episode in the life of grandmother has been passed down to later generations of the family to some degree. Stewart notes that the episode "functions to draw lines of traumatic relation"¹¹ and connects it to Kader Konuk's discussion of "figurally connected experiences of empathic suffering."¹² The episode might also be tangentially linked to Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory,¹³ in which subsequent generations 'remember' traumatic events that they did not personally experience, typically by engaging in some amount of imagination-work to fill in the gaps that inevitably result from the lack of firsthand experience of the event. In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Hirsch characterizes such postmemorial work as striving to "reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (33). Yet Hirsch is keenly aware that in order for postmemory to function, it must be mediated in some way: "the gap between generations," she notes, "is the breach between a memory located in the body and the mediated knowledge of those who were born after" (80). Hirsch then goes on to ask which media function to bridge this gap, noting that memory is "powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony" (33). Although

Hirsch does not mention theater as a vehicle for carrying out the tasks of postmemory, Özdamar's play proves an ideal medium to do so. Combining visual elements with text and sound, Özdamar utilizes *Perikızı* to comment on familial intergenerational traumas including the death of grandmother's husband in World War I and the deportation of Armenian neighbors that grandmother witnessed as a young girl. *Perikızı*'s ventriloquism differs from the postmemory work carried out by Hirsch's post-Holocaust generation to the extent that it lacks a creative dimension at the diegetic level: *Perikızı* simply retells the same story in the same words and with the same voice that the audience heard from grandmother moments before. Yet on a structural level, *Perikızı*'s voice transfer functions as a device that allows Özdamar to suggest the presence of a traumatic legacy that has been passed on. In her summary of Freud's explanation of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Cathy Caruth defines psychological trauma – “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth, 3) – as an event that has been “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (4). There is an eeriness to *Perikızı*'s strange speech act that suggests the same belatedness and repetition of which Freund (and Caruth) speak: *Perikızı*'s words are involuntary, as if she is overcome by a force that requires her to speak. According to the stage directions in the scene, *Perikızı* speaks suddenly (plötzlich) “im Duktus der Großmutter. Die Sätze der Großmutter platzen aus ihr heraus” (280). Her reaction at the end of the speech – one of bewilderment and unease – also suggests that the speech is beyond her control. When she comes to herself again, *Perikızı*'s immediate reaction is to depart for Germany as quickly as possible, explaining: “Ich wollte nie, dass Großmutter's Nacht sich so tief in mich setzt. [. . .] Ich will nicht mit den Toten leben. Ich will frei sein, ich will leben. [. . .] Großmutter lebt in einem Alptraum, ich will meinen Traum leben” (281). Although *Perikızı*'s migration initially seems motivated by her desire to escape her ancestors' traumatic histories, her experiences in Germany actually bring her into closer contact with the past. The inevitability of her confrontation with the past – a parallel drawn directly from the story of Odysseus, whose journey is the result of divine machinations rather than personal choice – is present here in the visual and acoustic similarity between the words “Traum” and “Trauma”¹⁴: *Perikızı* initially flees to Germany

to live her dream (“Traum”), but finds that the old traumas migrate with her, in addition to the new ones that she encounters after her arrival.

Probably the most widely recognized voice on trauma specifically in the works of Özdamar is Yasemin Yildiz, whose chapter on “Mutterzunge” in *Beyond the Mother Tongue* teases out the traces of trauma present in Özdamar’s literal translations from Turkish to German.¹⁵ Drawing on Cathy Caruth, Yildiz positions the German language as a site of potential recovery from the traumas inflicted by the Turkish state on leftist activists in the late 1960s and 1970s, even citing a passage from *Seltsame Sterne* in which the narrator describes herself as “unglücklich in meiner Sprache. Wir sagen seit Jahren nur solche Sätze wie: Sie werden sie aufhängen. Wo waren die Köpfe? Man weiß nicht, wo ihr Grab ist. Die Polizei hat die Leiche nicht freigegeben! Die Wörter sind krank.”¹⁶ The narrator’s words echo Özdamar’s own acceptance speech upon receipt of the Chamisso Prize some four years prior, when she states: “Damals bedeutete in der Türkei Wort gleich Mord. Man konnte wegen Wörtern erschossen, gefoltert, aufgehängt werden,”¹⁷ and again in her 2004 Kleist Prize acceptance speech, where Özdamar decries the censorship that took place in Turkey following the 1971 coup: “1971 putschten die Militärs in der Türkei. Gendarmen und Polizisten kamen in die Häuser und verhafteten nicht nur die Menschen, sondern auch die Wörter. Alle Bücher wurden vorsichtshalber zu den Polizeirevieren gebracht. Damals bedeutete in der Türkei Wort gleich Mord.”¹⁸ Yet if German has at times served as a recuperative language for Özdamar, it has not universally been so. In an interview with Sieglinde Geisel in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from 2008, Özdamar explains her literary return to Turkish in *Kendi Kendinin Terzisi bir Kambur* (2007) as motivated by the plagiarism controversy with Feridun Zaimoglu and her subsequent feelings of alienation from the German language: “Feridun Zaimoglu’s Plünderung meines Buchs [. . .] hatte mich für eine Zeit der deutschen Sprache entfremdet. [. . .] Um diese Lähmung zu entkommen, bin ich in die türkische Sprache zurück emigriert.”

This nexus between language, trauma, and migration takes on an additional dimension in *Perikızı* in the form of physical experiences that are shared between characters. In addition to the voice transfer that occurs when *Perikızı* retells grandmother’s stories in grandmother’s voice, *Perikızı* and her alter-ego Käuzchen also

experience nosebleeds just as grandmother does whenever she is confronted by traumatic memories of the past. In the first scene of the play, grandmother experiences a severe nosebleed just as she is recounting the deaths of her Armenian neighbors many decades prior. The nosebleed trope occurs several times throughout the play, but it finally transfers to Perikızı when she is confronted by a wolf in Germany who steals her poem and passes it off as his own. Like Odysseus on his travels, Perikızı encounters a number of monstrous creatures on her journey through the grotesque dreamworld version of Germany that Özdamar constructs in the play. In addition to the Odysseus story, allusions to fairytales are abundant in *Perikızı* as well as in Özdamar's dramatic works in general: both *Karagöz in Alamania* (1982) and *Keloğlan in Alamania* (1991) take their titles from traditional Turkish folklore, and the title of *Perikızı* ("fairy girl" in Turkish) is potentially a reference to one of Özdamar's more frequently cited intertexts: Shakespeare's own fairy tale play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Indeed the role of the fairy queen Titania – herself a "fairy girl" of sorts – is one that Perikızı rehearses and hopes to portray.¹⁹ In his discussion of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century dystopic representations of fairytales in visual art, Jack Zipes contends that such dark representations of well-known fairytales function as a collision of sorts – one that is "necessary to shake up the world and sharpen our gaze. In this regard, contemporary fairytale artworks, though often dystopian, still pulsate with utopian fervor."²⁰ According to Zipes, it is this jarring contrast between the grotesque dystopias presented in the works of art that he analyzes and the viewers' memories of idyllic versions of those tales that engenders a shock, or a "collision," as Zipes calls it, that forces viewers to critically engage with notions of happiness, and to confront their own reality while staring at the images.

If such a reckoning occurs in *Perikızı*, it is during the scene between the protagonist and the Wolf – a thinly veiled caricature of Zaimoğlu who is accompanied by his three minions, the Schuldgefühl-Giganten. These giants are apologist intellectuals who grasp at any excuse to sing the Wolf's praises in order to exculpate him from his crime of plagiarism. Perikızı's nose bleeds like grandmother's after the Wolf forces her to wear a headscarf and beats her. When she immediately begins to retell grandmother's story of the Armenian neighbors in the voice of grandmother, Käuzchen²¹ – an alter-ego of sorts who accompanies Perikızı on her travels and translates her Turkish poems into German

– experiences a nosebleed as well. Perikızı, Käuzchen, and grandmother are thus linked by traumatic experience, but the interchangeability of their psychosomatic symptoms (nosebleeds) and repetitious ventriloquistic soliloquies suggests that there is a transgenerational element to the characters' experiences of trauma. This aspect is underscored on a broader historical level in the play when the ghost of Perikızı's paternal grandfather who died in World War I appears to her in a dream and confesses that he and the other ghosts of the family have accompanied her on her journey all along, noting that "Wir Toten begleiten das Kind und sehen mit ihm, was aus diesen Ländern geworden ist, für die damals so viele gestorben sind. Wir waren die, die Perikızı erwählt haben, den Weg mit uns zu gehen" (312). Although Perikızı initially hopes to escape her grandparents' traumatic pasts, her grandfather's statement suggests that her odyssey is in fact primarily motivated by the need to confront multi-generational family trauma. Much like Odysseus' journey, Perikızı's migration to Europe bears traces of fate: although she ostensibly undertakes her travel in order to escape from the pressures of family, it is ultimately their traumatic legacy that lures Perikızı to Germany, or so the ghostly apparition of her grandfather suggests. The role of migration in the text – and indeed, its connection to memory and trauma – is twofold: on the one hand, migration itself is portrayed as traumatic. Perikızı encounters multiple nefarious characters from the moment of her departure for Germany until her return to grandmother in the play's final scene. The traumatic violence perpetrated against her culminates in the theft of her artistic/intellectual property by the Wolf when he claims Perikızı's poetry as his own. Yet, migration also functions in the play to bring Perikızı into contact with traumatic family histories that are embedded into the larger history of engagement between Turkey and Germany. Paradoxically, these are the very stories that Perikızı sought to escape by migrating to Germany. As the ghost of her grandfather suggests, it is precisely this attempt to run away from the family's traumatic past that precipitates her inevitable confrontation with it. As Kader Konuk notes in her discussion of *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*, scholarship since the early 2000s has resisted the tendency to reduce "the cultural production by Turkish Germans within the limited framework of labor migration and Orientalist stereotypes [. . .] This shift is due in part to [. . .] changes in the nature of Turkish-German literature more generally."²² As is reflected in Özdamar's work as well

as in the work of numerous other Turkish-German authors,²³ the deeper complexities and history of the Turkish-German relationship significantly predate the labor migrations of the 1960s. Historian Ulrich Trumpener traces German influence in the Ottoman Empire back to the 1830s, noting the training of Ottoman military officers and other attempts undertaken by the German political and military elite to modernize the Ottoman army and exert influence on Ottoman society. Trumpener also notes the prominent role played by German engineers, financiers, and military personnel in the construction of the Baghdad railroad, explicitly citing the project as an example of “*penetration pacifique*.”²⁴ In a similar vein, Malte Fuhrmann²⁵ traces the long history of German semicolonial involvement in the Ottoman Empire, invoking the influential historical figure of Wilhelm Leopold Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz (1843 – 1916), or “Goltz Pascha,” as he was known to the Ottomans. Goltz was a Prussian Field Marshal and military historian who served in the Ottoman Empire prior to World War I and was entrusted with the task of modernizing the Ottoman military. He later returned to the Ottoman Empire during World War I and was given command of the Ottoman Fifth Army, which carried out campaigns in Mesopotamia.²⁶ Goltz reportedly also approved of the orders presented to him by Enver Pasha in 1915 that called for the forced removal of the Armenian population in eastern Anatolia as a precaution against the possibility that they would side with Russia in the event of an invasion. However, Goltz later took action to halt the deportations by threatening to resign. Whether or not he fully understood the true significance of the deportations as genocide remains a matter for debate.²⁷ Bearing in mind this long history of Turkish/Ottoman-German involvement, it is not surprising to discover traces of the Turkish-German relationship in the seemingly disconnected historical events addressed by Özdamar’s play, including the Armenian genocide and the “Waffenbruderschaft” (brotherhood in arms) during World War I as personified by Perikızı’s deceased grandfather, nor is it strange that Perikızı re-encounters these traumas precisely in Germany, just as she had sought to flee them: lured unwittingly by the ghosts of her family’s past, Perikızı embarks on her migration to Germany only to uncover the same traumatic histories yet again, in addition to experiencing the traumatic effects of migration itself as embodied by the Wolf.

Özdamar's use of the theater to mediate this story of multigenerational trauma leads to the question of what makes the theater an ideal vehicle to explore such a web of intersecting and diverging traumatic experiences? As Olivia Landry explains in her discussion of political theater, the physicality of the theater, combined with its immediacy, allow for unpredictable exchanges between performers and audience members. In the theater, Landry tells us, "crisis becomes affectively palpable."²⁸ The theater "takes us back to the voices, to the stories, and to the bodies [. . .] in a way that brings them in proximity to new audiences and groups where unprecedented social relations open up and take shape."²⁹ Dovetailing into Landry's "voices, stories and bodies," Lizzie Stewart's careful analysis of the first two productions of the play at the Schlosstheater Moers and the Ballhaus Naunynstraße provides insight into the physical and visual dimensions of the performed work, noting that the initial production for the *Odyssee Europa* project at Schlosstheater Moers was staged in such a way as to heighten the sexually violent elements of the play, many of which are not explicitly mentioned in the dramatic text. For example, the Moers production staged a scene between Perikızı and the *Schlager* singer Heino to suggest that Perikızı is raped by the singer behind a curtain. The production also eliminated the leitmotif of the nosebleed in favor of more direct violence: after Perikızı's head is forcibly covered, the Wolf bites her, leaving bloody marks that visibly contrast against the white cloth that binds her (Stewart, 246 – 7). By contrast, the dramatic text merely states that Perikızı, already shackled from a previous encounter, is forced to wear a headscarf (326, 331). The Ballhaus production also emphasized sexual violence, although the rape scene in Michael Ronen's (Ballhaus) production was more explicit than the staging of the scene between Perikızı and Heino in the inaugural production at Moers. In Ronen's adaptation, the rape is perpetrated by the newspaper man, who replaced the Wolf in the Ballhaus production. Perikızı emerges with blood streaming down her legs after her brutal encounter with the newspaper man, such that the production effectively replaced the textual violence of the Wolf's act of plagiarism as depicted in the dramatic text with sexual violence as staged in the version at the Ballhaus (Stewart, 263 – 65). In both productions, the visual element of blood on Perikızı's head or legs produces a physical image that connects the protagonist's traumatic experiences to sexual violence in a manner that deviates considerably from the dramatic text.

Inevitably, any staging of a play requires creative decisions on the part of the director that may resist or reinterpret the intentions of the dramatic text, just as Özdamar's decision to repurpose the material from *Brücke* and her other novels into a play for the theater is not merely a repetition of that material, but a restaging of it. While there are certainly traumatic elements present in *Brücke*, especially pertaining to the novel's treatment of the '68 movement in both Germany and Turkey, the theme of familial transgenerational trauma that reverberates throughout *Perikızı* is not the primary concern of the earlier novel. I suggest that the performative, visual, and aural elements of the theater are particularly suited to Özdamar's task of representing complex traumatic experiences that span generations and cross geographical borders. As Claudia Breger argues in the introduction to her study, *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance* (2012), "we can best grasp the complex processes of imaginative world-making, identity formation, and critique in contemporary culture by studying the productive interplay, and overlap, of different narrative and performative forms" (7). Citing the theater as the "site where narrative and performance are fused" (18), Breger, in dialogue with Erika Fischer-Lichte (*Ästhetik des Performativen*, 2004; in English, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 2008), emphasizes the embodied nature of theatrical storytelling. The theater does not merely develop "a fictive world," but rather, generates "materiality" by highlighting the "actors' bodily being-in-the-world."³⁰ The embodied immediacy of theatrical performance – compared by Breger to what Roland Barthes termed an "emanation of reality"³¹ in *Camera Lucida* – creates what Fischer-Lichte describes as "an intense experience of presentness"³² that goes beyond mere mimesis, or appearance. The embodied nature of physical presence also goes beyond words or dramatic text. This is significant for a play like *Perikızı* that foregrounds the problem of speechlessness, or the failure of language. Linked directly to the characters' experiences of trauma, the nosebleeds that Perikızı, Käuzchen, and grandmother experience create a visual image of their inherited traumas that are represented to the viewer in an immediate, physical way, but these psychosomatic and ventriloquistic acts also suggest that embodied/experienced stories serve as a recourse when conventional modes of telling through language have failed. Language is portrayed as especially problematic in Perikızı's encounter with the Wolf, who steals her words by claiming her poem as his own.

She responds to the Wolf's act of plagiarism and the physical violence that follows it by ventriloquistically reiterating grandmother's story yet again while Käuzchen's nose bleeds. In light of the theft of her words, Perikızı's verbal arsenal has failed her, but the expressive powers of her body in the form of psychosomatic nosebleeds and ventriloquistic soliloquies are still a means by which she can tell her story. Theft of language is a theme that reverberates throughout the play, but it is particularly significant in the plagiarism scene between the Wolf and Perikızı. In the middle of an interview with the Schuldgefühl-Giganten, the Wolf notices Perikızı at work on a poem. Snatching it from her hand, he reads it out loud. The poem in the text is in Turkish – one of the few instances of Turkish in the play – but Özdamar eschews the actual Turkish spellings/orthography in favor of a Germanized spelling of the Turkish words:

“Istanbul da atschı atschı, atschı tschekmek
 Taschın üstünde bir yalnız adam, kör.
 Surlar
 Tamirli taschlar
 Tamirsiz insanlar
 Yol Tozunda dönen bir dönen
 Bir umutusuzluyun atschik bej tscheketi
 Tasch üzerine tschökme tschökme özlemiyle giden
 Ayakabılar. Intsche mermer koltuklar
 Park da uzanmışch bir büyükanne
 Iki kız Torun. Mermere oturmamışch” (329 – 30).³³

The Germanized spelling and occasional adherence to German orthography (capitalization of nouns like “Torun” (grandchild) or “Toz” (dust)) suggests that the Wolf is reading with a German accent when he recites the poem, a notion that is reinforced immediately after his reading when he asks Perikızı, “Was heißt das?” to which she replies, “Es ist türkisch.” The Wolf then requests a summary of the poem, to which Perikızı begrudgingly complies, after which he then pockets the poem and smugly announces, “Das ist von mir.” To add insult to injury, the Wolf later rolls the poem into a cylinder and snorts cocaine through it before exiting the scene, at which point Perikızı

experiences a nosebleed and ventriloquistically reiterates grandmother's traumatic tale of the Armenian brides from her village. Although Perikızı's non sequitur word-for-word recitation of grandmother's story bears little resemblance to the Wolf's more overt act of plagiarism, the theme of stolen language is nonetheless worthy of a moment's scrutiny, especially in this pivotal scene. While it could be argued that Perikızı herself is guilty of language theft when she appropriates grandmother's stories as a response to her own traumatic experiences, her act is somehow distinct from the Wolf's theft. For one, Perikızı is not in control of her soliloquies. They are presented in the text as instinctual reactions to traumatic experiences, which is also why the words themselves matter so little: grandmother's stories – the actual events detailed in them – have no clear connection to Perikızı's experiences; rather, they simply signal the presence of trauma. Perikızı is in a trance-like state when she repeats the well-worn phrases, which are presented in the text as an inherited physical vocabulary. This is especially emphasized when grandmother's nosebleed passes to Perikızı and then to Käuzchen: the nosebleed trope – in addition to the repetition of grandmother's "script" – are passed down through members of Perikızı's immediate family. The Wolf also steals language, but his theft is blatant and intentional, whereas Perikızı never passes off grandmother's words as her own. Indeed, she seems unaware of having uttered them. Hers is an example of a language act that functions as a communal ritual, whereas the Wolf knowingly steals an individual artistic expression. Özdamar utilizes this notion of a shared physical vocabulary inherited from grandmother to assert that traumatic experiences can migrate across generations and geographies. Furthermore, she suggests that this particular story – one of decades-old personal narratives of trauma that are rooted in historical acts of political violence – is ideally suited for telling in the theater, with its element of embodied "presentness" that allows for the bodies to speak when words fail.

The play ends on an ambiguous note, as Perikızı and grandmother reenact a variant of the opening scene. Perikızı once again rehearses her lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and grandmother cautions her about the dangers of moving to a foreign land. Grandmother recites the end of the Ece Ayhan poem that opened the play, thereby suggesting that the plot has come full circle, and Perikızı ends the play with one final word, "Großmutter." This last line of the play suggests that Perikızı has returned from her

nightmarish Odyssey; indeed, Özdamar's inclusion of a portion of Constantine Cavafy's poem, "Ithaca," provides an overt parallel to Odysseus' journey. Quoting from a German translation of the poem, Özdamar's selected lines emphasize the significance of the journey over the moment of return:

"Ithaka hat dir eine schöne Reise beschert.
Ohne Ithaka wärest du nicht aufgebrochen.
Jetzt hat es dir nichts mehr zu geben.
Und auch wenn du es arm findest, hat Ithaka
Dich nicht enttäuscht Weise geworden, mit solcher Erfahrung
Begreifst du ja bereits, was Ithaka bedeutet."

The ending hints, too, at the possibility that the events of the play have been a dream – an unlikely scenario for a writer as sophisticated as Özdamar. Yet, when we remember that the play is subtitled, "Ein Traumspiel," and that grandmother's own dream in the opening scene foreshadows Perikızı's impending journey, the dream motif seems well placed. Certainly, dream-like sequences are not unusual in Özdamar's oeuvre – the magical-realist episodes in *Karawanserei* or *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* readily come to mind. Lizzie Stewart reads the dream reference as "a mythologization of migration" on the one hand, and also as a suggestion that "the real story is best told through the distorting lens of the dream-world" (261). Throughout her oeuvre, Özdamar demonstrates a tendency to look at things – often the most ordinary of things – through a lens that is slightly askew, thereby allowing her to see the unusual in the most quotidian.³⁴ The connection between dreams and trauma is addressed also by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he notes how "dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident" (13). Freud's particular insight is that the purpose of the dream is to recuperate the missed or delayed reaction to the initial traumatic event: "these dreams are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (Freud, 32). Caruth, summarizing Freud, asserts that it is not the threat itself that traumatizes, but the "fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known" (Caruth, 62). Looking at the grotesque dreamworld of *Perikızı*, it is

possible to interpret the play as both a commentary on the traumatic nature of migration as well as a suggestion that traumatic histories can be explored and recuperated through the lens of migration. Probably the most traumatic experience for *Perikızı* is the theft of her creative work by the Wolf when he passes off her poetry as his own. She responds with the vocabulary of trauma that she has learned from grandmother: a nosebleed and the repetitive retelling of events from the past. Yet *Perikızı*'s odyssey to Germany also brings the family's history full circle: unwittingly, *Perikızı* heeds the call of the ghosts who urge her to visit this foreign land with its link to Turkey dating back long before the labor migrations of the 1960s. Reading *Perikızı* alongside Caruth, who asserts that "the theory of individual trauma contains within it the core of the trauma of a larger history" (Caruth, 71), it is possible to delineate the strands of individual trauma, history, and migration, all of which intertwine on stage, where the ventriloquized voices and bloodied bodies of the actors add the physical language of bodily presence to this *Traumspiel*'s project of uncovering familial lines of traumatic experience that first become visible in the strange twilight of the dreamworld.

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¹ Stewart, "Performing Diversity," 236.

² Certainly any discussion of a theatrical work entails an awareness that the dramatic text and the performed versions of the play are two separate things. In her work on *Perikızı*, Lizzie Stewart traces the different incarnations of the play as it was adapted by directors at the Schlosstheater Moers (Odyssee-Europa) and the Ballhaus Naunynstraße (Almançı! 50 Jahre Scheinehe).² The play has since been performed at other venues and has entered into the permanent repertoire at the Ballhaus. Although the artistic choices of different directors in their various productions is a fascinating aspect of the play that reminds us of theater's position as a living, dynamic medium, a focus on individual productions is beyond the current scope of this paper. As such, I will confine my observations primarily to the dramatic text.

³ See B. Venkat Mani, "The Good Woman of Istanbul," (35) for "various elements of several theatrical traditions . . . Western and non-Western;" See Kader Konuk, on "inszeniertes Sprechen" in "Identitätssuche ist ein private archäologische Graberei;" See also, Ela Gezen, "Staging Berlin," Monika Shafi, "Talkin 'Bout My Generation," and Sonja Klocke, "Orientalisierung der DDR?"

⁴ *Karagöz in Alamania* (1982), *Keloğlan in Alamania* (1991), *Noahi* (2003?), *Perikızı* (2010), *Sterben in der Fremde* (2011), plus dramatic monologues „Karriere einer Putzfrau – Erinnerungen an Deutschland“ and „Der Hof im Spiegel,“ which were later published as short stories in *Mutterzunge* (1990). See: Lizzie Stewart and Frauke Matthes (2016) „Introduction: Emine Sevgi Özdamar at 70,“ *Oxford German Studies* 45:3, footnote 17. See also: “Emine Sevgi Özdamar” at verlagderautoren.de.

⁵ See Maha El Hissy, *Getürkte Türken*, 96 – 98.

⁶ See Elizabeth Mittman, “Celestial Desires,” 5; and Gizem Arslan, “Animated Exchange,” 191.

⁷ Stewart, “Performing Diversity,” 231.

⁸ Lizzie Stewart, “Performing Diversity,” 242.

⁹ As opposed to the autofiction that characterizes Özdamar’s novels, as discussed by numerous researchers including Elisabeth Boa (“Özdamar’s Autobiographical Fictions,”) and Annette Wierschke (*Schreiben als Selbstbehauptung*).

¹⁰ The plagiarism controversy between Özdamar and Zaimoglu has received considerable critical attention, scholarly and otherwise. See: Dayıoğlu-Yücel, “Die Plagiats-Debatte um Zaimoglus *Leyla* und Özdamars *Karawanserei* – kulturelles Kapital oder geistiges Eigentum?”

¹¹ Stewart, “Performing Diversity,” 245.

¹² Konuk, “Taking on German and Turkish History : Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s ‘Seltsame Sterne,‘” 244.

¹³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, 2012.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Gizem Arslan for calling my attention to this wordplay.

¹⁵ Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, 152 – 60.

¹⁶ *Seltsame Sterne*, 23.

¹⁷ Cited in Yildiz.

¹⁸ Cited in Angela Weber, *Im Spiegel der Migrationen*, 225.

¹⁹ Much has been written about Özdamar’s use of intertexts, and indeed the number of intertextual references present specifically in *Perikızı* is considerable: in addition to Shakespeare’s play and Homer’s *Odyssey*, Özdamar’s play contains references to Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*, Heine’s *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen*, the Schlager singer Heino, poetry by Constantine Cavafy, as well as Özdamar’s own works, including the three novels in her Berlin trilogy (*Karawanserei*, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, and *Seltsame Sterne*), in addition to the short story collection *Der Hof im Spiegel*. See also: Liesbeth Minnard, *New Germans, New Dutch*, (Chapter 3, pp. 69 – 105), and Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*.

²⁰ Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, 136.

²¹ El-Hissy notes Özdamar’s use of anthropomorphized animal figures in her earliest theater works (*Karagöz in Alamania* and *Keloğlan in Alamania*), where they function as “ein Stilmittel des Karnevalesken, das [. . .] surreales Geschehen markiert” (101 - 02). The talking cat Tekir (*Keloğlan*) functions as a Brechtian “Figur der Verfremdung” by assuming the narrative voice in the play and communicating directly with the audience. Much like the little owl Käuzchen in *Perikızı*, Tekir also takes on the role of translator between characters on stage who do not share a mutual language. I’m grateful as well to Susanne Rinner for pointing out that “Kauz” carries the double meaning of “owl” and “strange old geezer” (“ein komischer Kauz”). Certainly this Käuzchen in Özdamar’s play is a strange bird, but I suggest that the diminutive “-chen” lends a certain adorability to this narrator/translator who speaks for *Perikızı* when she cannot speak for herself.

²² Konuk, “Taking on German and Turkish History,” 233.

²³ Zafer Şenocak comes to mind with works like *Alman Terbiyesi* (2007)

²⁴ Trumpener, “Germany and the End of the Ottoman Empire,” in *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 112.

²⁵ Fuhrmann, “Germany’s Adventures in the Orient,” 132.

²⁶ See: *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.), “Goltz, Colmar, Freiherr von der,” Cambridge University Press.

²⁷ Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, 276 – 7.

²⁸ Landry, “Greek Dispossession Staged, or When Street Politics Meets the Theater,” 10.

²⁹ Landry, 13.

³⁰ Breger, *Toward an Aesthetics of Narrative Performance* (26), quoting Fischer-Lichte’s *Ästhetik des Performativen*.

³¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88.

³² Fisher-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 96.

³³ Following Turkish orthography, the poem would read: “İstanbul’da acı acı, acı çekmek / Taşın üstünde bir yalnız adam, kör. / Surlar / Tamirli taşlar / Tarmirsiz insanlar / Yol tozunda dönen bir dönen / Bir umutsuzluğun açık bej ceketi / Taş üzerine çökme çökme özlemiyle giden / Ayakkabılar. İnce mermer koltuklar / Park’ta uzanmış bir büyükanne / İki kız torun. Mermere oturmamış.”

[“Suffering suffering, suffering in Istanbul / A man alone on a rock, blind. / Walls / Repaired stones / Unrepaired people / In the dust of the road turning and turning / An open beige jacket of hopelessness / shoes walking over stones desiring to collapse. / Narrow marble chairs / a grandmother lying down in a park / Two granddaughters. They haven’t sat down on the marble.]

³⁴ Yıldız discusses a similar characteristic in the works of Yoko Tawada, noting that Tawada’s playful use of language “promises new perceptions and experiences. Rather than feeling excluded by this linguistic opacity, Tawada’s figure seeks out this condition as productive” (*Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 118).

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