

AMERICAN DREAM AND GERMAN NIGHTMARE? IDENTITY, GENDER, AND  
MEMORY IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIC WORK OF ESMERALDA SANTIAGO  
AND EMINE SEVGI ÖZDAMAR

A Thesis

by

ANJA MARGARETHE SCHWALEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2007

Major Subject: Comparative Literature and Culture

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## ABSTRACT

American Dream and German Nightmare? Identity, Gender, and Memory in the Autobiographic Work of Esmeralda Santiago and Emine Sevgi Özdamar. (August 2007)

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This thesis compares the autobiographic work of Esmeralda Santiago and Emine Sevgi Özdamar focusing on the aspects of ethnic identity, gender, as well as history and memory. The argument is that both authors' work not only reflects the cultural origins of each writer and her trauma of loss, but also each host country's social realities and conflicts. In spite of alienation and loss of home and language, both protagonists create "touching tales," a phrase coined by Leslie Adelson that refers to the entanglement between cultures, stressing more the common ground between them than the differences. Santiago's work stresses the dividedness of American society along racial and ethnic lines, but also the opportunity for the immigrant to reinvent herself and overcome racial and social boundaries. Özdamar on the other hand reflects on the dividedness and traumatization of Germany through World War II, the Holocaust, the East-West division, and the terrorism of the 1970s. She compares it to the political and social division within Turkey as results of the Armenian genocide and military coups. While Santiago views American culture with distance, Özdamar displays an enthusiastic reception of leftist writers like Bertolt Brecht and German literature in general. Both autobiographical subjects find a way to reconcile their own inner divisions through theater work, which combines universal and multicultural elements.

## DEDICATION

To my husband Walter and my children Sandy and Thomas. Thank you for all your support and patience!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All translations in the text from the original German into English are my translations.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Immigrant or ethnic literature has been part of U.S. literature since the late nineteenth century. Usually it combined the immigrant experience with a coming of age narration of the subject's assimilation into American culture. During the past thirty years the interest in this type of literature has increased significantly, alongside with a fascination in women's and life writings from the part of literary criticism as well as the general reading public. Works by Latinas now form a large part of the canon of ethnic/gender literature.<sup>1</sup> Germany, not being a classical country of immigration, has lagged behind in this development, but since the early nineties attention has been drawn to a number of German language writers, from different countries or cultures of origin, especially from Turkey.

This study will compare the autobiographic works of two well known ethnic women authors: Esmeralda Santiago (USA) and Emine Sevgi Özdamar (Germany). Both writers were born in the 1940s in Puerto Rico and Turkey and first came to the U.S. and Germany as teenagers, having to acquire English/German as a second language in which they later chose to write. Since both of them describe their personal journey and development through adolescence and young womanhood, and their works cover a similar historical time, a comparative analysis seems promising. The object of my

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This thesis follows the style of *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America*.

study will be their autobiographic trilogies<sup>2</sup> with emphasis on the last volumes respectively that deal with the protagonist's young adulthood: *The Turkish Lover* (2004) by Santiago and *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (*Strange Stars staring down onto Earth*) (2003) by Özdamar. My purpose is to explore similarities and differences regarding main topics chosen, self-construction, ethnic and gender identity as well as reflections on history and politics. I will argue that the differences I find are not only due to the individual uniqueness of each writer's biography and culture and her style of writing, but that they reflect different attitudes towards the concepts of self, society, and history in the respective host country. In simplifying terms one could say that after all, Santiago represents the American immigrant success story, which some critics have accused her of, but which also might have contributed to her success.<sup>3</sup> Özdamar on the other hand reflects on the inner divisions and generational conflicts of Germany of the seventies, still resulting from the trauma of World War II and the Holocaust, paralleling it to the Turkish trauma of military dictatorship and Armenian genocide. While North America can become somewhat of a home for the immigrant who Americanizes or assimilates, Özdamar's protagonist keeps wandering through Europe like the picaroon of the Baroque novel that has ever since been a character in European Literature.<sup>4</sup> Becoming German is never a concern for Özdamar's character, while being European or connecting with Europe has great importance. Although the "Europeanness" of Turkey is contested even today, I will show that her literary work is influenced by the ideas of European Enlightenment and Socialism, but also of the postwar despair on how "writing after Auschwitz" (Günther Grass) would be possible.<sup>5</sup> Santiago for her part is North American,



although she might not always like it or be conscious of it, to paraphrase her Turkish boyfriend.

That said, I am aware of the problematic of treating literary works as bodies of evidence in the context of cultural studies or history, since there is the danger of generalizing the findings.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the second chapter of this study will discuss the most crucial theoretical questions regarding memory, autobiography, and identity for my analysis. After a brief comparative introduction of ethnic literature in the USA and Germany and an overview over the work of Santiago and Özdamar in chapter III, chapter IV will start with a comparison of the main topics. Also in this chapter, the following aspects of their works will then be discussed:

How is self-construction or self-invention carried out? Where is the narrated "I" situated in relationship to other(s)?<sup>7</sup> What role do the categories of race, gender, and class play for the protagonist and in her encounters with the cultural other? Memory of personal and national history and traumas and coping with them are major themes in both works. How do Santiago's and Özdamar's texts reflect on divisions within the individual and society of either country? Finally, how do both protagonists achieve a certain degree of reconciliation of their inner contradictions and conflicts through artistic work in the theater? Does this reconciliation again reflect on American/German mentalities?

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As early as the 1920s Walter Benjamin observed the process of democratization in literature with a certain ambiguity, stating that with an increasing penetration of the press into all areas of life, the distinction between reader and writer was increasingly diminishing: "At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer" (*Illuminations* 232). The surge in life writings of all kinds during the past three decades certainly seems to prove Benjamin right. When the Mexican-American writer Sandra Cisneros recently gave a talk to a socially and racially mixed audience in Bryan, Texas, she suggested to aspiring authors to start with one's own life, because this is what each of us knows best.<sup>8</sup> This is an indicator of the general interest in autobiographical writing, which has also influenced the field of ethnic literature, rendering most present literary productions by present day minority writers more autobiographical.

Only a few scholars have done comparative work on literature by Latino and Turkish immigrant authors. However Azade Seyhan has written extensively on the topic and points out in her latest book *Writing Outside the Nation* that anthropology has started to become increasingly interested in life narratives as "microcosms of larger political and sociocultural issues" (67).<sup>9</sup> By questioning the exclusive claims and validity of "official" historical or cultural narratives, literary, autobiographical, and bilingual texts fill the gaps of understanding and provide alternative points of view. Although a writer does not necessarily reflect the experience of average people, Seyhan claims that: "The works of Castillo, Anzaldúa, Kingston, Özdamar, Moniková, or Danticat may not be

'representative of the thoughts or lives of the majority of women.' But they are representative of the destinies of women and men who have lost their footing in history, their place in geography, and their families to persecution in any form" (158). The anthropologist Michael M. J. Fischer, who has done extensive studies of autobiographies from all over the world, affirms: "The individual is one locus for the intersection of wider historical processes. The frame of a life history or an autobiography is one experiential field for identifying the ways these intersections articulate" (92). He argues that autobiography usually speaks with multiple voices and has a mosaic composition, thus not just telling the protagonist's life from one perspective, but including mirroring, dialogic storytelling, and cross-cultural critique. Both Santiago's and Özdamar's texts do this to different extents and in different ways, putting emphasis on the individual and subjective experience with the larger historical contexts as a backdrop.

Furthermore, postmodern theory increasingly has questioned the stability of the concept of identity and gender, thus rejecting the "humanist/essentialized self" (Bergland 161). Sidonie Smith describes autobiographic telling as a performative act during which identity is being produced (141-46). Philipp Lejeune declares in his revision of "The Autobiographical Pact": "Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject – it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing" (131-132).<sup>10</sup> In her book *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler asserts that gender is a similarly unstable concept which is socially and discursively constructed instead:

If one "is" a woman that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive ... because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constructed identities. As a result, it becomes

impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (3).

Kader Konuk remarks in her study on Turkish women writers that critics or readers often assume cultural authenticity (essentialism) in marginalized groups alongside the idea of the possibility of a authentic or true self with its "identical core"(126-27).<sup>11</sup> The assumption in this study is thus that identity is being produced discursively in both Santiago and Özdamar's work and that gender and ethnic origin are important positionalities that cannot be separated from each other.<sup>12</sup> However, I will show how each author produces identity differently and positions the subject differently as well, both in love relationships and female community.

The complexity of the field of life writings and the multiple terminologies make it necessary to briefly address the issue of different genres of life narratives. In their textbook *Reading Autobiography* Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson list and define fifty-two genres of life narratives.<sup>13</sup> In the scholarly literature, many of these terms are used interchangeably, reflecting the blurred boundaries between subgenera like autobiography, memoir, *Bildungsroman*, etc. This fact stems from the insight that the confessional truth claims of classical autobiography cannot be maintained, since "the subject of autobiography is a self-representation and not the autobiographer her/himself" (Gilmore 68).<sup>14</sup> In fact, many contemporary life narratives themselves mix those genres, as for example Santiago and Özdamar do, and some critics refer to them as "novels."<sup>15</sup> This practice is prevalent in non-western, nonmetropolitan life writings which Karen Kaplan ironically describes as "out-law genres."<sup>16</sup> If one accepts these premises, any life narrative implies invention of self and re-creation of memory and therefore "what really happened" remains elusive. Therefore I will use terms "protagonist," "autobiographical

subject," and the first names of the authors when I talk about the "narrated 'I'" in Santiago's and Özdamar's texts and their last names when referring to the authors as "narrating 'I.'"<sup>17</sup>

In my opinion, the work of Santiago and Özdamar reflects the growing phenomenon of global migration and dislocation as well as cultural alienation, difference, and conflict. Both authors can be considered postcolonial subjects, who coming from the periphery of the metropolis (Europe, United States), challenge notions of stable cultural and personal identity in their life writings. In an age of increasing global dislocation and migration, much has been written on the topic of ethnic awareness and difference, with emphasis on the conflict between the immigrant's culture and language and the culture of the host country. Since the late seventies, the latter has received somewhat of a bad name which goes beyond the anti imperialistic critique of the sixties and early seventies, because it is accused of imposing itself in a patronizing colonial way on the immigrant.<sup>18</sup> Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha argues for the idea of a "third space" as the location of immigrant culture, situating it between culture of origin and culture of the colonial country.<sup>19</sup> According to Bhabha, this cultural hybridity "makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'" (56). Leslie Adelson in her study of Turkish-German literature worries that this approach might overlook transformation of ethnic and national entities in the process of migration. Thus she focuses on this transformation with her concept of "touching tales," which puts an emphasis on dialogue, common ground, and historical and cultural entanglement between Germans and Turks. Rejecting the idea of a "third space," she suggests that in spite of conflict and animosities between ethnic groups and the ongoing debate about

assimilation, migrants and their literature have already transformed German culture and have become a part of it.

First, it suggests that Germans and Turks in Germany share more culture (as an ongoing imaginative project) than is often presumed when one speaks of two discrete worlds encountering each other across a civilizational divide. Touching tales thus takes conceptual leave from a model of incommensurable differences to stress a broad range of common ground, which can be thicker or thinner at some junctures. (20)<sup>20</sup>

I believe that this is an important aspect in both Santiago's and Özdamar's writing, and that both their texts resist a simplistic dichotomy between Anglo/German culture on the one hand and Puerto Rican/Turkish on the other hand. Instead they expose discontinuities and fractures in both the uprooted immigrant and his culture of origin *and* the host culture and its representatives. Beyond an awareness of gender and ethnicity of the narrated subject, both texts mirror the cultural and political environment in which they are written, the urban USA during the Vietnam era and the divided Berlin of the seventies. The protagonists' cultural and historical backgrounds and personal stories touch and intersect with those whom they encounter, transforming each other in the process and creating a new story. Nevertheless I am conscious of the fact that the documentary value of any individual piece of life writing is limited, since it does not attempt to be historiographical account in the traditional sense of the word and even tries to counter them.<sup>21</sup> However, life writings are part of the democratization of literature and add alternative perspectives to official historiography. Walter Benjamin would have been pleased with this development; when theorizing about the future of literary production in 1934, he polemicized against any possible revival of the classic *Bildungsroman* which consolidated the bourgeois subject.<sup>22</sup>

While pointing out parallels and differences in content, narrative structure, identity-construction, and historical memory, my aim is to demonstrate that both works – in the sense of "touching tales"-reflect different philosophical and political attitudes generally attributed to the U.S. and Europe, therefore giving each work a distinctive American or German touch. It would be ideological to discuss whether the works discussed are more Puerto Rican than American or more Turkish than German. However they may point to the fact that as countries of the periphery of North America/ Europe both Puerto Rico and Turkey already share cultural values, ideas and history with the country/continent of immigration. As Juan Flores remarks: "In no other national history are twentieth-century American social values and priorities more visibly imprinted than in Puerto Rico's" (1988, 39). And Özdamar's protagonist states ironically in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*:

Ein Mensch aus Europa. Was er sagte, war wie ein zementierter Satz. Ein Türke, der in Europa studiert hatte, bekam an einem Tisch den ersten Platz, und alle schauten auf seinen Mund, was er sagte. (249-50)

A person from Europe. Whatever he said was like a sentence written in stone. A Turk who had been to study in Europe was seated at the head of the table and everybody paid close attention to every word coming out of his mouth.

CHAPTER III  
OVERVIEW ON IMMIGRANT OR ETHNIC LITERATURE IN THE U.S. AND  
GERMANY

**Similarities and Differences**

At first glance it seems that the United States is the classical country of immigration, while Germany only admitted the first "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*) in the 1950s. However, the facts are more complex. Immigration historians such as Klaus Bade have pointed out that Germany does have a history of migration since the late Middle Ages, for example immigration from France and Poland, as well as emigration to Romania, Russia, and later the Americas.<sup>23</sup> While the United States has defined itself much earlier as a country of immigration, offering citizenship to immigrants quickly and granting automatic citizenship to children born in the U.S. (I.e. acknowledging *ius solis*), Germany until a few years ago, still insisted on the *ius sanguinis* (law of blood or descent) when deciding who could qualify as German, and naturalization continues to be a long and tedious process.

The national narrative of the United States until the 1920s and 1930s upheld the myth of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier thesis according to which the American mentality had been formed under the challenges of settlement. Later, in the 1950s the so-called "melting pot" theory (Oscar Handlin) tried to integrate the fact of post-frontier immigration, claiming that all immigrant cultures would eventually be forged into a new homogenous people.<sup>24</sup> This ideology led to a systematic repression of the immigrants' ethnic past, which is reflected in much of the earlier immigrant writings that usually take on a more assimilationist tone (Singh 5). According to Kathrine Payant, most early



immigrant writers were Jewish immigrants like Abraham Cahan, Henry Roth, Mary Antin, and Anzia Yeziarska, who stressed the aspect of assimilation and gratefulness to America. However, she mentions that even in those early texts one finds that the assimilatory pattern was problematic (xvi).<sup>25</sup>

With the black civil rights movement in the early sixties and the surge of African American ethnic literature, other ethnic groups started asserting their rights as well. Within a few years, awareness of ethnic identity resurfaced, and with it a new literature reflecting this experience and the fact that many groups were excluded or disadvantaged from participating in the so-called homogeneous American culture. The racism of the national narrative thus became evident. After the change of immigration laws in 1965 that abolished national quotas, a new wave of immigration from Latin American and Asian countries set in, and with them a new production of literature that focused again on the immigration experience (Payant xx).

In this political context Chicano and Latino literature established itself as a new genre of ethnic literature.<sup>26</sup> These days, citizens of Hispanic descent represent the largest minority in the USA. The immigration history between Mexico, Puerto Rico and the USA is special in so far as there has been ongoing migration since before the founding of the USA, and in fact large parts of the USA once were Mexican territory. Moreover, unlike Europeans and European immigrants, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have considered themselves as being colonized by the United States in many ways, and Chicano/Latino literature reflects this awareness of this discrepant, disadvantageous status (Flores 1988, 41). While the genre was initially dominated by male writers (Rudolfo Anaya, José Antonio Villareal, et al.), women writers such as Sandra Cisneros

and Gloria Anzaldúa followed in the wake of the feminist movement. Their texts explore the concept of difference not only in terms of ethnicity, but also femininity and sexual orientation.<sup>27</sup> According to Juan Flores, Puerto Rican literature in New York began as early as 1916 with *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega*, and experienced a second wave around 1950 featuring a more fictional and dramatic approach, for example René Marqués' *La carreta*. However, this kind of literature talks more about the island and the outside view on the community in New York. Only the third wave, the Nuyorican stage that emerged in the late 1960s, stressed the bilingualism and Caribbean heritage of the Puerto Rican community and lately has also produced women writers like Sandra María Esteves and Nicholasa Mohr. Flores observes the tendency to testimonio style novels and autobiographies (43).<sup>28</sup>

Germany, on the other hand, never pretended to melt immigrants into a common "Germanness." Until a few years ago, it was very difficult to attain citizenship if one was not born of German parents. The pressure of immigration, i.e. that about 10 percent of the population were foreigners, has led to some changes, such as granting citizenship to children of foreigners born in Germany and reducing the waiting period for naturalization from 15 to 8 years.<sup>29</sup> People of Turkish descent are the largest minority in Germany. In 1999, about 2 million lived in the Federal Republic, which is about one third of the total foreign population. Most of them were recruited during the labor shortages of the 1960s and were able to have relatives follow them to Germany. Because of the continual coming and going of people between Turkey and Germany, similar to that between Mexico and Puerto Rico and the U.S., one can also employ the word migrant. Since the

reunification and opening of the borders in the East, a large influx of migrants from Eastern Europe and Asia has also occurred.

Literature by Turkish and other immigrants first entered the public eye in the late seventies and early eighties when a heightened awareness of that matter was prevalent, especially because of the 1981 military putsch in Turkey.<sup>30</sup> Much of that literature dealt with the experience of culture shock and prejudices, but also presented a quest for identity in an existence between cultures (Frederking 41). In contrast to Chicano literature which usually was written in English, initially many of those authors wrote in Turkish, if their schooling had been predominantly in Turkey. However, many of them eventually chose German as their literary language. Reasons for this varied, as Frederking explains, from wanting to address a broader audience, being censored in Turkey, to the expanded linguistic possibilities of writing in German by using montage technique mixing German and Turkish lexical or sentence structures (38-39).<sup>31</sup> Saliha Scheinhardt<sup>32</sup> and Aysel Özakin are considered the first important German Turkish woman writers. They published their first books in Germany in 1982 and 1983. Their focus was the social situation of Turkish migrant workers as well as the difficulties of women situated between tradition and modernity (Fischer/McGowan 12-13). Recently, in the wake of a new debate about the compatibility of so-called European and Islamic values, a wave of testimonio literature has been published.<sup>33</sup> These works are usually written by women from Islamic cultures, who have escaped often oppressive and violent families and reflect on their experiences and survival. One of the earliest and best known is Serap Çileli's *Wir sind eure Töchter, nicht eure Ehre* (*We are your daughters, not your honor*) from 2002.<sup>34</sup>

## Esmeralda Santiago and Emine Sevgi Özdamar:

### Overview of Work and Critical Reception

Özdamar was born in Malatya, Turkish-Kurdistan, in 1946 and at age 19 went to Berlin, Germany on her own to work at a factory for two years. Introduced to the work of Brecht, she decided to become an actress, and attended drama school in Istanbul from 1967 to 1970. For a several years, she worked as an actress at different Turkish theatres.<sup>35</sup> In 1976, she went to East Berlin in order to study with Brecht disciple Benno Besson, soon became his assistant, and after a short time with him in Paris, went back to Germany to work as an actress at the Schauspielhaus in Bochum (1979-1984).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, she wrote a play, *Karagöz in Alania* and acted in several German movies.<sup>37</sup> Her writings fit into neither of these groups of authors described above. Along with authors like Zafer Şenocak and Aras Ören, she rather represents what Leslie Adelson calls the "Turkish turn" in contemporary German literature around 1990, which coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and a time "when ethnic signifiers, memory cultures, and tectonic shifts in transnational conflicts loomed disorientingly large, not only in Germany but on a global stage in dramatic transition" (15). Özdamar published *Mutterzunge*, her first book, in 1990. The autobiographic novel *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei (Karawanserei)* came out in 1992, followed by *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn (Brücke)* (1998) and *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde (Sterne)* (2003). The latter three volumes form the so-called *Istanbul-Berlin Trilogie*.<sup>38</sup> Özdamar was awarded several prizes, among them the prestigious *Ingeborg-Bachman Preis* in 2004.<sup>39</sup> Though touching on the themes mentioned above, her writings also reflect her experience with Turkish and German theater and the awareness of the complexity of cultural and linguistic experiences and

shifting identities (Horrocks xxiii). In spite of her high acclaim by literary critics, her work has not reached a mass audience like some of the testimonios mentioned above, and some critics have taken offense at her bilingual style and her sometimes literal translation from Turkish into German.<sup>40</sup>

Santiago was born in 1948 in Puerto Rico and came to New York at age 14 in 1961 with her mother and seven younger siblings, since her younger brother needed medical treatment. The family moved in with her grandmother and her boyfriend and Santiago's mother went to work as a seamstress. Santiago herself qualified for the High School of Performing Arts in Manhattan and later won a scholarship to Harvard University from where she graduated in 1976. Her first book, the memoir *When I Was Puerto Rican (Puerto Rican)* (1993) was completed as a Master's Thesis from Sarah Lawrence College. *Almost a Woman (Woman)* and *The Turkish Lover (Lover)* followed in 1998 and 2004. Santiago's writings belong to what critics like María Acosta Cruz call the "Latina boom" of the 1990s and which includes authors like Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, and Cristina García (2006, 172).<sup>41</sup> Her memoirs have been very successful in reaching a mainstream audience, and parts of them have been published in readers for high school and university students, so that one can agree with Cruz's assessment, that Santiago has become part of the canon of Latina literature. Not all critics agree on Santiago's literary or emancipatory value; some think that she uses too many stereotypes and wrongly claims to represent "Puerto-Ricanness" (Acosta Cruz 2002, 112; Tate 108), while others laud her texts for instilling self-confidence in young Latinas (Averbeck 379).

In spite of their different cultures of origin and professional backgrounds, the authors' life stories have numerous parallels and treat similar topics, although in very different ways, as will be shown in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

## COMPARISON OF THE TRILOGIES

**Content and Topics: Overview**

Both Santiago and Özdamar chronologically cover the time from their childhood in the country of origin through their personal and professional development in the country of immigration. In *When I Was Puerto Rican* Santiago talks about her childhood in semi-rural Macún, her growing up as the oldest sister, daily life and her family's economic and personal struggles, and finally her arrival in New York. *Almost a Woman* treats her time in New York between the age of thirteen and eighteen when she attends the High School for Performing Arts in Manhattan and meets her much older Turkish boyfriend Ulvi, who is one of the central figures of the third volume: *The Turkish Lover*. This last volume comprises Esmeralda's relationship with Ulvi, her emancipation from him, and culminates with her graduation from Harvard. All three volumes are labeled "memoir," pointing to the autobiographical nature of the story.

Özdamar's case is a little more complicated: the first two volumes are subtitled "Roman" (novel), but the main events, especially in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, are known to be autobiographical. *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* also is the account of the protagonist's childhood, and follows roughly the author's biography: the childhood and youth of a Turkish girl, her birth in Malatya, the constant moving of her family due to unemployment, and their settling down in Ankara. It ends with the protagonist's temporary working migration to Germany. *Die Brücke* reflects on the protagonist's migration between "two worlds:" her experience as guest worker at Telefunken in Berlin, her involvement with the leftist political scene in Germany and Turkey, her growing

interest in German theater, and her training as an actress in Istanbul. It ends with the trauma of the military coup of 1971, the subsequent years of political suppression and the protagonist's decision to go to Germany and work in the theater there. The third volume, *Seltsame Sterne starren vom Himmel*, however, is subtitled *Wedding-Pankow 1976/77*, which suggests a documentary character. Indeed, the second part of the book contains excerpts of her diaries with dated entries and sketches the author took during her time at the *Volksbühne* in East Berlin.<sup>42</sup> *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* is therefore the most openly autobiographical volume of the *Berlin-Istanbul-Trilogy*.

There are quite a few parallels between the lives told by both authors. Both protagonists leave their homeland at a relatively late age, as teenagers, and learn the language of the host country within a short time. Both leave their families and cultural traditions behind, geographically and figuratively. Santiago attends the High School for Performing Arts in Manhattan and later moves away from New York altogether and Özdamar embarks on the long train trip to Germany. Neither Santiago nor Özdamar represent the conventional Puerto Rican or Turkish immigrant woman: they both are university educated professionals who attain economic success. Their characters (narrated "I") display determination and assertiveness when trying to reach their professional and personal goals. Another point both characters have in common is a cosmopolitan attitude: they relate many cross-cultural encounters and friendships and while Santiago openly states her discomfort with identity politics, Özdamar parodies ethnic stereotypes from the side of both Germans and Turks. In the context of relationships, both characters rely on the emotional and practical support of other women (relatives and female friends), while men are usually function as lovers and mentors.



Another central topic is both characters' interest in theater and stage and social interactions with people from that field. As will be shown, however, the differences between them are equally important here: while Santiago's character opts for dance, Özdamar's character develops a passion for acting and directing.

Santiago's immigration is forced; she comes to the U.S. with her mother and siblings, leaving the father behind, which is a traumatic experience for her. Therefore she openly discusses her initial hostility and alienation toward the American culture and people, which paradoxically at the same time represent a coveted and unattainable ideal. Özdamar, on the other hand, comes to Germany the first time out of curiosity and the second time as an exile. Her trauma is the violence and oppression that comes with the military coup and dictatorship. In spite of the cold climate and initially unapproachable Germans, she harbors her love for German "ideals," the poets and writers she learned about in school, especially Bertolt Brecht and Franz Kafka.

Santiago describes her family as unconventional and sometimes dysfunctional, since her mother was never married and her grandmother is an alcoholic. Although she never questions her loyalty and love for her mother, the relationship is ambivalent and at times violent. Özdamar's parents seem to generally support her, although they do not approve when she leaves for Germany the first time. She describes the relationship with her grandmother as the closest and most emotional one, because the old woman is the link to her ancestors and ancient traditions and stories. Whenever Özdamar expresses feelings of nostalgia, it has to do in some way with her grandmother's stories and the places where they were together. Santiago's nostalgia reaches for the lost father and childhood. Both

authors evoke plants, colors, smells, and tastes of the island or of Istanbul when experiencing bouts of nostalgia.

The greatest difference between both oeuvres, though, seems to lie in the area of identity construction and relationships, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Santiago dwells on her very exclusive love relationship with Ulvi, while such relationships seem fleeting in Özdamar alongside with other relationships she entertains. Although she lives during a time of political and racial division and tension, Santiago explicitly avoids active involvement with the issues at stake. Özdamar, on the other hand, chronicles carefully the political events and discussions not only in her accounts of Turkey, but of the divided Germany as well, leaving no doubt about her political stance. Where Santiago's account remains anchored in her present, Özdamar's characters reflect upon Germany's and Turkey's troubled past.

### **Positioning the Subject in a Larger Context**

This section will explore the different positionings of the narrated "I" in Santiago and Özdamar by taking a closer look at the opening chapter of *Lover* and *Sterne*. Although Santiago's books are called memoirs,<sup>43</sup> they contain the basic characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist leaves home to venture into the larger society and ends up finding a place in it. This influences the way Esmeralda talks about herself, her history, and her development. Like her previous volumes, *Lover* contains reflections on personal history, comments on further developments, uses introspection and confession, and generally conveys learning experiences, misfortunes and successes to the reader. These characteristics remind of a autobiography in the tradition of for example Benjamin Franklin. The narrated "I" (alias Esmeralda, Chiquita, Essie, Ez, Negi<sup>44</sup>) is the

undisputed protagonist of the narration, and her confessional style makes the reader a confidante of her trials and tribulations. We learn not only about the details of her love relationship with Ulvi and her professional career, but also her interpretation of it. The other characters, her various friends and colleagues she meets between Florida, New York, Lubbock, and Syracuse, are in one or other way contributing to her development from a troubled young woman, who flees from her mother's control into the arms of her controlling boyfriend.<sup>45</sup>

According to Smith and Watson, the classic *Bildungsroman* has been given a new definition by ethnic women writers:

And yet the form of the *Bildungsroman* has been taken up more recently by women and other disenfranchised persons to consolidate a sense of emerging identity and an increased place in public life. The *Bildungsroman* can also be used negatively as a norm of assimilation into the dominant culture that is unattainable and must be relinquished, or that produces alienation from the home community. In much women's writing, its plot of development culminates not in integration but in an awakening to gender-based limitations. (188-189)

Although Santiago discusses racial and gender-based limitations in *Lover*, I doubt whether her protagonist really resists integration. On the contrary, I would argue that her character adapts very well to American ideas of self-assertion and self-actualization by remaining within the boundaries of society. Both the protagonist's doubts and her success in mainstream society, which allows the maintaining of certain ethnic markers, will be delineated in the following pages.

*Lover* begins like a traditional autobiography:

The night before I left my mother, I wrote a letter, "*Querida Mami*," it began. *Querida*, beloved, Mami, I wrote, on the same page as *el hombre que yo amo*, the man I love. I struggled with those words, because I wasn't certain they were true. Mami understood love, so I used the work and hoped I meant it. *El hombre que yo amo*. *Amo*, which in Spanish also means master. I didn't notice the irony. (*Lover* 1)

Santiago describes a personal journey that begins with an escape from her family and ethnic community. Esmeralda uses the word "love" sensing that it is not true, but love is an accepted or at least understood reason, not only by *Mami*, but also by American culture in general (thinking e.g. of Hollywood romances). The project of a journey for love really turns out to be a journey to self-discovery as a Puerto Rican woman living in the United States. Everything that happens and every person she meets will in some way be relevant to Esmeralda's personal development and contribute to her selfhood. The first chapter thus ends like a typical *Bildungsroman*, with the protagonist stepping out into the world, causing a split between her and her family. Since Esmeralda manages in the course of the book to leave the abusive relationship, to win a scholarship and to graduate, it can be suggested that *Lover* (like Santiago's other books) represents a "traditional" American immigrant success story, at least in its outcome. In addition, *Lover* seems to reflect the belief in a triumphant self-realization of the Western individual and the belief in an authentic self that can emerge after layers have been peeled off (M. Fischer 99). When Esmeralda is trying for the second time to liberate herself from Ulvi's control, she tells her friend Marie, who has taken her in: "It's just that I feel as if...like...like Esmeralda is pushing through Chiquita." 'And isn't it about time, Esmeralda?' Marie asked" (222).

Özdamar in contrast, places her protagonist into a broader context right from the beginning and keeps doing so by telling stories that are not necessarily about her, but that touch her (touching tales). The influence of Brecht's alienation effect is clearly visible, as well as a rejection of autonomous individuality or the pursuit of individual success. In his

2004 speech during Özdamar's reception of the Kleist-Award Günther Blamberger summarizes her style as follows:

Die Naivität ist eine inszenierte Naivität, eine Art Maschine der Inversion, sie führt vor, aber kommentiert nicht, der Leser wird denken, das hätte Brecht, Özdamars imaginärem Begleiter in Deutschland and dieser Courage gefallen...Bei Özdamar wird die Biographie nicht zur Psychologie, sondern zur Enzyklopädie, ...Die Kreativität dieser Autorin ist Beziehungssinn, das ist ein ganz anderer Begriff als der des deutschen Originalgenies, das vom unverwechselbar Eigenen reden und dieses dann absolut setzen will. (4)<sup>46</sup>

This naivete is a staged one, a kind of inversion machine; she presents but does not comment. The reader might think that Brecht, Özdamar's imaginary companion in Germany, would have liked this kind of courage...With Özdamar, biography is not psychological, but encyclopedical,...The creativity of this author lies in her relationality<sup>47</sup>, which is a very different concept than that of the German original genius, who is talking about his genuine subjectivity and wants to declare this as an absolute value.

*Sterne* (like her previous books) cultivates a montage technique reminiscent of European Modernism, of different stories and voices of which the narrated I is the observer or chronologist. Direct introspection and reflection as in *Lover* seldom occur, but are found between the lines, which again stress the focus on the relationship between people of different cultures and their experiences, and not on *Originalgenie*.

Der Hund bellte und hörte nicht auf. Manchmal lief er in den zweiten oder dritten Hof, seine Stimmer entfernte sich, aber dann kam sie wieder näher. Ich konnte nicht mehr schlafen, Else Lasker-Schülers Buch lag auf dem zweiten Kopfkissen. Bevor ich einschlief, hatte ich ein paar Zeilen auswendig gelernt.

*Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde,  
Eisenfarbene mit Sehnsuchtsschweiften,  
Mit brennenden Armen die Liebe suchen...*(9)

The dog barked and did not stop. Sometimes it ran into the second or third courtyard, its voice moved away, but then came closer again. I couldn't get back to sleep. Else Lasker-Schüler's book was lying on the second pillow. Before falling asleep I had memorized a few lines.

*Strange stars are gazing down to earth,  
iron colored ones with tails of desire,*

*looking for love with burning arms...*

*Sterne* begins with a seemingly random episode of a dog barking that robs the protagonist's sleep and the lines of Else Lasker-Schüler's poem that is also part of the title.<sup>48</sup> While Emine walks through the deserted cold apartment in a factory loft (all her German roommates are visiting family over Christmas) she reflects on their togetherness, different people who live or used to live there and their stories. We learn only through the effect that the dog's barking has on her, that she may be feeling alone and afraid. Like Esmeralda, she decides to escape, but escape to East Berlin, where she works at the theater: "Ich fahre sofort, der Hund kann mir nicht in den Osten folgen" 'I am leaving right now; the dog cannot follow me east' (15).

The first chapter of *Sterne* is a microcosm of the divisions and breaks the book will reiterate: the politically divided West Germany, the two different (historical) time zones of East and West Germany, the rift between many young people and their parents as a result of the repressed Nazi past, the old widows reminiscing of the losses of World War II. Only in the second chapter do we learn about the protagonist's own trauma and the deep political and social divisions in Turkey and her decision to put her dream into reality and learn Brecht's theater in Germany. Like her German roommates, she feels estranged or alienated from her country and culture, and like Santiago, she wants to escape from family and community as well.

Although Santiago's writing resembles more the traditional autobiography and its self-reflection, while Özdamar has been clearly influenced by Modernism and its theme of the dissociated and sometimes disowned individual, both texts practice what Michael Fischer calls "1,2,3, voices" or compositions of identity (79). The individual identity (1<sup>st</sup> voice) cannot establish itself without dialogic relations with historical and cultural others (2<sup>nd</sup> voice), and finally needs a rationalizing endeavor (3<sup>rd</sup> voice).<sup>49</sup> Özdamar uses 2<sup>nd</sup> voice dialogues frequently, by letting voices of others, especially her German friends and colleagues occupy a lot of room. Brecht's epic theater seems to function as 3<sup>rd</sup> voice, being the artistic and social ideal for which her protagonist strives. Santiago on the other hand uses her 1<sup>st</sup> voice more often, because of ongoing self-reflection and interpretation of events, the dialogic relation with others does take place, but less often; sometimes Esmeralda appears to address the reader, because of her confessional style. Her 3<sup>rd</sup> voice is harder to discern: I would suggest it is her quest to make sense of her Puerto Rican-American identity and find a way to belong. The discussion of excerpts from Santiago's and Özdamar's work in the sections that follow will shed more light on the differences in the use of these voices by both authors.

### Loss of Home, Loss of Language

Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself.

--- Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to ourselves* (1)

I kept that me so hidden, that I was invisible even to myself.

---Esmeralda Santiago, *Lover* (210)

Jetzt habe ich Angst. Wenn ich nicht arbeite, tauchen die Geister auf. Traurigkeit, Einsamkeit, langweilige Männer.

Now I am afraid. Whenever I do not work, the ghosts appear. Sadness, loneliness, dull men.

---Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Sterne* (215)

This section will explore the protagonists' experience of trauma, disruption, and loss expressed in recollections, encounters, stories, and poems. The argument here is that trauma and loss do erode the sense of integrity of the subject, but also that it is something inherent in the human condition. Telling their own and other people's stories, Esmeralda and Emine again place themselves into a larger context. On the other hand, the loss of the geographical home and of the mother tongue concerns primarily the immigrant subject.

These losses go along with an uncertainty of the narrated "I" about who she is. Both protagonists experience personal losses, which inflict feelings of pain, alienation, hopelessness, and fear on them. Santiago recalls the loss of her father in Puerto Rico, who marries a different woman, and of her subsequent stepfather Francisco, alongside with the loss of the homeland:

Loss was familiar. An absent father, a dead stepfather, an alcoholic grandmother, who when sober was sweet and funny, but when drunk could become violent and vulgar. Loss was a Puerto Rican afternoon humming with bees, the proud cackle of a hen with chicks, the sudden, loud thunder and pounding rain of a tropical squall. Loss was not feeling safe, even in our own apartments. (*Lover* 18-19)



In her self-analysis, Esmeralda admits that she suppressed her feelings of resentment and grief as a teenager and young woman in order to protect herself: "There was so much feeling in me that if I explored it, as Mrs. Provet [her acting teacher] asked us to do, I would drown in my own emotions" (19). She later describes her split identity according to the different roles she thinks she has to play for others: Negi for her family, Chiquita for Ulvi, Ez at work. "It was such a conscious shift from Esmeralda to Essie to Chiquita that I actually felt my body contract and diminish in stature on the walk from the hospital to our building on Harrison Street" (209).

Esmeralda harbors resentments against her father for leaving her mother and the children to their own devices. So when he finally shows up after six years to meet her lover Ulvi, she feels angry and rejects him, because he never had come before. When he blesses her before his departure, it offers her no comfort. "It hurt too much to believe that their blessings would have any effect on my life. They shriveled into hard nuggets of resentment that fed the American part of me, mistrustful of the superstitious beliefs of *gente puertorriqueña decente*" (72).

The same way she controls her anger and resentment, she has buried her grief about the loss of her home and her father and stepfather. Only after she meets the terminally ill dancer Jacqueline, whose skeletal looks remind her of her dying stepfather Francisco and all her other emotional losses, she allows this grief to resurface. "I sobbed so violently that the bed shook. It had been nearly six years since his death, and I had grieved then, but never alone, where no one could see me" (105).

At the end of *Brücke* and the beginning of *Sterne* Özdamar describes the traumatic toll that the Turkish military putsch has had on her protagonist and many other people:

Ich wollte nicht mehr mit dem Rücken zur Wohnungstür sitzen, weil sie auch durch die Wohnungstür schossen. Wenn ich auf den Straßen schwangere Frauen sah, dachte ich, jetzt haben ihre Kinder in ihrem Bauch Angst. (328)

I did no longer want to sit with my back to the entrance door, because they shot through closed doors as well. When I saw pregnant women in the streets, I thought, now the children in their womb are afraid.

Her alienation is further expressed with the loss of words, language: "Man sagt, in fremden Ländern verliert man die Muttersprache. Kann man nicht auch in seinem eigenen Land die Muttersprache verlieren?" "People say that you lose your mother tongue in a foreign country. Can't you lose it in your own country as well?" (*Sterne* 23).

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva contends that with Freud's discovery of the unconscious, the idea of otherness within ourselves had found a theoretical basis (181). She concludes that the "foreigner" or our fear of him points us to those parts of us which we do not want to know about. In this case, the alienation the foreigner feels within the other culture, is always something that is constitutive in every human being, at least as a possibility: "Or should one recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within?" (14).

This applies to both Esmeralda and Emine: the former is somewhat of a loner, even within her own family, who likes to escape to the library or into a quiet corner whenever she can. Emine as a young girl breaks with her parents' expectations when she does not finish school, hangs out with leftists and finally goes to Germany. But expanding on this assumption, the trauma and/or alienation might not only concern the uprooted immigrant or exile, but it can also happen within one's own culture and within oneself.

For both Santiago and Özdamar, the alienated self is also manifest in the "loss" of their native language. Even though this loss occurs in different ways, it is a loss

nevertheless pertinent to any immigrant, as Mary Besemeres observes: "The experience of migrants into a new language attests doubly to the shaping effect of natural language on self: both in the sense of a loss of self undergone with the loss of the native language, and in the sense of an enforced gain of self in living with the new language" (10). She further points out that in the process a person has to recreate him- or herself. In Özdamar's *Sterne* the narrated "I" actually describes her native language as being sick (23) and embraces the foreign language (German) in order to cope with the trauma: "Wenn die Zeit in einem Land in die Nacht eintritt, suchen sogar die Steine eine andere Sprache" 'When in a country the times enter the night, even the stones will search for a new language' (28). The protagonist thus consciously leaves her "language community," i.e. the cultural group identified with her native language.<sup>50</sup> In Istanbul she meets Joseph, a Swiss physicist, another stranger from within, who learned his Turkish from guest workers in Switzerland and addresses her in somewhat awkward language: "'Weib, wo ist ein Hotel?' Ich lachte und sagte: 'Lassen Sie uns doch Deutsch sprechen'" "'Woman, where is a hotel?' I laughed and said: 'Let's speak German instead.'" (*Sterne* 21).

Joseph becomes her friend and mentor and finally helps her to fulfill her dream to study the Brecht theater whose poems/songs Emine uses as a mantra against her fear:<sup>51</sup>

"Das Große bleibt groß nicht und klein nicht das Kleine. Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden, dann kommt schon der Tag" 'The big does not remain big and the small does not remain small. The night has twelve hours, then comes the morning' (27). The break with her own culture is evident in her identification with this German poet persecuted by fascism, as well as German Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler and the cosmopolitan Greek Constantine Cavafy.<sup>52</sup> At the same time these "cultural borrowings" are manifestations of

the concept of "touching tales," according to which cultures are more connected than it seems at first glance:

Du sagtest: "Ich werde in ein anderes Land fahren.  
An ein anderes Meer. Ich werde eine bessere Stadt finden  
Als diese, wo jede meiner Anstrengungen zum Scheitern  
verurteilt  
Ist..." (29)

You said: "I will go to a different country.  
To a different ocean. I will find a better city  
Than this one, where each of my efforts  
Is destined to fail..."

Interestingly, this poem is quoted by Emine's husband, whom she leaves because she cannot bear being married against her convictions and out of survivor's guilt:

Joseph, während eines Militärputsches steht alles still. Auch die Liebe. Plötzlich gehst du in ein Café, dort sitzt dein Freund nicht mehr, der gestern noch da war. Du gehst an seinem Haus vorbei, es sind keine Lichter an. (*Sterne* 26-27)

Joseph, during a military putsch everything stops. Also love. Suddenly you enter a coffee house, but your friend, who was there just yesterday, is gone. You pass by his house, but the lights are out.

Another hint of the break with Turkish in *Sterne* is that it features very few Turkish words or interferences compared to her earlier volumes, like *Brücke* where she is still in the process of learning German and lives with other Turkish women. Also, in *Sterne* Emine no longer lives among Turks, but mostly among Germans. By the same token, language loss is not overtly the object of nostalgic feelings as it is with Santiago.

Language loss happens in a different manner to Esmeralda, since her migration is not her decision and therefore the exposure to English is forced. Although she learns some English at school in Puerto Rico, it holds no positive connotation, and when in New York, she learns it out of necessity in order to survive, to translate for her mother at the welfare office, to succeed in school. After a painfully awkward conversation with the

caseworker while interpreting for her mother, Esmeralda vows to learn English in order "never again to be caught between languages" (*Woman* 21). At the same time, she is still connected to Spanish through the family and the other Hispanic neighbors, and the transition to English as the language she is more comfortable in is gradual. *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman* therefore contain lots of borrowings from Spanish, although the children's new identity through the acquisition of English is announcing itself: "Slowly, as our vocabularies grew, it became a bond between us, one that separated us from Tata and Mami, who watched us perplexed, her expression changing from pride to envy to worry" (*Woman* 18). Only when Esmeralda is in her twenties, after she left home and went on to live with Ulvi, and had spent some weeks on the island, does she miss Spanish as part of herself and actually seeks out people to speak Spanish in the form of a Puerto Rican family that "adopts" her when she is a student at Harvard. Other than that, *Lover* contains considerably less Spanish borrowings, reflecting the fact that Esmeralda has left her language community (her family and the neighborhood).

Santiago mentions in this context that she is driven by nostalgia and loneliness when she looks up Puerto Rican names in the phone book. The topic of nostalgia is prevalent in both authors' works as a way of grieving for a lost home and lost language and with this loss of identity. For Santiago, the object of nostalgia besides the language is the island itself with its plants, animals, climate, customs, and food. At the same time, these comforting memories circle around her father and the time when the whole family was still together. Therefore, Esmeralda can relate when she talks to Carmen, the Puerto Rican wife of the university president in Lubbock:

"It's like missing your mother," she said, closing her eyes as she remembered. "I just want to go back to our *finca* in Utuado, grab a handful of that rich soil, and rub it

over my body." She opened her eyes and blushed. "Ay, *Díos mío*, listen to me, talking like that. *¿Qué dirá la gente?*"

"Nobody else heard you," I said, "I wish I could do the same." (191)

Some critics believe that Santiago uses a romanticizing nostalgia when talking about the island, disregarding the social sufferings of the *jíbaros*, the poor farmers.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, in *Lover* the narrated "I" does recognize nostalgic memories for what they are, especially when she returns to Puerto Rico for an extended visit towards the end of her and Ulvi's relationship. "Nothing was as I remembered" (278). When visiting the spot where their house once stood, she has a construction fence around it and is about to be torn up in order to build an access road to a golf resort for tourists: "I closed my eyes and listened to the soughing leaves, the flapping wings, the chirruping tweeting, trilling life around me. I stood immobile, listening, discarding the throb of cars and trucks, the thunder of a plane overhead" (279). The idealizing memory thus cannot be maintained.

Emine abandons Turkey as a language community and with it her husband and her family. Although she does not use many Turkish words or makes allusions to Turkish, figures of speech and images from Turkish keep resurfacing: "Im Zug schwor ich mir, ich werde nie wieder heiraten, ich will nie wieder eine Trennung erleben, ab jetzt ist Alleinsein mein Pferd" 'On the train I vowed, will never again marry, I don't want to live through another separation, from now on, solitude will be my horse' (30). Still, nostalgia for her grandmother and her childhood are a prevalent topic throughout *Sterne*. East Berlin triggers feelings of familiarity and memories in the protagonist that she did not have in the West. She perceives the East as still living in the past; life is less busy than in West Berlin, there isn't that overabundance of goods and it smells similar because of the burning of coal. "Die Morgenstimmung und der Geruch in den Straßen von

Ostberlin erinnerten mich daran, wie meine Großmutter jeden Morgen den Ofen heizte" 'The atmosphere in the mornings and the smell in the streets of East Berlin reminded me how my grandmother started the stove each morning' (81). Emine spends her first night in East Berlin at the apartment of two gay men, one of whom reminds her of Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer:

Aber ich liebte sie, so wie ich als Kind meine Großmutter geliebt hatte, ohne begreifen zu können, daß auch sie einmal ein Kind gewesen war. Wenn sie sagte, "Komm, schlafen wir", dann folgte ich ihr. Und so schlief ich in dieser ersten Nacht in Ostberlin in einem Bett mit Albrecht Dürer, dessen Bett mich beruhigte wie die einfachen Gegenstände in den Ostberliner Schaufenstern. (37)

But I loved them as I had loved my grandmother as a child, without being able to grasp that also she had once been a child. When she said, "let's go to sleep," I followed her. And so I slept during this first night in East Berlin in one bed with Albrecht Dürer, whose bed calmed me down like the simple objects in the shop windows in East Berlin.

When visiting a theater friend at her community garden, her pear trees remind her of a Turkish sentence she once read in a children's book: "Ach, was für einen schönen Birnbaum haben Sie" 'Oh what a beautiful pear tree you have' (98). This makes her think of how her grandmother as a young girl used to sleep under pear trees during hot summer nights. The image of her grandmother thus represents childhood, innocence, and love, something that Emine wants to recover in her childlike, innocent attitude toward Germany, especially the East, since it represents the attempt to build a more just society.

The passages dealing with representations and stories of her grandmother alternate with images of torture, violence and terror: " ...ich erzählte Katrin von dem 17jährigen Jungen, der gerade in der Türkei erhängt worden war. Für diesen Jungen gibt es keinen Abend mehr, keine Zigarette, keine Katze" '...I told Katrin about the seventeen

year old boy they had hanged in Turkey. For this boy, there are no more evenings, no cigarette, no cat' (136).

In spite of all differences, loss of language entails for both Santiago and Özdamar "Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet slumber of childhood" (Kristeva 15). Their autobiographies written in their second language still bear witness of "that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you" (Kristeva 15). Using a new language layering over the old one, they enter new discourses, constructing new aspects of identity. Juan Flores remarks on Santiago and other Puerto Rican writers: "...la memoria rota' [broken memory] is the site not merely of exclusion and fragmentation but also of new meanings and identity" (342).

### **Ethnic and Gender Difference**

How to disrupt the foundations that cover over alternative cultural configurations of gender? How to destabilize and render in their phantasmatic dimension the "premises" of identity politics?

--- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (147)

It is noteworthy that the first foreigners to emerge at the dawn of our civilization are foreign women – the Danaïdes.

--- Julia Kristeva (42)

The main topic of this section is the role of gender in the protagonist's interaction with her own and the "host community." The three areas of interaction to be explored are attitudes towards femininity and sexuality within the culture of origin, especially the family, (cross cultural) gender relationships, and finally the role of a "female community." The central question of interest for this study is whether the destabilization of identity discussed in the sections above also applies to the categories of ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, one could ask if the similarities found between Santiago and



Özdamar point towards universal patriarchal structures, and whether the differences reflect on their culture of origin, on the host country or on both.

In this context, it is important to follow Judith Butler's cautioning advice regarding the universalizing of patriarchal structures, which would constitute another colonizing gesture of Western feminism, instead of acknowledging the specific cultural operations of gender oppression (13). At the same time, I agree with Butler in that "there is no gender identity behind expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). Butler draws on the Foucauldian perspective when pointing out that certain cultural configurations of gender (the law) take the place of "the real." Subversion of power therefore can only take place within discourses of power: "If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing" (32).<sup>54</sup>

What would such subversion look like? Butler stresses the process of identity and gender formation as discursive and repetitive: "The subject is not determined by rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effect" (145). What then seems "real" and "natural" turns out to be a phantasmatic construction or "illusion of substance that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can" (146). Thus binarism is created: man/woman, "I" /"Other," etc., with the masculine and heterosexuality being the norm.

This is where parody comes into play, practicing subversive repetition which on the one hand exposes the phantasmatic character of so-called natural categories and on

the other hand suggests alternative configurations of gender. This critique of gender as a stable category can be extended to the domains of racial and ethnic identity as well, as Karen Christian writes in her study on *Identity as Performance in Latino/a Fiction* (16). She understands cultural and gender identity as drag shows "that parody the notion of essentialized identity categories" (16). On the subsequent pages I will trace such subversion in both authors' discussion of ethnic and gender identity. I maintain that both texts practice it using different textual tools (repetitions which at the same time demonstrate the construedness of those categories).

The female subject in both Santiago and Özdamar constructs herself somewhere in between the intersections of discourses of family, men/lovers, and the female community. While Santiago remains more clearly in the discursive tradition of separating the thoughts and actions of the narrated "I" and the others, these boundaries are less defined in Özdamar, as will be shown below. Although the circumstances of the two characters are quite different, both of them undertake a journey away from their families and cultures of origin and ultimately rebel in their lifestyles against traditional gender roles and femininity. In doing so, they also reflect more or less explicitly on the women's movements of the sixties and seventies in the USA and Germany, especially the ideas of sexual liberation which opposed not only the established views of the host country, but even more those of the culture of origin.

Santiago's rendition of her mother's and other women's discourse on what a woman should be, serves as a good example of the regulated repetitions which establish rigid roles of hierarchical binarism. Even if Santiago's style does not appear intentionally parodic but rather self-reflective, the repetition throughout all three volumes of her

mother's attitudes and beliefs quoted in her native Spanish convey a sensation of absurdity and artificiality. Her mother's discourse reflects the fear of female sexuality and the need to control it, by guarding the girl's virginity. This requires close supervision of the adolescent girl's whereabouts, because *algo te puede suceder* (something could happen to you). When moving out in order to live with Ulvi, Esmeralda reflects on and summarizes those beliefs: "I had failed as a *mena puertorriqueña decente*, a decent Puerto Rican girl. I had lost myself to Ulvi without benefit of *velo y cola*, the trailing veil Mami imagined for each one of her daughters before a Catholic altar" (*Lover* 6). The opposite of the decent girl are "those *americanas*," Americans or assimilated girls, who date and dress provocatively. Her mother had always warned her of the male/macho whose only aim was to take girls' virginity or "*el hombre que le hizo el daño*" (the man who damaged/hurt her). Repeated throughout the book is the phrase that dictates her mother's behavior and that of the other women in the family and neighborhood: "*¿Qué dirán?* What will they say?" However, the reader learns that her mother and grandmother themselves have counteracted those rules all her life, by not being married to the children's father, not attending church, by having boyfriends in New York, by dressing seductively and finally by working outside the home and providing for her family on her own. Therefore the constant repetition of these Spanish formulas appears contradictory and has a parodistic effect.

In the same way, Esmeralda recognizes the contradictions in the discourse of the *puta*, the woman who sleeps around, versus the *pendeja*, the woman who allows a man to walk all over her. Somewhere in between, she says in *Woman*, was the *mujer decente*, the phantasma who appears to be impossible to reach: "...the pointed conversations I was

supposed to overhear, were meant to help me distinguish between a *puta* and a *pendeja*. But there was always a warning. One false move, and I ran the risk of becoming one or being perceived as the other" (15).

Özdamar reports a similar emphasis on virginity in her culture, though mainly in the second volume, *Brücke*. Like Santiago, she uses the Turkish figure of speech for the loss of it, although literally translated into German, *den Diamanten verlieren* (to lose one's diamond), but it is something her character talks about casually as being a topic of conversation among the Turkish women in the dorm in Berlin. Emine perceives herself as progressive, and so her goal is to go to Germany and get rid of her diamond, in order to become a good actress. In Germany, she would not have to face her parents every day (*Brücke* 108). As a consequence, she sleeps with a limping Turkish socialist, whom she perceives as a progressive who won't want to marry her. Ironically, he reiterates Turkish stereotypes: "'Jungfrauen schlafen mit einem Mann, und dann zwingen sie ihn zum Heiraten'. In den türkischen Zeitungen gab es oft solche Nachrichten: 'Er nahm ihr ihr Gold weg, jetzt muss er zum Standesamt'" "'Virgins sleep with men and then force them into marriage.' In Turkish newspapers one could often read: 'He took her gold away, now he has to go to the courthouse'" (164). According to tradition, virginity is a woman's most valuable asset (diamond, gold). However, Emine's family does not seem to preach this belief a lot. Only when Emine returns from Germany knowing that she is in early pregnancy, her mother does acknowledge that she had been worried about her virginity and says as if to reassure herself: "Auch wenn eine Birne vom Baum herunterfällt, fällt sie nicht weit weg von ihrem Baum. Sie hat sicher dort auf unsere Familenehre keine

Flecken kommen lassen" 'Even if a pear falls off the tree, it doesn't land far away from it. Certainly she has not stained her family's honor over there' (179).

The popular image of the whore, however, differs from the one in Santiago. The term *Hure* is only applied to professional prostitutes, with whom Emine interacts in Ankara when she is rehearsing her role of one for a play, and in Berlin, where her *WG* (*Wohngemeinschaft* or apartment shared by a group of friends) is located above a bordello. Two of the whores teach her to ride a bike in the street and they become friends. She draws a parallel between the positive image of prostitutes in Brecht's plays with what her mother had told her about them: "Sie schützen uns vor den hungrigen Männern, sie sind unsere Heiligen" 'They protect us from the hungry men. They are our saints' (Sterne 59).<sup>55</sup> Prostitutes thus represent low social status (the ultimate exploités of the capitalist system) paired with a certain personal and sexual freedom.<sup>56</sup>

In general it seems that the regulating discourse is more prevalent in Santiago, while it is less restrictive in Özdamar's writing. Both protagonists, however, represent their grandmothers as somewhat subversive regarding the issues of gender roles and sexual freedoms. Morales-Díaz ascribes a feminist attitude to Esmeralda's paternal grandmother with whom she spends some time as a child while her father visits other women. *Abuela* is getting some kind of revenge in her old age by banning her husband from her bedroom and retreating to devout Catholicism, thus renouncing sex (Morales-Díaz 145). However, she is powerless when it comes to her son's philandering and Esmeralda notices in the conversation between her and her mother that remaining *jamona* (old maid) may not be such a bad option for women after all (*Puerto Rican* 104).<sup>57</sup>

In contrast Emine reports about a certain feminine freedom and expression of sexual pleasure even among the rural women that she, as a young Marxist student, is trying to educate about orgasm. Thereby she comments ironically on the protagonist's naivete, when the women laugh and say: "Wir Bauern haben nur einen Spaß, den Spaß im Bett" 'The only fun we peasants have is the fun in bed' (*Brücke* 270). In Berlin when meeting her *WG* for the first time, Emine feels compelled to talk about her grandmother who survived three husbands and wants to live with the last one in paradise; he went to see prostitutes who taught him erotic skills that she liked (*Sterne* 50).<sup>58</sup> The same grandmother is also reported to clap with joy when she sees young couples kiss (*Sterne* 186). In contrast to Santiago's grandmother, Emine's has conserved some *jouissance*<sup>59</sup> and is honest about the facts of sexual attraction.<sup>60</sup>

Thus both protagonists rebel against gender and sexual limitations set by certain authorities in their culture. Both characters are determined to live out the lifestyle of sexual liberation and free love. Their mothers' worry seems justified when reading Kristeva's comments on how often immigrant women from more restrictive cultures start experimenting sexually in a new environment (30).<sup>61</sup> At the same time, their texts point out that within those hegemonic discourses of their families a rebellion or destabilization is taking place in the contradictory behavior of their own mothers and grandmothers.

In both authors' works the male gaze on the foreign woman is one of appropriation and desire to conquer the female exotic stranger. All of Esmeralda's dates (the Texan Avery Lee, the Germans Jürgen and Otto, and finally Ulvi) are attracted by her exotic looks, which feed the men's stereotyping sexual fantasies. When Avery Lee attempts to recruit her as his mistress since he deems it improper to marry a "Spanish

girl," Esmeralda rejects this and is deeply offended: "I was the virginal Maria of *West Side Story*, but he envisioned me as the promiscuous Anita" (*Woman* 247). Ulvi finally makes her a blank page by calling her "Chiquita," an innocent naive girl, in which he wants to inscribe his law in terms of behavior, dresses, and friends: "Ah Chiquita, you are innocent...I will teach you everything. But you must listen what I say" (*Lover* 22). Although Esmeralda thinks that she has failed her mother's aspiration for her as a "decent Puerto-Rican girl," Ulvi takes over the mother's role and discourse trying to control Esmeralda's behavior and ultimately sexuality. Breaking out of it, for example by talking to other men or talking too much in public, would mean, as for her mother, being "a spoiled American girl" (219) or a "cheap whore" (283).<sup>62</sup>

Özdamar mentions the curious gaze of the border policemen between East and West Berlin, who let her pass in spite of the fact that she is exporting food (carp) illegally, the colleagues at the theater, who call her "Schöne des Südens" "beauty of the south" or "türkischer Flieder" "turkish lilac," and that Heiner Müller and Benno Besson flirt with her. After she has spent the night with Peter in the *WG*, he comments "Entführung aus dem Serail" 'Abduction from the Seraglio'.<sup>63</sup> These remarks are certainly of orientalizing quality, but the speakers seem aware of it and display a somewhat ironic attitude towards them. In general, German men do not seem to be in an absolute position of power, as is reflected in Müller's question during a party and her evasive reaction: "'Was denkst du über uns deutsche Männer?' Ich war total besoffen und dachte lange nach" "'What do you think about us German men?' I was totally drunk and thought for a long time" (178). Parallel to the affair with Peter in the West, Emine sleeps a couple of times with Graham, a British stage worker, whom she meets in East Berlin, and later she

falls in love with Steve, an American professor who lives in Copenhagen. The stereotyping of the foreign woman happens not as much within these love relationships, but in small scenes on the side. Similar to Santiago, men of their own culture do not play a very favorable role either. While in Santiago's work Puerto Rican men are often portrayed elusive and irresponsible towards their wives and girlfriends (her father and Don Carlos, her mother's lying boyfriend, for example), men from both cultures display the objectifying attitudes in Özdamar. At a party in West Berlin she meets the Kurdish lover of a Social Democrat city council member who thinks she is Kurdish too, because of her beauty, and the Turkish men who cross into the East to find German wives there call her a whore.<sup>64</sup> At a swimming lake she and her friend run into an East German Nazi, who is sexually attracted to Emine and thinks her to be Bulgarian or Russian, calling himself a pure blooded Prussian.

It is obvious that Esmeralda suffers from Ulvi's abuse, but feels unable to leave him, thus collaborating in a codependent relationship, while Emine reacts aloofly or with amusement to the many advances of men. On the other hand she does admit really being in love with Steve, perceiving this as a conflict with her artistic projects.

In both texts, the characters' actions ultimately undermine existing power structures, thereby rendering the system of domination fragile. During the course of *Lover*, Ulvi's control over Esmeralda keeps diminishing, even though it is obvious that she is suffering from his abuse: He is ultimately dependent on her help with his studies, and his attempts to micromanage her life and her other relationships appear more and more desperate, revealing his own insecurities, fears, and lack of self confidence. Even though Esmeralda seems to comply with his demands on the outside, she keeps



developing her own interests, career, and relationships whenever she is not under his supervision. The reader thus notices her gaining power in the professional and emotional field, while his success as a film maker never materializes, and his career as professor doesn't take off either. Towards the end of *Lover*, he seems to have exhausted most of his options, while she stands at the beginning of her career: "He was more depressed than I had ever seen him...He looked worn, with deep, dark rings under his eyes...One night he dropped his face into my bosom and sobbed...The reason things never worked out for him, he said, was that he had a terrible childhood" (300-301). The relationship ends, when Esmeralda finally summons up the courage to openly rebel against his constant jealous attacks on her morality and sends him away.

Özdamar does not let her autobiographic subject show or reflect feelings, but her narrated "I" seems either aloof or ironically dismissive, especially when it comes to ethnic stereotyping. Emine parodies stereotypic perceptions of herself as an exotic stranger. The Kurd, for example, is countered with the statement: "In einem alten Cafe in Istanbul sprach mich einmal ein türkischer Faschist an: 'Sie sind bestimmt Turkmenin oder Tscherkessin. Ihre Fersen verraten mir das'" "In an old coffee house in Istanbul a Turkish Faschist told me: 'You must be Turkmen or Circassian. Your heels tell me that'" (41). When the Nazi at the lake addresses her:

"Na, kleines süßes Ding, wo kann ich dich treffen? Bist du Russin? Ich habe sofort erkannt, daß du slawisch bist. Ich könnte dein Gesicht und deinen Kopf messen, zu Hause habe ich ein Meßgerät. Damit kann ich jede Rasse bestimmen." (*Sterne* 137)

"Hey, you cute little thing, where can we meet? Are you Russian? I have noticed right away that you must be Slavic. I have a measuring device at my house. With that I can determine any race."

Her ironic answer leads his statements ad absurdum:

Ich sagte: "Ich bin jüdisch, rede nicht mit mir, sonst wird dein Blut beschmutzt." ... "Warum sind denn die Deutschen für dich eine grosse Rasse?" "Die Deutschen haben zum Beispiel den Kommunismus erfunden, Marx und Engels waren ja auch Deutsche." "Marx war auch Jude. Ich will lesen, tschüß." (137)<sup>65</sup>

I said: "I'm Jewish, don't talk to me or your blood will be contaminated." ... "Why do you think the Germans are a great race?" "The Germans have invented Communism, for example. Marx and Engels were German, too." "Marx was Jewish, too. I want to read, bye."

Both *Lover* and *Sterne* discuss and at least partly reject the ideal of romantic love, although in different ways. Esmeralda reflects and analyses the authenticity of her feelings for Ulvi, doubting that it is love, and at some point reaches the psychological conclusion: "Our relationship was a web of matched neuroses and it was up to me to untangle them if I ever wanted to be free" (296). Özdamar, on the other hand, employs once again self-parody in the sense of Butler when talking about her being in love and the contradictions in her own person. When she is unhappy after her British lover Graham returns to England, "Ich hätte nicht mal um einen Toten so geweint" 'I would not have cried that much if he had been dead' (128), she parodies her romantic feelings, but also her attempts to cope with them in Brechtian rational manner. "Er (Brecht) hat einfach die Verhaltensweisen der Geliebten und seine eigenen Widersprüche beobachtet. Er hat sich nicht hergegeben. Wieso bin ich so weinerlich?" 'He [Brecht] simply observed his lovers' behavior and his own contradictions. He did not give up himself. Why am I so whiny?' (132).

Even though neither Esmeralda nor Emine depict their autobiographic subject as explicitly feminist, they practice the sexual liberation of the sixties and seventies by noticing and seeking out attractive men and so appropriate the male gaze of desire. For example, Esmeralda about the Brazilian Oscar with whom she has a one night stand: "He

had warm olive skin, hazel eyes, brown hair, a mellifluous voice that rose and dipped with soft vowels and unexpected consonants" (125). Emine writes about her British lover: "Graham hat ein interessantes Gesicht, schwere Augenlider, rote kräftige Haar, roter Bart. Ein sehr schöner Mund" 'Graham has an interesting face, heavy eyelids, thick red hair, red beard. A very beautiful mouth' (*Sterne* 116-117).

Furthermore, both characters reject jealousy and so rebel against the cultural norm of one man, one woman, and the sexual relationship as a mutual possession. Emine accepts that Peter has a girlfriend and sleeps in a different room when she visits. Again, the reader does not know what she feels, but may suspect that she adheres to a socialist ideal. When Ulvi talks on the phone for hours with his German friend Irmchen, or flirts around with cheerleaders, Esmeralda feels hurt, but makes the conscious decision not to show it, in order to conserve her self respect: "A woman fighting over a man was pathetic, and I had decided, while still a girl, that jealousy would not be a part of my life- or at least, its public display" (151).

Finally, the important role other women beyond mothers and grandmothers play in both works should be pointed out. The "community of women" is interestingly inclusive, meaning that it extends over ethnic, age and class boundaries, something that both works have in common.<sup>66</sup> One can even argue that the relationships between women constitute a "touching tale" (Adelson) as the following examples will show. These tales are about resisting discourses of power in the form of emotional and practical support. As with other topics discussed above, the kinds of relationships reflect back on values of the respective society or social group within that society (American/German).

Esmeralda has only one Puerto Rican friend, her cousin Alma, but a few Anglo girlfriends (Jacqueline, Shirley, Marie, and Marilyn) who support her when it comes to career planning and self assertiveness. They offer emotional and practical help when she tries to get away from Ulvi. However, this community is not a stable network, since the girlfriends appear in a succession, in the order in which she meets them and that except in the case of Jacqueline, who is very ill, appear in the role of helpers or mentors who play an important role for Esmeralda's personal and professional success. Shirley lectures her on feminism and equal relationships, co-worker Marie takes her in when she leaves Ulvi the first time and encourages her to apply to Harvard, while Marilyn serves as a confidante when Esmeralda finally ends the relationship. Also, the relationships do not seem very reciprocal, partly because the other women do not seem to open up to Esmeralda in the same way she does to them.

This is certainly different in *Sterne*, where the relationships between girlfriends are depicted as more emotional, conspirational, and intimate. At the same time, they represent more "touching tales" creating links between cultures. The three legged old bathtub in the West Berlin WG where Emine meets Inga and Barbara on the first day and is invited to join them, is a clear allusion to the Turkish bath, which for centuries had served women as a place for relaxation and conversation removed from male control. During the months that follow, this bath tub then becomes a regular meeting place for the women (Barbara, Inga, Susanne, and Emine) to wash each other's hair and to talk. Although the male roommates may pass the tub in order to shave or wash their hands, they never join the women, respecting this female realm. A similar example are Emine's all-night conversations with Gabi in the East, during which they have several pots of

peppermint tea (both an Oriental *and* a German beverage) and secretly use Gabi's ex-husband's record player to listen to Janis Joplin.<sup>67</sup> In another brief scene in a hospital room, Emine is waiting for a neighbor lady and in the meantime, helps the nurse serving tea to a room with six old ladies, cuts an old lady's nails and listens to their stories about past and present oppression.<sup>68</sup> In all these examples Emine seems as important to her German friends or interlocutors as vice versa, yes they seem almost eager to confess to her as someone from the outside as she needs to tell them about Turkey (and her grandmother).<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that both works depict tendencies in the culture of origin to control womens' bodies and sexuality, which are expressed in restrictive discourses regarding their virginity and their freedom of movement. The Puerto Rican culture (as depicted in Santiago) thereby produces stronger binary oppositions, for example mother, virgin/whore and male/female. However, there are forces in these cultures themselves to undermine these restrictive regulations, be it in the form of contradicting behaviors or open rebellion. Furthermore, the host culture has discourses in place that try to objectify the foreign woman, making her the exotic object of male desires. However, neither Özdamar nor Santiago depict these attempts as being successful; both protagonists resist them by making the male the explicit object of their desire as well. While Esmeralda's resistance shows itself more in direct actions that lead to her independence, Emine undermines power structures rather discursively through parody and irony.

Ultimately, the "outcome" for the female protagonist mirrors American versus German cultural preferences: Esmeralda, in the words of critic Morales Díaz "asserts herself as strong, decisive, and self-assured" and "evolves ...to an independent woman able to choose the life she envisions for herself" (146). This mirrors Anglo –American atomistic individualism that believes in cultivation of self and the ultimate freedom of choice. While both Esmeralda and Emine choose to end love relationships to pursue other goals, Esmeralda ends an oppressive relationship to free herself and then start her own project after graduation. Emine's relationship with Steve appears to be more equal, and the end of it appears to be more of a sacrifice than liberation when she chooses her theater work instead and declares: "Ich werde Besson treu bleiben" 'I will remain true to Besson' (*Sterne* 245). The cultural project of Brecht theater in Paris is about relationships or being part of a bigger project which has less to do with gender differences and mirrors the values of the leftist European scene of the seventies.

### Storytelling: History and Memory

Storytelling and shared experience are the markers of traditional solidarity.

--- Michael M. J. Fischer (105)

It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences.

--- Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (83)

The act of memory defies uniformity.

--- Juan Flores, "*Broken English Memories*" (340)

Azade Seyhan observes in her reflection on the popularity of autobiographical writings: "The current interest in memory is based, to a large degree, on the mistrust of scientific objectivity in history and psychology" (39). Santiago as well as Özdamar engage in storytelling and include dialogic relations and different perspectives in their personal story. By telling their own and other people's stories and memories of trauma, disruption, and nostalgia, they position themselves and others within American and European history, and reflect on specific attitudes of their time. These stories provide multiple and alternative versions of official history and illustrate how the individual locates him- or herself at the "intersection of wider historical processes" (M. Fischer 92). I also claim that many of these stories are "touching tales" in the sense of Adelson, reflecting on common experiences. Furthermore, the following examples will illustrate "American" or "German/European" perspectives in Santiago and Özdamar, being careful at the same time to not fall into the trap of stereotypes and essentialism.<sup>70</sup>

Even before they set foot in the new land, both narrated "I"s have already been influenced by America and Europe through cultural import. Santiago remembers the Spanish version of *Reader's Digest* and Dick and Jane from her English primer. In *When I Was Puerto Rican*, Esmeralda recalls the education campaigns of the fifties on hygiene

and proper nutrition, which had clearly colonialist traits: white bread, broccoli, apples, and pears are recommended to the people for proper nutrition. "'But señor,' said Doña Lola from the back of the room, 'none of the fruits and vegetables on your chart grow in Puerto Rico'" (66). Later, her dad explains to Esmeralda the word "imperialism: "They call *Americanos* imperialists, which means they want to change our country and our culture to be like theirs" (73). The American school breakfast, which is forced on the children, doesn't agree with her stomach and she is relieved when the American elections are over and the breakfasts cease. Her repulsion for American food thus reflects Esmeralda's uneasy and hostile attitude towards North America.

Özdamar expresses equally hostile sentiments towards US imperialism in all three volumes, especially in *Karawanserei*, where her protagonist has a similar reaction of repulsion to American powdered milk.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, she remembers her first impressions of European influence with certain fondness. In an essay written for the symposium *Europa schreibt (Europe writes)* in 2003, she recalls her parents going to a movie theater on Mondays that showed only European movies, especially French and Italian ones. "So waren unsere ersten europäischen Gäste Jean Gabin und Rossano Brazzi" 'Thus our first European guests were Jean Gabin and Rossano Brazzi' (232).<sup>72</sup> Her mother reads Dostoevski when Emine is a child, and she herself is heavily influenced by European literature:

Als Kind waren meine ersten europäischen Gäste die Toten: Madame Bovary, Robinson Crusoe, Isadora Duncan, Moliere. Als junge Frau in der 68er-Bewegung in Istanbul hielt ich auf den Schiffen zwischen Asien und Europa wieder die europäischen Toten als Bücher in meinen Händen und in meinem Herzen....Ich sah Woyzeck im Theater, nicht mehr auf den deutschen Straßen. Aber Woyzeck existierte auf den türkischen Straßen. Dort sah man Männer, die einen wie Büchners Figur Woyzeck berührten. ("Gastgesichter" 239-40)



As a child, my first European guests were the dead: Madame Bovary, Robinson Crusoe, Isadora Duncan, Moliere. As a young woman in the 1968 movement in Istanbul I was on the ships between Asia and Europe, holding the European dead as books in my hands and in my heart...I saw Woyzeck in the theater, but no longer in the German streets. But Woyzeck existed in the Turkish streets. There you saw men who moved you like Büchner's Woyzeck.

The historical and emotional entanglement with the other culture or the universalism of certain figures and topoi does influence the way stories are told in the respective books. The inner attitude of the narrated "I" determines how many connections she sees between her own and the new culture, how personal stories and political events are interconnected, and what meaning they are attributed within a larger context.

It is important to note that there is a tendency in Santiago to treat those stories of disruption and trauma as individual accounts which belong to a private realm, although the reader might understand the social and historical context by implication. Racism and prejudices against minorities, especially Latinos and Blacks, are clearly a topic in all three of her memoirs. She reports being called "spick" behind her back, and being stereotyped: "All this was the self-hatred engendered by racist remarks from total strangers who spit out 'Spick!' as I passed them on the sidewalk as if they had been waiting for just such an opportunity" (*Lover* 186). She is upset when in Lubbock, her Anglo landlords tell her and Ulvi to move after neighbors complain about them being "colored." Esmeralda is clearly aware of the women's movement when reading about it or through friends like Shirley in Lubbock. However at first she does not know how to apply it to herself, although she is conscious of living in an abusive and exploitative relationship (185/86).

Among the historical events of her time, she does mention Vietnam, Watergate, and the Civil Rights Movement, but affirms on the other hand that she had no interest in politics back then and even seemed to be afraid to take a position.

Whenever possible, I avoided arguments and discord, at home or away from it. If I were strolling along Fifth Avenue and saw the hand-printed signs and folk-singing, fist-raising swarms of antiwar or civil rights demonstrators, I turned in a different direction. If friends at a party became vocal about Vietnam, it was time for me to go. (*Lover* 132)

One could say that Esmeralda is out of tune with the leftist political movement of her time, even when it is about racism. When she has a job at the Museum of Modern Arts and needs to confront Puerto Rican members of a Guerilla Art Action Group, she is accused of being a "sell out" and "acting white" by them. It hurts her, but she cannot follow their perception of accepted art: "I didn't know ...that to some people Monet's *Waterlilies* were not the tranquil refuge into beauty I had always experienced, but a symbol of white European hegemony in the art world" (132).

While in Lubbock and Syracuse, she meets liberal or left leaning Anglo-Americans and Europeans, but contends that their way of being politically active does not speak to her. When they look at a slide show on Third World problems at the house of a German-Swedish couple, Esmeralda feels patronized because it seems that she and Ulvi as darker skinned people are supposed to have more knowledge about these things. While Ulvi fulfills his friends' expectations by eloquently talking about issues, she says about herself: "I had no opinions, only questions. 'Why,' I asked once, 'does every slide we see at these gatherings show poor people? Why is poverty so fascinating?' The question hung like an accusation. No one answered, not any of the four philosophy graduate students in the room, not the psychologist, not the Master in social work" (*Lover* 164). In this way,

Santiago represents herself as naive and open minded at the same time, as a reaction to her friends' well meaning, but fruitless efforts against world poverty.

Even though Esmeralda does not present herself as activist, we learn later in the book that she can claim the successes of the Civil Rights Movement for herself, by getting into Harvard through Affirmative Action. However, since she isn't politically conscious, Marie, her feminist white co-worker gives her the idea:

"I've never thought of myself as a 'minority.'" I curled my fingers to put quote marks around the work.

"You don't but other people do. Take advantage of it, all it will cost you is a stamp," she said, finishing her coffee. (216)

In the meantime, she has not only left behind her family - nobody comes to her graduation-, but also Ulvi: "With those words, *el hombre que yo amo* confirmed that there was no future for us as a couple. How could there be when he refused to acknowledge my family?...With those words I saw Ulvi for what he was, a stop along the journey. And as I had already discovered, another train would come" (272).

At the same time, one can observe not only a lack of historical reflection (explorations into the history of Puerto Rico and the USA), but also a curious absence of storytelling among characters that would evoke some kind of past or historical experience. The Europeans Esmeralda meets during her years in New York, especially in *Almost a Woman*, (for example her German boyfriends Jürgen and Otto) are strangely silent about the fairly recent past. Her Jewish co-worker Ilsa – as one of the few exceptions- only starts telling when asked why she hates Otto and all Germans: "'The whole country stood by as Jews were murdered. My mother, my father, my sisters and brother.' The passion in her voice was hypnotic, and I remained silent, hoping she'd continue, but she bit her lips and said no more" (*Woman* 190).

It is thus as if the ability to "exchange experiences" in the sense of Walter Benjamin has often been lost by the characters in Santiago's books. They start telling, but interrupt themselves, they may make insinuations or allusions, but the present they are living in America seems to swallow up such attempts. The figure of Ulvi is interesting in this context. Clearly from a different culture (Turkish-European) and conscious of it, he has a certain disdain for American ignorance of the rest of the world and their optimism about their country's place in it (*Lover* 163). In contrast to Esmeralda, he is an avid newspaper reader and news watcher and has opinions on every political event. There is a telling scene which shows Esmeralda's confusion about her national identity:

"That is what the Kennedy family wants, Chiquita, that Americans will not pay so much attention."

"I'm not American."

... "Chiquita," he said softly and deliberately, "even if you don't like, you are American."

"I'm Puerto Rican." (*Lover* 80)

Ulvi is able to see what Esmeralda cannot: that in spite of her ethnic heritage she is American, at least by passport, but also, as he insinuates, in her disinterest in and ignorance of politics and foreign affairs. Maybe Ulvi is the most displaced and traumatized character in the whole book, but like the others, his ability to tell his story or share his experience has been suppressed or stifled. Nevertheless, he is the one from whom we learn most about historical and political contexts. On various instances, he makes allusions to his family circumstances; his father and sister Ulviye, the reason why he had to leave Turkey, his bad experiences with people in Germany when he was a guest worker. Towards the end of their relationship, when suffering from depressive episodes, he starts talking about his father, who was a survivor of the Armenian genocide.

Now he revealed that his father, Hassan, was born in a remote village in Anatolia. When Hassan was a boy his family was killed and their homes burned during one of the pogroms against Armenians by Turkish soldiers,

"He hid in the woods near a river," Ulvi said. "When he came out in the morning, the river was flowing with blood and there were bodies everywhere he looked."

...

"Does this mean," I asked, "that you're Armenian?"

"No, Chiquita, I'm Turkish," he said with such hauteur that he forgot his troubles. He got up, went to the bathroom to wash his face and the revelations were over. (301-302)

Ulvi has suppressed the historical memory of his origin as part of the general amnesia in Turkey regarding this topic.

In contrast, storytelling takes up much more room in all books of the *Berlin – Istanbul Trilogie*, with an emphasis on it in *Sterne*. This causes the text to look fragmented at times, through the before mentioned montage technique and changes of perspectives. In the words of Fischer, we find a lot more "triangulations among multiple perspectival positionings," i.e. the interweaving of different perspectives (79). Since Özdamar's style is less self-reflexive or self-justificational, the protagonist seldom states her personal opinion on political circumstances or historical events as they happen or happened in Germany. However, like Esmeralda, she has more questions than opinions, although everybody around her seems to have one. Özdamar's reflection on politics and history circle around the major issues of the seventies in Germany and Turkey, as well as around the traumas of both nations' recent history. They appear connected, there is a continuity between past and present *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will* (past that will not pass away), because it has not been dealt with properly.<sup>73</sup> The German problems are clearly the division into East and West, the insular isolation of West Berlin, where Emine's seven roommates live, and terrorism (the Baader-Meinhof affair).<sup>74</sup> They are depicted as an aftermath or consequences of World War II and the Holocaust. When in

West Berlin, Emine notes not only the flood of newspaper headlines she quotes within the narration, but also the slogans and graffiti inside restrooms, on house walls, in parks, on train cars, and on doors. She concludes that German society is at war with itself:

Ganz Westberlin war im Wörterkrieg. Aus allen Löchern kamen Wörter heraus und hatten keine Wirkung....Der Westberliner Wörterkrieg war wie das verlängerte Echo eines echten Krieges. Barbara sagte: "Wir wollen mit unseren Eltern, die den Krieg mitgemacht haben, nichts zu tun haben. Deswegen sind wir nach Berlin abgehauen, aber der Krieg ist auch hier – die vielen alten Kriegerwitwen und die alten Männer ohne Arme oder Hände. Die Westberliner Hunde sind Hunde gegen die Kriegseinsamkeit, Kriegsberuhigungstabletten. Die Männer sind tot, die Hunde haben ihre Plätze eingenommen. (Sterne 65-66).

All Berlin was in a war of words. Words came out of holes and had no effect...The war of words in West Berlin was like the prolonged echo of a real war. Barbara said: "We don't want anything to do with our parents who participated in the war. This is why we came to Berlin, but the war is here as well – all the old war widows and the old men without arms or hands. The dogs in West Berlin are dogs against the loneliness of war, sedatives against the war. The men are dead, the dogs have taken their places.

Özdamar's German characters are traumatized, but they tell stories. Emine functions as a witness of storytelling; she overhears and elicits stories from them. However, Özdamar does not comment on them or judges them openly by not relating an emotional reaction to them. For example when she overhears two old war widows talk about the Holocaust:

Erste Frau: "Ich bin kein Judenfreund."

Zweite Frau: "Aber nicht vergasen. Nicht umbringen. Diese Schrecklichkeiten. So eine Strafe, das ist nicht richtig.

Erste Frau: "Ich weiß es nicht, ich war nicht dabei, ich hab früher nichts davon gewußt."

Zweite Frau: "Ich auch nicht."

...

Erste Frau: "Ja wissen Sie, zu Goebbels hat mal eine gesagt, die Juden sind doch auch Menschen. Da hat er gesagt, ja Wanzen sind auch Tiere, aber recht unangenehm, das hat Goebbles gesagt."

Das Wort Wanzen kannte ich noch nicht. "Was sind Wanzen?"

Erste Frau: "Sie saugen Blut aus, aber heute gibt es sie nicht mehr. Durch den Krieg ist alles weg." (Sterne 66-67)

First woman: "I'm no friend of the Jews."

Second woman: "But gassing them was wrong. These atrocities. Such a punishment isn't right."

First woman: "I don't know, I wasn't there, I didn't know anything back then."

Second woman: "Neither did I."

...

First woman: "You know, some lady once said to Goebbels, Jews are humans, too. He answered, yes, bedbugs are animals, too, but nasty ones, that's what Goebbels said."

I didn't know the word bedbugs yet. "What are bedbugs?"

First woman: "They suck blood, but they aren't around anymore. Because of the war, everything is gone."

Later in the book, the reader is reminded that Emine's grandmother's generation had seen similar things.

Du hast sieben Kinder verloren und glaubtest, daß sie alle Engel sind und dich ins Paradies tragen werden. Du hast so viele Tote gesehen. Auch die Armenier. Manchmal bist du aufgestanden und hast geschrien: "Wie sich die armenischen Mädchen von den Brücken gestürzt haben!" Du hattest ihren Kindern Essen gebracht. Eine alte Armenierin lebte bei dir. Sie trug in ihren Taschen immer trockenes Brot bei sich. "Warum?" fragtest du. "Damit ich nicht verhungere, wenn ich mich wieder in einer Höhle verstecken muss." (227)

You had lost seven children and believed that they all were angels and would carry you into paradise. You have seen so many dead. Also the Armenians. Sometimes you got up and cried: "How the Armenian girls hurled themselves off the bridges!" You had brought their children bread. An old Armenian woman lived with you. She always carried dry bread in her pockets. You asked her: "Why?" "So I won't starve when I have to hide in a cave again."

In contrast to the German women, though, the grandmother acknowledged what happened and grieved over it. The fact that violence and oppression still have not ended is reflected in an outcry after Emine hears from friends that a lot of demonstrators were killed in Istanbul during the Mayday demonstration: "Die Nachrichten aus meinem Land sind ein einziges Wort: Mord" "The news from my country can be comprised in one word: murder" (101). This juxtaposing of Turkish and German past and present via storytelling in form of mosaic memory represents an attempt to do cross cultural comparison

(Fischer) and to find a moral common ground. It also shows Özdamar's connectedness to European ideals of democracy and freedom of speech. At the same time, she remains true to her grandmother's subjective and personal interest in something like micro history that focuses on overlooked but still important people and events:

Was dachte Albrecht damals? Wie war seine Mutter? Was haben sie damals gegessen? Wie war die Liebe damals? Wie sprach man damals mit Kindern? Und die Großmutter von Dürer – wenn sie aus dem Fenster schaute, was sah sie damals? (36)<sup>75</sup>

What did Albrecht think back then? What was his mother like. What did they eat? What was love like? How did people talk to their children? And Dürer's grandmother? When she looked out of her window, what did she see?

One of her roommates, Reiner, tells his friends another story that testifies to the break between the postwar generation and their parents:

Er war fünf Jahre alt, als der Krieg zu Ende ging. Einmal hatte er in den Ruinen gespielt und dort einen schwarzen amerikanischen Soldaten getroffen, der ihm eine Pampelmuse geschenkt hatte. (74)

He was five years old when the war ended. One day while playing in the rubble he had run into a black American soldier who had given him a grapefruit.

The absence of father figures in the postwar chaos, makes him reject his real father years later: "...Als Reiners richtiger Vater aus der russischen Gefangenschaft zurückkam, sagte er zu ihm: 'Du bist nicht mein Vater.' Mit vierzehn haute Reiner von zu Hause ab" "When Reiner's real father returned from Russian imprisonment, he told him: 'You are not my father.' At the age of fourteen, Reiner ran away from home" (74).

Turkey's and Germany's histories are intertwined. Emine notices on a Berlin house wall "Tod dem Faschismus" 'Death to Facism' in Turkish, a reminder that why among other things she left. Murat, a Turkish waiter, reports that older German men told him: "Türke, Deutscher, Kamerad im Ersten Weltkrieg" 'Turk, German, comrades in World



War I' (69). He is the one who also tells Emine about the Turkish men who have German wives in the East and keep going back and forth. Her roommate and boyfriend Peter remarks about the Turks that they are adopting German customs with a ten year delay: "Die Türken lagen unter ihren Autos und reparierten sie. 'In den sechziger Jahren haben die Deutschen genauso unter ihren Autos gelegen'" "The Turks were crawling under their cars and repairing them. 'Back in the sixties, the Germans crawled under their cars just like that'" (72).

After getting her visa for East Berlin, Emine moves over there to work at the Volksbühne with the Brecht disciple Benno Besson. In East Berlin, there is an even greater obsession with history, which is reported in different ways. The plays that are rehearsed and discussed at the *Volksbühne* and of which Emine is taking notes and sketches, all deal in some way with history, albeit through the lens of historical materialism. That is certainly true for Brecht's *The Good Woman of Sechuan*, but especially for the plays by Heiner Müller like *The Battle* and *The Peasants*, as well as Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Citizens' General*. The rehearsals are interspersed by Marxist commentaries like:

Dabei ist Goethe nicht prinzipiell gegen die Französische Revolution, hält sie aber für Deutschland nicht für geeignet. Seine Idee ist die Erziehung der Fürsten...Der Dorfrichter ist ein Dummkopf, es gibt keine Solidarität im Stück, die Bauern werfen sich in die Arme des Edelmanns, der ein raffinierter, bewußter Klassenkämpfer von oben ist. (144)

Goethe is not in principle against the French Revolution, but he thinks it is not right for Germany. His idea is the education of the noblemen...The village judge is stupid, there is no solidarity in the play, the peasants throw themselves into the arms of the nobleman, who is a cunning, class conscious warrior from above.

On Heiner Müller's *Peasants* she remarks: "Der neue Stalinist Beutler zeigt dem Landrat seine Freundschaft. Er ist ein Karrierist, gefährlich. Er hat alle Bücher von Stalin

gelesen, aber der Landrat, ein bewußter Arbeiter, merkt sofort seine Heuchelei" "The new Stalinist Beutler shows the councilman his friendship. He is career oriented, dangerous. He has read all of Stalin's books, but the councilman notices immediately his hypocrisy' (119).

Frequently, Emine notes parallels between European literature and plays and Turkish folklore. So, she describes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a "touching tale" because:

*Hamlet* ist eine türkische Dorfgeschichte. Hamlet ist ein türkischer Bauer, sein Vater war Großgrundbesitzer und ist von seinem eigenen Bruder vergiftet worden, damit dieser den Grund und Boden seines Bruders bekommt. Dazu heiratet er die Frau seines Bruders, Hamlets Mutter. Solche Ereignisse gab es immer wieder in der Türkei. Wenn ein Mann stirbt, heiratet der Bruder dessen Frau. Mein Stück heißt *Hamlet-Ahmet*. (Sterne 194)

*Hamlet* is a Turkish village story. Hamlet is a Turkish peasant, his father was a landowner and was poisoned by his own brother, in order to get his land. Also, he marries his brother's wife. Such things used to happen a lot in Turkey. When a man dies, his brother marries the widow. My play would be called *Hamlet-Ahmet*.

Like the Germans in West Berlin, people in East Berlin have lots of stories to tell about the Nazi past and their families' fate. Oftentimes, and in contrast to the West Berliners, they draw parallels to Turkey, like a taxi driver who knows about fascism in Turkey and expresses his solidarity, and the old ladies at the hospital, whom Emine meets when she accompanies a friend.

Die Frau, die auf Krücken geht, lag im Bett und las ein Reisebuch über Ägypten. "Gibt es in der Türkei Faschisten?" fragte sie. "Als Adolf damals hier an die Macht kam, fing das Töten an." Ihr Mann war vor dem Krieg in der Sozialdemokratischen Partei gewesen. (217)

The lady with the crutches was in her bed, reading a travel book about Egypt. "Do you have fascists in Turkey?" she asked. "When Adolf came to power here, the killing began." Her husband had been a member in the Social Democratic Party before the war.

Emine's friend and landlady, Gabi Gysi, tells her in detail about her Russian-Prussian-Jewish forefathers in Petersburg and how they survived World War II. About Heiner Müller, Emine learns:

...daß Müllers Vater von den Nazis verfolgt wurde, später in der DDR hatte er Schwierigkeiten mit den Kommunisten, dann ging er in den Westen und arbeitete in der westdeutschen Verwaltung. Seine Aufgabe war es, den Naziwitwen ihre Pension auszuzahlen. (118)

...that his father was persecuted by the Nazis, later, in the GDR, he had problems with the Communists, then he went to the West and worked in the civil administration there. It was his job to pay pensions to the widows of Nazis.

The feeling of identification and empathy is clearly conveyed, not as much in overt comments by the narrated "I," but through the fact that these impressions and stories are being told. Both German and Turkish society are scarred and traumatized by their respective histories. However, the reader gains the impression that the people Emine meets in the East display less self pity and are more focused in telling their tales and placing them into a larger historical contexts. For example Emine's seven roommates in West Berlin "die sieben Zwerge" "seven dwarfs" are represented as quite disorganized, unfocused, and whiny.

...die sieben Seminaristen sprachen über das Wort *deprimierend*: "Wir sind depressiv, weil Westberlin depressiv ist." ....Während sie sprachen, räumte ich den Tisch ab und spülte das Geschirr. (53)

...the seven seminarists were discussing the word *depressing*: "We are depressed, because West Berlin is depressing." ...While they were talking, I cleared the table and washed the dishes.

The narrator, who had just escaped a much more threatening situation in Turkey, ironically adopts a motherly attitude by looking after the practical requirements of the moment and is later dubbed "Snow-white" by her friends. In spite of a certain closeness and mutual understanding, some aspects of the other culture or mentality remain

"strange" to Emine. She observes for example that her West and East German friends often talk a political topic to death: "Wenn Müller, Maron und Gabi sprechen, fühle ich mich wie in einem Fremdsprachenkursus" 'When Müller, Maron, and Gabi are talking I feel like I'm sitting in a foreign language class' (*Sterne* 202).

The scars of history are reflected also in the RAF Terrorism in West Germany, the terrorism-hysteria of the media, and the political unrest and violent clashes of demonstrators with the police in the weeks after the ominous suicides of some terrorist leaders in prison. During the so-called "German Fall" Emine's *WG* was also under suspicion and was searched a couple of times by police. Eventually the social fabric of the group of friends collapses and they disperse. The East German friends on the other hand have to put up with a paranoid government that spies on its most intelligent and critical citizens. Emine gets to know the dissidents Gundula and Rudolph Bahro when the latter is arrested for publishing parts of his latest book in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*. While she and Gabi are looking after his wife, Gabi represents the rational and politically conscious East German. She suggests that her brother, the well known lawyer Gregor Gysi<sup>76</sup> should represent Rudolph and analyses the general German situation: "Bahro ist für Ostdeutschland, was Baader-Meinhof für Westdeutschland war, bevor sie sich als RAF kriminalisiert haben. Sie haben das System in Frage gestellt" 'Bahro is for East Germany, what Baader-Meinhof was for West Germany, before they criminalized themselves as RAF. They have questioned the political system' (230). When her new boyfriend turns out to be a spy for the secret police, she confronts him about his double life and concludes for herself: "Wir werden uns von keinem Ereignis schlagen und

traumatisieren lassen" 'We won't allow anything that happens to beat us down and traumatize us' (236).

In conclusion, both Santiago and Özdamar provide the attentive reader with clues about the time and place they live alongside with subjective reporting on "historical events" or currents, which tell alternative and sometimes conflicting stories. They thus contribute to anthropological and historical insights providing "sondages" or "soundings," exploratory digs into the past (M. Fischer 79). In spite of their stylistic and ideological differences, both Emine's and Esmeralda's stories contribute pieces to the "mosaic memory" Fischer defines "as a figure of the hermeneutical traditions created in the interface between orality ...and literacy" (80).

Santiago's texts however seem to reflect mainstream American ideology by celebrating the protagonist's individualism and personal successes, leaving history and politics on the side or as a backdrop of the scene. Puerto Ricans have left their island in order to achieve some of the American Dream for themselves, which is something Esmeralda does. This dream of self-realization then seems to be her "touching tale" that connects her to everybody else, regardless of racial background. Thereby the political criticism in *When I Was Puerto Rican* of the imperialist USA gives room to an apolitical cosmopolitan attitude in *Woman and Lover*. The student revolt that Esmeralda witnesses reacted to the ongoing war in Vietnam and demanded recognition of ethnic minorities, and thus was also a way of facing the contradictions within North America's colonialist past and present. However, Santiago does not create a "touching tale" out of these events, since her narrated "I" remains distant to this historical-political entanglement between North America and its colonies.<sup>77</sup> Towards the end of *Lover* Esmeralda acknowledges the

more critical opinions of her friends of color, who are more prone to regard themselves as victims of racism, and admits that she does not want to accept this notion. It makes her feel powerless, "weaker than I would acknowledge, crushed under the weight of processes I did not want to name and refused to admit applied to me" (262). This quote clearly illustrates the motivation behind her emphasis on individualistic goals and successes.<sup>78</sup>

If Santiago's biography is not representative of the "average Puerto Rican woman," whatever that might mean, the same must be said, perhaps more emphatically, about Özdamar, since she certainly does not represent the average Turkish immigrant. However, the reader of Özdamar's novels/autobiographies, especially *Sterne*, immediately notices the divisions within Turkish *and* German societies. In contrast to Santiago's ahistorical representation, the reader is given multiple clues in order to understand that both societies' divisions have their origins in atrocities committed in the past. The autobiographic subject and many of the other storytellers clearly suffer from the European trauma of war and genocide and ask themselves how poetry and art can be possible after that. Özdamar's characters are looking primarily for redemption through their work, the whiny West German students, the East German actors, and even the terrorists. Özdamar's Emine wants to redeem herself from survivor's guilt through learning dialectical thinking in the Brechtian terms and chronicling her observations. In this context, the personal success story of the individual is less important than his/her mission. Emine's memories of Turkish atrocities are matched by those of German

oppression or cruelty, but at the same time there are similar dreams: "Death to Fascism" in Turkish on a Berlin house wall. Hereby, she creates "touching tales" supporting Adelson's argument that Germans and Turks share more culture than is often realized.<sup>79</sup> Since neither the narrating nor the narrated "I" provide an interpretation, the stories speak for themselves and rather resemble what Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" calls constellations or configurations "which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (*Illuminations* 263). The constellations in *Sterne* bridge not only time, but also space (Germany/Turkey). History is being reclaimed by the oppressed; each individual story bears traces of truth or what Benjamin calls "chips of Messianism," thus rejecting a hegemonic (official) historical discourse.<sup>80</sup>

However, the latter seems to be true mainly for Özdamar's work, since her emphasis is on multiple memories. While Esmeralda's memories as witness of the sixties and seventies certainly provide an individualistic perspective, her texts lack the preoccupation with prior events and are often limited on the perspective of the narrated "I."

### **Finding a New Language: Reconciliation through Theater**

Heute abend haben Gabi und ich uns unsere Fotos aus der Schauspielschulzeit gezeigt. Gleiche Kostüme, gleiche Gesten. Die beiden Schulen sind 2000 km von einander entfernt. Wir tranken drei Kannen Pfefferminztee.

Last night, Gabi and I showed each other our pictures from drama school. Same costumes, same gestures. The two schools are 2000 km apart. We had three pots of peppermint tea.

--- Özdamar, *Sterne* (193)

I graduated from Performing Arts High School with a degree in drama, but no one knew that the reason I had no depth as an actress was that, in spite of having grown up on an island, I could not swim.

--- Santiago, *Lover* (19)

Although both trilogies reflect upon political and social disruption and the protagonists' personal losses, they end on an optimistic note, showing the chance to reconcile the personal and political/social spheres and to achieve some healing of personal trauma. The protagonists' identities are not restored to wholeness free of contradictions, but rather they learn to take on new masks, to find new ways of expression and self-definition which are open ended. This would confirm Karen Christian's claim: "If we envision *all* identity as a sort of ongoing drag show, as parodic imitation of a nonexistent original, then no configurations of ethnicity, gender, or sexuality can be judged culturally authentic" (150).<sup>81</sup> In the following pages, I will explore to what extent Santiago's and Özdamar's representations of theatrical experience and expression reflect this opinion and how theater serves as a trope in the "ongoing narrative" that constitutes identity (Christian 9). Interestingly, too, both protagonists chose art for its *universality* and *multiplicity* of modes of expression, thus rejecting an ethnic self discovery via Turkish folk theater or Puerto Rican Dance.



I would take this argument even further and claim that reconciliation happens at the intersection of identity quest and the simultaneous forgetting of it in favor of something more universal/utopian that transcends the self-interested question of "Who am I?" Adorno defines the moment of self-forgetting of the subject in language as reconciliation, both within the subject but also between individual and society.

Der Augenblick der Selbstvergessenheit, in dem das Subjekt in der Sprache untertaucht, ist nicht dessen Opfer ans Sein. Er ist keiner der Gewalt, auch nicht der Gewalt gegen das Subjekt, sondern einer von Versöhnung. (57)<sup>82</sup>

The moment of self forgetting, in which the subject is immersed in language, does not mean the subject's sacrifice to being. It is not a moment of violence, not even of violence against the subject, but a moment of reconciliation.

I believe that both works actually attempt to express this idea, through the language of theater, although in radically different ways. In this context, the styles of theater both of them learned, Method and Brecht style, are important for the ongoing discussion in this study of the cultural differences between both works as well as the American and European political and cultural scene. Esmeralda, when learning Method acting<sup>83</sup> in high school, feels unable to successfully apply it because she is afraid to examine her deepest self for emotional truth, as she explains:

If I did, everyone would know I was illegitimate, that I shared a bed with my sister, that we were on welfare. The result was that I was accused by my peers of "indicating," the worst sin a Method actor can commit on stage. To "indicate" meant to pretend to be in the moment by going through the motions, rather than to actually live it.

It was humiliating not to be a good enough actress to fool my teachers and fellow students, but I simply couldn't abandon myself to the craft. I didn't have the skills to act while acting. Because the minute I left the dark, crowded apartment where I lived, I was in performance, pretending to be someone I wasn't. I resisted the Method's insistence on truth as I used it to create a simulated reality. (*Woman 74*)<sup>84</sup>

Thus the fear of having to face uncontrollable feelings keeps her from adopting Method. Also, she is conscious of her identity as a set of different masks, which would

contradict the idea of "deepest self." However, Esmeralda discovers dance as a mode of self expression *and* self forgetting: "For me, dance was not to be shared but to bring me to a place nothing else did. I danced for myself, even when being led across a shiny floor by a skillful partner" (*Woman* 117). Esmeralda first becomes interested in classical Indian dance when the Indian dance teacher says she looks like an Indian dancer. A little later she auditions for a play based on an Indian legend and obtains the role of Lakshmi, the swan goddess. One can argue that the attraction of this art form for Esmeralda lies in the theatric concept in which all art forms come together: "It was a complete art form that combined theater, dance, music, and spectacle. It had its own unique language; every gesture had a name, every emotion a gesture" (*Woman* 133). The ritualistic set of movements thus helps her to find a language without words that represents empowerment and self-abandonment at the same time: "When I danced, I had no tongue, but I was capable of anything. I was a swan, I was a goddess, I vanquished devils" (134).

When her Puerto Rican activist friend tells her to rather devote herself to Puerto Rican dance in order to preserve her own culture, she resists these rigidly defined identity categories (Christian 150): "Why should I be less Puerto Rican if I danced Bharata Natyam?" (*Woman* 286). Later at Harvard, Esmeralda takes private lessons from the Indian dance guru Dulal, who teaches her the story-telling dance form of Khatak which gives her the idea for her thesis: creating a dance interpretation of the Song of Songs, rewriting the text and using elements of Khatak and Middle Eastern music and belly dance. In this, Esmeralda clearly produces a hybrid work of art, which upsets Dulal at first.<sup>85</sup> However, this project also represents universality, since the Song of Songs is an important cultural tradition of both East and West. It implies self-forgetting through love

and ecstasy. Esmeralda's thesis project is a group project, but she stresses that she is at the center of it and that she is telling/dancing her autobiography while her supporting actors are reading the words aloud. On the other hand, her personal story becomes a universal story:

But the Song of Songs was more than my thesis. It was how I explored and conflated my interests, skills, worries, and concerns. I researched, interpreted, wrote, designed, directed, choreographed, and performed one of the most beloved and well-known poems ever written. Each performance explored and expressed themes of race ("I am black but comely, ye daughters of Jerusalem...look not upon me because I am black"); love, passion...loneliness, longing ..., nostalgia, power, and powerlessness...; and alienation from culture, family and lover. It was as close to a biography as I could come. (*Lover* 314)<sup>86</sup>

While the Song of Song as a Bible text represents universality, it also has a history of subjectivistic readings/interpretations (for example by female mystics like Theresa of Avila), pointing to its identificatory message, especially for women. Likewise, Esmeralda's audience and Santiago's reader is (implicitly) invited to identify with Esmeralda as she dances the story. Although she could not successfully adopt Method acting at the high school, she actually does apply it when she dances, although rather in its later forms which focus more on the actor's physical body. The expressiveness of gestures and body postures of the classical Indian school seem to coincide with it.<sup>87</sup> While at the beginning of *Lover* Esmeralda is afraid to expose herself, she finally feels able to do so through the language of this ancient text and ancient dance: "Each word of the Song of Songs, each mudra, each step, each jingle of my ankle bells was a bit of Esmeralda, emerging... After the last note of the last performance, I was a different person" (*Lover* 314). Reconciliation thus happens in the sense of Adorno:

Wo das Ich in der Sprache sich vergißt, ist es doch ganz gegenwärtig...Das aber weist zurück auf das reale Verhältnis zwischen Einzelnem und Gesellschaft. Nicht bloß ist der Einzelne in sich gesellschaftlich vermittelt, nicht bloß sind seine Inhalte

immer zugleich auch gesellschaftlich. Sondern umgekehrt bildet sich und lebt die Gesellschaft auch nur vermöge der Individuen, deren Inbegriff sie ist. (57)

When the I forgets itself in language, it is very present at the same time....This however refers back to the real relationship between the individual and society. Not only is the individual socially constituted, not only are his contents always at the same time social. But on the other hand, society can only form and maintain itself due to the individuals of whom it constitutes itself.

Emine decides early, by the middle of the second volume *Brücke*, to become an actress:

Außerdem wollte ich keine Arbeiterin mehr sein. Ich wollte Schauspielerin werden, alles, was im Leben schwer war, war am Theater leichter. Tod, Haß, Liebe, schwanger sein. (*Brücke* 183-184)

Furthermore, I no longer wanted to be a worker. I wanted to become an actress, everything that was hard in life was easier in the theater. Death, hate, love, pregnancy.

I would argue that Emine actively longs for self-forgetting in her artistic quest, especially in *Sterne*, as stated previously, since there it also goes hand in hand with her wish to distance herself from Turkish and to live in a new language. Acquiring this new language (German) and combining it with other means of expression like body language is crucial. In an interview, Özdamar explains: "You must remember that my first encounter with German was via the theater. I experienced the language as if it were bodily, either by speaking lines myself or hearing them from the bodies of fellow actors. You could almost say that words themselves have bodies, and when they are spoken on stage they are especially beautiful" (Horrocks/Kolinsky 47).

Emine actually discovers many parallels between Turkish and European folk theater, as for example in *Hamlet*. Emine's special love for Brecht also results from his claim for universality expressed in the Marxist revolutionary quest, but also in his language that attracts her.<sup>88</sup> Her training in Turkey had included both the Stanislavsky tradition and Epic Theater. Under her ninety year old teacher, a Stanislavsky student, Emine one day

does an impromptu performance of a mother and her child. Afterwards, the old man makes a prophesy that attests to her ability (unlike Esmeralda's) to abandon herself in her craft:

Er sagte: "Mein Kind, nichts kann dich vom Theater trennen, nur ein Kind. Kinder, habt ihr gesehen, wie zärtlich sie zu ihrem Kind war." In der Rolle der Mutter spielte ich meine Mutter nach und merkte dann, wie zärtlich meine Mutter zu mir war. So entdeckte ich am Theater meine Mutter. (*Brücke* 223)

He said: "My child, nothing can separate you from the theater, only a child. Children, did you see how affectionately she was with her child." In the role of the mother, I played my own mother and realized how affectionate my mother was with me. This is how I discovered my mother at the theater.

However, since she studies during the politically and socially polarized times in Turkey in the late sixties and early seventies, the Epic Theater, with its ambition to coolly analyze a situation and make people think, becomes more compelling to her. She quotes her Brecht teacher when he criticizes the students for being too emotional, when screaming and crying during the representation of workers:

"Ihr dürft nicht schreien, sondern müßt die Geschichte untersuchen. Weil ihr die Geschichte nicht untersucht, fällt, was in der Welt passiert, wie ein Alptraum auf euch herab, und ihr stellt nicht die Realität dieser Menschen dar, sondern eure Gefühle diesem Alptraum gegenüber, und daraus macht ihr einen neuen Alptraum....Schreien ist eure Maske. Setzt die Maske ab und lest Geschichtsbücher über das Ottomanische Reich." (*Brücke* 209-210)

"You must not scream, but examine history. Because you do not examine history, everything that happens in the world falls onto you like a nightmare and you do not depict the reality of those people, but your own feelings regarding this nightmare and so you create a new nightmare....Screaming is your mask. Take off that mask and read books about the history of the Ottoman Empire."

Following Brecht's anti-naturalist directive, he admonishes them to distance themselves from their feelings and neither to identify with their character nor try to stimulate empathy in the spectator. According to Brecht, a cool, clear, and unsentimental acting would create the so-called alienation or estrangement effect (*Entfremdung*) which

he hoped would raise the consciousness and critical awareness of the spectator.<sup>89</sup>

According to Emine, people in Turkey during the political upheaval and repression were moved by Brecht's theater:

In den anatolischen Städten hatte die Polizei linke Studenten getötet, ihre Mütter kamen nach Ankara und liefen mit den Demonstranten zum Atatürk-Mausoleum, um sich bei Atatürk zu beschweren....Einige kamen auch zu unserem Theater und schauten sich Bertolt Brechts "Die Mutter" an. Die verschleierte Mütter hoben am Ende des Stückes aus ihren Schleiern ihre Fäuste in die Luft. (*Brücke* 301)

In the Anatolian cities the police had killed some leftist students. Their mothers came to Ankara and went with the demonstrators to Atatürk's Mausoleum in order to complain to him....Some also went to our theater and watched Bertolt Brecht's "The Mother." At the end of the play, the veiled mothers raised their fists out of their veils into the air.

It is obvious that Emine, once in Germany, develops an almost religious identification with Brechtian theory and theater, trying to keep the "ghosts" of her past from returning:

Ich zerreiße das idealistische Denken, sie gehören auch zum Leben, die Geschichten, die mich so traurig gemacht haben, in der Türkei. Die Türen der Fehler sollen sich schließen. Jetzt ist es Zeit, durch Wissen weicher zu werden, reicher zu werden. In der Türkei konnte ich meine Hand und meinen Arm nicht bewegen....Jetzt muß ich erwachsen werden. Die Kraft der Menschen wird reichen gegen Unrecht, gegen Armut. (*Sterne* 103)

I tear up my idealistic thinking; the stories that made me so sad back in Turkey, are also part of life. The doors of these mistakes shall close. Now is the time, to become softer and richer through knowledge. In Turkey, I couldn't move my hand nor my arm....Now I must grow up. The people's strength will be enough against injustice and poverty.

Emine evolves from an observer and chronicler of Besson's work to his assistant, and in addition she starts playing smaller roles. Working with others on the different productions makes her forget about her personal trauma and becomes essential for her existence and self justification. However, the realities of the GDR, which suppresses free speech and discussion, and the fact that her friends are being spied on and sometimes arrested, causes disillusionment with a state that cannot live up to its lofty ideals. Thus

Emine does not have to think very long before she decides to help Besson with the production of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the Avignon Festival.<sup>90</sup> Although following Besson to Paris means something of a personal sacrifice because she eventually loses Steve, who wants to marry her, the move to Paris signifies a move towards cosmopolitanism, artistic development, and being part of a bigger project. "Ich helfe Benno Besson. Mir geht es gut. Mir geht es sehr gut. Er braucht mich" 'I am helping Benno Besson. I am doing well. I am doing very well. He needs me' (*Sterne* 195). Paris in the end embodies hope and a certain prophesy of change, also expressed in the multiracial faces in the metro (*Sterne* 247). The blue packet of *Gauloises* cigarettes, the brand that she and Besson share and that caught her attention when she first met him in Berlin, reappears at the very end of *Sterne*, when she fixes her gaze on it as if to remind herself why she is in Paris.<sup>91</sup>

Ultimately, both protagonists' performances and theatrical work achieve reconciliation and create more "touching tales": Santiago's combination of different ethnic dancing styles with a biblical poem which serves as self expression for a Puerto Rican girl creates universality and self-transcendence at the same time. However it reflects as well American individualism: the subject reinvents, organizes, and orchestrates herself, while the others remain rather pale compared to her triumphant performance. At the end of *Lover*, Esmeralda, proud of herself and self assertive, leaves for Puerto Rico with a funded project on Puerto Rican culture.<sup>92</sup>

Özdamar's universalism and utopian attitude adapted from Brecht's theater create a bridge between her Turkish friends and colleagues and similar minded people in East and West Germany, as well as between common people of both cultures who have been

oppressed and persecuted. There is clearly less concern about self-definition either as ethnic or as individual. Where Santiago is self-reflective, Özdamar displays self-irony in retrospect with regard to her political extremism as a young woman.<sup>93</sup> Individual self-expression is less important: It is the project and the relationships that count. Thus the personalities and stories of the others: Besson, Mueller, Gabi, Katrin to name only a few, have at least the same importance as Emine's.

While in Santiago the reader is encouraged to feel empathy and identification for Esmeralda's plight, following the concept of Method, Özdamar's reader is kept at arm's lengths due to the Brechtian distance in her discussion of her work and refusal to discuss and reflect on her feelings.<sup>94</sup>

Still, the new languages of story-telling-dance and German theater make it possible for both protagonists to accept their history and position in the present, to be reconciled with themselves and their circumstances for a while, and to move forward with new projects that transcend themselves.



## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSIONS

Du wirst keine neuen Länder entdecken, keine anderen Meere  
Die Stadt wird dir folgen. Du wirst durch dieselben Straßen  
Streifen, in denselben Vierteln alt werden.

You will discover no new lands, no new oceans.  
The city will follow you. You will roam the same streets,  
you will grow old in the same quarters.

--- Constantine Cavafy (qt. in *Sterne* 56)

I set out to find and discuss similarities and differences between these two popular and successful authors expecting to see not only their cultures of origin, but also their host cultures reflected in their work. Furthermore, I argued that Santiago and Özdamar are American/German writers as much as Puerto Rican/Turkish and that their literature is actually as American/German as anybody else's who lives in that country and writes in this language. In this context, I was looking for "touching tales" in Leslie Adelson's sense, which attest to the process of entanglement between cultures, stressing the common ground rather than the differences between them.

Santiago's Americaness (albeit a reluctant one) becomes evident in her self representation of an individual who achieves the American dream by being industrious and assertive. It also manifests itself in the inner conflicts and certain obsession with race and origin, which according to Santiago herself prompted her to tell her story, believing that the question "Who am I?" is important to great numbers of bicultural Americans (Hernandez 163). Also, American society of the 1960s and 1970s is depicted as divided mostly along racial/ethnic lines. Even though society was also divided by the Vietnam War as it is today by Iraq, this division is less marked in Santiago.

Özdamar's work appears clearly European through her reflection on wars, dictatorships, and genocide that interrupted biographies of people all across Europe during the twentieth<sup>h</sup> century. Her emphasis on the politicization of the 1968 generation and their hopes for a more peaceful and just society, points to the fact that it was a stronger social movement in Europe than in the U.S. Division within society thus is represented along generational lines (parents and their children) and political lines (left wing movements versus status quo). On the other hand, the question of ethnic identity is not as big an issue as it is with Santiago, since Emine at that point in time could not seriously contemplate becoming German, partly due to the fact that Germany only recently started to see itself as country of immigration.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, Brecht's social universalism was all the more appealing to her, since it attempts to bring different cultures together.

The most important common feature of both works is perhaps their rejection of particularism, essentialism, and identity politics, and their focus instead on the individual experience and on relationships. The latter are considered more important than ideologies and the "big picture," which becomes evident in the implicit criticism of ideologists from all political spectrums. Özdamar however proves more inclusive by adding more voices to the voice of her narrating "I." Both clearly write from a feminine perspective expressed in the importance of the female community in form of family and friends and the attention to domestic details.<sup>96</sup> By doing so, both works produce "touching tales" in the areas of society, history, and culture. These tales seem to be most poignant when the subject/protagonist forgets herself and focuses on the world and people around her or on the artistic project instead. Both authors achieve this especially through the joining of

spoken language and body language on stage as an attempt to reach reconciliation between the subject's troubled past and insecure present. The latter again is more prevalent in Özdamar's writing due to the emphasis on the theater.

Economic hardship, wars, and political upheaval have impelled people to migrate throughout history. During the past 150 years, with population explosion and globalization, migration and displacement of people has increased dramatically all over the world. It is thus not surprising that life writings which reflect on loss of home and family, and the experience of being a stranger who needs to bridge languages and cultures, are increasingly popular with reading audiences. Almost everyone nowadays, if not a foreigner him or herself, at least knows an immigrant, and be it only superficially. Thus the popularity of the genre is at least partly due to recognition or identification on the part of the reading audience. On the other hand, scholars like Bhabha, Lyotard, Doris Sommer, and many others warn of universalism and sentimentalist identification when reading "minority writings," pointing to the danger of assimilating or neutralizing difference.<sup>97</sup>

I would argue, though, that the reasons for both Santiago's and Özdamar's success lie at well in their universalistic aspects as in their expression of otherness or difference. As Kristeva points out, there is both a fascination and fear in each of us when facing a stranger, which reflect on the parts of ourselves that have been suppressed.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, familiarity and strangeness are both present when encountering a "stranger," and perhaps the tension between the universal and the different needs to be upheld in order to create a text that reconciles and challenges at the same time.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Betty Bergland's article affirming the surge in ethnic autobiography by women (130).

<sup>2</sup> *When I was Puerto Rican, Almost a Woman, The Turkish Lover* by Esmeralda Santiago and *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei hat zwei Türen aus der einen kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich raus* (1992) (*Life is a caravanserai, it has two doors, I came in through one and went out of the other*), *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998) (*The Bridge of the Golden Horn*), *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (2003) (*Strange Stars staring down onto earth*) by Emine Sevgi Özdamar.

<sup>3</sup> See the commentaries by Acosta Cruz, Holmes, Vizcaya Echano below.

<sup>4</sup> See the address by Günter Blamberger at the award of the Kleist Preis to Özdamar: "Ein Picaro, eine Picara, wird hier geboren, die ums Überleben kömpft, für die jeder Tag Gerichtstag ist, an dem das Urteil über das Leben gefällt wird, wie im barocken Schelmenroman" 'A picaroon is born who fights for survival, for whom each day is judgment day which judges over her life as in the Baroque Picaresque novel' (4).

<sup>5</sup> In his lectures on poetics, the author Günther Grass refers with this phrase to Theodor W. Adorno's remarks on Auschwitz as a caesura in European history, after which it might be impossible to write poetry again (64).

<sup>6</sup> In *Women Writers and National Identity. Bachmann, Duden, Özdamar*, Stephanie Bird discusses this problem and opts for a strictly literary approach instead (4). However, she analyzes fiction while the texts of my study are both literary and clearly autobiographical. With boundaries between these narrative genres blurred, the same problems exist for autobiographies as well. Still my approach will mainly follow the line that "the literary text's function becomes illustrative and is presented as a mirror of specific kinds of sociopolitical and historical contexts."

<sup>7</sup> When talking about the "others" or "other" in this essay, it sometimes simply refers to the other characters in either book. In other parts (and this will be pointed out) it will discuss the "other" in the understanding of Julia Kristeva (the stranger or other in myself) and also Emmanuel Levinas who discusses the interdependency and tension between subject and other.

<sup>8</sup> February of 2006.

<sup>9</sup> She quotes the anthropologist Michael M.J. Fischer (67).

<sup>10</sup> Lejeune comments on his original *Pacte*: "When I reread it, I am struck by the contradiction that stands out between this initial first position, absolute and arbitrary, and the analyses as a whole that follow....If I have chosen the title *Je est un autre* in order to regroup the studies written since *Le Pacte*, it is precisely to reintroduce the free play that is inevitably related to identity" (125).

<sup>11</sup> *Identitäten im Prozess: Literatur von Autorinnen aus und in der Türkei in deutscher, englischer und türkischer Sprache.*

<sup>12</sup> The concept of "positionality" is defined by Smith and Watson as a way "to designate how subjects are situated at particular axes through the relations of power," based on Michel Foucault's "technologies of the self" (*Reading Autobiography* 145).

<sup>13</sup> See Sidonie Smith's and Julia Watson's explanations of terminology in *Reading Autobiography*, 183-207.

<sup>14</sup> Gilmore traces the truth claim of confession back to Augustine, but also to medieval female mystics, who had to "clear" their visions as confessions of truth towards church authorities.

<sup>15</sup> Smith and Watson remark: "Typically, they call autobiographical texts 'novels' though they rarely call novels 'autobiographies'...Further complicating matters, many contemporary writers are interested in blurring the boundary between life narrative and narration in the first-person novel" (*Reading Autobiography* 7). Ismael Muniz in his article on Latina *Bildungsroman* voices a similar opinion on the shifting of definitions: "Viewed theoretically, the contemporary *Bildungsroman* may appear as a more or less autobiographical novel, contemplative of a writer's aspiration to universalize individual experience in order to give value to personal identity" (86). Amanda Holmes as well notices the generic ambiguity of the field when saying that "even Santiago's work has been categorized generically as a 'novela'" (111).

<sup>16</sup> "Resisting Autobiography: Outlaw Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects," where she refers to Derrida's critique of the law of genre (119).

<sup>17</sup> Smith and Watson follow Francoise Lionnet's definition of narrated "I" as the subject of history whereas the narrating "I" is the agent of discourse (60).

<sup>18</sup> Anti-imperialistic critique would attack the colonizing power (Britain in India, Germany in East Africa, the USA in Vietnam) as exploitative and self-interested. Post colonialism, which began with Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, criticizes the cultural imperialism which took place in the colonized "third world" as well as in the colonizer's home country which experienced immigration from people who often stemmed from their former colonies.

<sup>19</sup> *The Location of Culture* 54-56.

<sup>20</sup> However, I believe the conceptual difference between Bhabha and Adelson are reconcilable, since he does not put this concept of "third space" in absolute terms.

<sup>21</sup> In his book *La memoria rota (The Broken Memory)* the well known critic Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones "identifies the most glaring lapses in Puerto Rican historical memory, the ruptures and repressions which have left present-day public discourse devoid of any recognizable field of critical reference." (qt. in Flores 2000, 338) According to Díaz-Quiñones, this "broken memory" is due to century old imperialism and the triumphalist rhetoric of progress and modernization of the postwar era.

<sup>22</sup> In "The Author as Producer:" "Nothing will be further from the author who has reflected deeply on the conditions of present-day production than to expect, or desire, such works" (*Reflections* 233).

<sup>23</sup> *Normalfall Migration* 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> For this passage, I have relied on the introductions to the essay collection *Memory, Narrative, and Identity* by Armtjit Singh and *The Immigrant experience in North American Literature* by Katherine Payant.

<sup>25</sup> Since many early immigrants except the Jewish people were illiterate or not well schooled, there were not many other ethnic immigrant writers in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, with the notable exception of O.E. Rølvaag.

<sup>26</sup> The term "Chicano" refers to authors of Mexican descent only. The exact definition of the genre is contested, as with most genres these days, but in the sixties Chicano literature, was defined by the activists of the Chicano movement as written by Mexican-American authors who reflected on the Mexican-American experience. *Pocho* by Villareal is usually considered the first of its kind, although the movement considered him as too assimilationist. "Latino/a" then would apply to authors of Spanish-American origin who discuss the specific plight of their ethnic group. As one can guess from this definition, it is a rather shaky one since there is an ongoing heated discussion on what exactly constitutes this experience.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that from the nineties on, the term Chicano literature was less in vogue and has usually been replaced by the term "Latino" in popular language. However, the terms "Hispanic," "Latino," and "Chicano" are contested.

<sup>28</sup> See his article: "Puerto Rican Literature in the United States: Stages and Perspectives" from 1988.

<sup>29</sup> The exact rule is that at least one of the parents has to have lived in Germany for eight years in order for the child to be granted German citizenship. By the age of 23, the child

has to make a final decision on whether to hold on to the German or the foreign citizenship (Bade 129).

<sup>30</sup> The 1981 putsch led by General Kenan Evren was the third in the history of the Turkish republic and favored a Kemalistic (secular) anticommunist political line. Before, there had been military putsches in 1971 and 1961.

<sup>31</sup> Frederking mentions Aysel Özakin, who switched from Turkish to German in the early eighties.

<sup>32</sup> Scheinhardt was Turkish born, but had married a German.

<sup>33</sup> In 2006 the website of the *Fachdidaktik Deutsch* department at the UT Berlin lists 85 authors of *Migrationsliteratur*, half of them of Turkish descent.

<sup>34</sup> Çileli earned the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* in 2005 for her political work against forced marriage and honor killing. Her book was made into a movie and has raised awareness about this issue. A number of testimonials by other Islamic women have followed and apparently sell well on the general book market. See for examples the website of the publishing house: [www.blanvalet-verlag.de](http://www.blanvalet-verlag.de).

<sup>35</sup> Among other roles, she played Charlotte Corday in *Marat-Sade* by Peter Weiss and widow Begbick in Bertolt Brecht's *Man is Man*.

<sup>36</sup> Born 1922 in Yverdon, Switzerland and died 2006 in Berlin. Between 1949 and 1956 he worked under Brecht at the "Berliner Ensemble" as an actor and assistant director. In 1962 he left the GDR, but returned to East Berlin from 1974 to 1977.

<sup>37</sup> *Yasemin*, by Hark Hohm and *Happy Birthday, Türkei*, by Doris Dörrie.

<sup>38</sup> The three (autobiographical) novels have been published in 2006 in one volume under the title *Sonne auf halbem Weg. Die Istanbul-Berlin Trilogie* by Kiepenheuer & Witsch. Other volumes published are the story collections *Der Hof im Spiegel* (2001) and *Mutterzunge* (1991).

<sup>39</sup> Özdamar was the first foreign born author to win this award. In 1999 she won the Adalbert-von Chamisso-Preis, and also in 2004, the Heinrich-von Kleist-Preis.

<sup>40</sup> While some literary critics, among them countryman and fellow author Senoçak, had problems with the orientaling reviews of *Karawanserei*, critic Jens Jøssens criticized "den hilflosen Text einer deutschschreibenden Türkin" 'the helpless text by a Turk writing in German.' Yasemin Dayioğlu-Yücel provides an overview on the discussion of Özdamar's work in the German press (28-32).

<sup>41</sup> Acosta Cruz's article "Esmeralda Santiago in the market place of identity politics" offers a critical reading of Santiago's work which will be discussed at a later point of this study.

<sup>42</sup> In an interview with Cornelia Geißler, in the *Berliner Zeitung* from 3/5/2003, Özdamar admits and points out that this is the first book in which she uses material from her diaries, because they capture the atmosphere much better than her memories.

<sup>43</sup> In a 1998 interview with Carmen Hernandez, Santiago affirms that a professor suggested this label, since "memoir" is an open genre (163).

<sup>44</sup> Negi is a short form of *Negríta*: "Because when you were little you were so black my mother said you were a *negríta*" (*Puerto Rican* 13).

<sup>45</sup> This is also the opinion of other literary critics like Muniz, who emphasizes the *Bildungsroman* character of Santiago's work: "Santiago's Negi portrays the transition from innocence to enlightenment. This transition includes the attempt to close the breach between the uninitiated protagonist and the experienced narrator, a common theme in *Bildungsroman*" (96-97).

<sup>46</sup> Website: [www.metzlerverlag.de/buecher/les](http://www.metzlerverlag.de/buecher/les).

<sup>47</sup> I translated *Beziehungssinn* with "relationality," a term used by Smith/Watson and which refers to the representation of others (family, friends, etc.) and possibly their voices in the text (*Reading Autobiography* 177).

<sup>48</sup> This is a first reference to a "touching tale": the title of *Sterne* stemming from the German Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler. It will be discussed in more detail later.

<sup>49</sup> In Fischer's essay, the objects of analysis were autobiographies of scientists, so science played that role of the 3<sup>rd</sup> voice.

<sup>50</sup> Besemeres refers to Charles Taylor's argument that individuals are born into particular "language communities," characterized by an implicit commitment to certain values (34).

<sup>51</sup> Joseph knew a Jewish bookseller named Pinkus in Zürich, who knew Benno Besson and wrote Emine a letter of recommendation (*Sterne* 33).

<sup>52</sup> Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933) was born in Alexandria, Egypt, to Greek parents, lived in England and Istanbul before returning to Alexandria. He has been called a skeptic and a neo-pagan. Cavafy's poetry has been instrumental in the revival and recognition of Greek poetry and today he is considered one of the finest modern Greek poets.

<sup>53</sup> Especially Acosta Cruz 2006, 173.



<sup>54</sup> This is also Kelly Oliver's argument in her essay on "Power Gender, and Revolution in Julia Alvarez's Novels" (237).

<sup>55</sup> Santiago as well displays a positive personal attitude towards prostitutes. In *Lover* she talks with affection about the two prostitutes Rayenne and Dayenne who live and work near her dorm and who try to protect her from being hit on by a man in the street (124).

<sup>56</sup> The Brecht play Özdamar refers to is *The Good Woman of Sechuan*.

<sup>57</sup> Morales-Díaz 145: "Her grandmother had been through puberty, was married and had children, overcame menopause, and found no need to be with her husband." One has to keep in mind though that this "independence" has been earned over a lifetime of subordination.

<sup>58</sup> The protagonist reflects somewhat self-ironically on that fact: "...als müsste ich nicht mich selbst, sondern meine Großmutter vorstellen, um hier zu wohnen..." '...as if I needed not to present myself, but my grandmother in order to be accepted here...' (*Sterne* 50) Therefore the narrated "I" is conscious of the subversive qualities of her grandmother's discourse.

<sup>59</sup> "Jouissance" is a term often used by French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, but is not equivalent to the English "joy," since it encompasses sexual pleasure. Cixous contends that it is linked to passion and suffering, that one is impossible without the other. Emine's grandmother is represented as having experienced and lived all of the above, which would give her a truly human experience that many people lack in Cixous' opinion: "On what makes humanity, its pains and its joys" (12).

<sup>60</sup> In another instance Emine tells theater friends how her grandmother encouraged her to let her female cat run free to go after the tomcats: "Let them out, one day you will become like them with the men" (*Sterne* 150).

<sup>61</sup> I am not sure how far the following quote has been empirically verified or is merely anecdotal: "Witness the erotic outburst of Spanish or Moslem women once they have settled in France: the 'French model' might have something to do with it, but how easy it is for the Christian facade and even the tyranny of Islam to be swept away by these new perverts who are willing to stop at nothing, admittedly in order to succeed, but above all in order to joy in their bodies, unto death" (30).

<sup>62</sup> Thus Ulvi establishes the same double standard that Esmeralda knows from her own culture.

<sup>63</sup> *Abduction from the Seraglio*: Comic Opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. A Christian lady and her servant have been kidnapped and been sold into a Turkish pasha's seraglio.

Her lover succeeds in saving her. The opera was very successful and contains many stereotypes about the Orient and Ottoman Empire.

<sup>64</sup> An exception is her friend Murat, who has tragically fallen in love with an East German woman, whom he is not allowed to see anymore.

<sup>65</sup> One should point out the double irony not only of Marx being Jewish, but the fact of an Eastern German Nazi defending Communism and so staying on the course of his Government. In retrospect this might shed some light of the phenomenon of revival of Neonazism in the East after 1990.

<sup>66</sup> In the interview with Hernandez, Santiago stresses that she really writes with women in mind, and does not care much about men's opinions (161).

<sup>67</sup> Gabi's husband had moved out, but in the GDR it took some time to find a new apartment with a new partner. Therefore, he had locked his room with his possessions, but Gabi had found a second key.

<sup>68</sup> It is much more common in Mediterranean countries for relatives to care for the physical needs of family members at the hospital.

<sup>69</sup> Özdamar emphasizes the popularity of stories by and about her grandmother with her German friends. This may be explained by the fact that grandmother seems to represent the wisdom and tolerance of an old experienced person as well as an uncorrupted or naive outlook stemming from a more archaic and essential cultural state. Obviously, young German leftists of the sixties and seventies looked at their own grandparents with suspicion, due to their possible involvement with the Nazis. At the same time though, they often both lacked and desired this loving and respectful attitudes towards their elders.

<sup>70</sup> In 2003 a congress of European writers was organized in the *Literaturhaus* Hamburg to talk about the question: *Europa schreibt. Was ist das Europäische an den Literaturen Europas? Europe writes. What is the European in the Literatures of Europe?* As can be expected, different authors came to quite different conclusions. Özdamar was one of the participating authors and describes in her essay the discussion in the Istanbul of her childhood about Europe and her first memories about Europeanness.

<sup>71</sup> Both protagonists relate how they are forced to eat American food rations like powdered milk and eggs at school and, after complying out of fear of their teachers, throw up the food in the cafeteria. Both incidents take place in the 1950s (*Puerto Rican* 82; *Karawanserei* 132).

<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that while the Americans are represented as imperialists, the Europeans are perceived as guests.

<sup>73</sup> The title of historian Ernst Nolte's provocative essay from June 1986 in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, (subtitle "Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte" 'A speech that could be written, but not given') which challenged the singularity of the Holocaust and offered a reinterpretation of National Socialist Politics. It immediately triggered an angry response by Jürgen Habermas, who accused Nolte of "apologetic tendencies," which then set off the notorious German *Historikerstreit* (Historians' debate). See Alfred Low, *The Third Reich and the Holocaust in German Historiography* from 1994 for a summary of the debate (118-165).

<sup>74</sup> The RAF (Red Army Fraction) was a leftist terrorist organization of the 1970s, under the leadership of Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. They assassinated numerous politicians and business leaders. After a major crackdown, the group was broken up and most of its members imprisoned. Several of the leading persons apparently committed suicide in jail, a fact that has been hotly contested until this day. Many left-leaning Germans believed that they might have been murdered instead. A good overview on the history of the RAF is offered by Stefan Aust in his *Baader-Meinhof-Komplex*.

<sup>75</sup> In "Gastgesichter" Özdamar relates how her grandmother, when told the story of Robinson Crusoe, was concerned in the same way about his family (234). In *Karawanserei*, her grandmother asks the same about people mentioned in the newspaper or in the parents' conversations (117-118).

<sup>76</sup> After German reunification, Gregor Gysi became leader of a new party, the PDS (party of democratic socialists), because many former East German dissidents were feeling disenfranchised by they perceived a takeover by West German political parties.

<sup>77</sup> Some literary critics have accused Santiago as serving too much the American mainstream, deploring her lack of social representativity and commitment (Acosta-Cruz 172). On the other hand, Marta Viscaya Echano gives Santiago credit for being honest when talking about her younger self, even if it wasn't politically correct (122-124).

<sup>78</sup> In the interview with Hernandez, Santiago affirms this attitude of hers: "I was brought in it [the American Dream] a way my sisters and brothers didn't. My mother had made it very clear...We are going to the United States and this is going to be your job: you're going to learn English, get a good education and you're going to get great jobs. ...And I really just took off with it. I didn't let the other things that stopped my sisters and brothers stop me. And I think that I had to overcome a lot of fear" (167-168).

<sup>79</sup> In a TV discussion with Sabine Kroissenbrunner and Barbara Frischmuth in 2005, Özdamar mentions that her publisher lauded her for showing the Germans that there also was a 68 movement in Turkey, that Turkey is a part of Europe (10).

<sup>80</sup> See also Seyhan's reading of Benjamin's "Theses" (35).

<sup>81</sup> Özdamar, in the above mentioned TV discussion herself uses the term "Maske" several times when the topic is cultural and linguistic identity, either in the sense of an adopted language/role or even faces of immigrants who adapt to a different culture: "...ich wollte kapiieren, was Holländer sind. Dann bin ich auf den Straßen spazieren gegangen und habe nicht in die holländischen Gesichter geguckt, sondern in die der Jugendlichen, die aus fremden Familien stammten. Dahin habe ich geguckt, um die Holländer zu verstehen. Diese Masken nehmen das auf." 'I wanted to understand what the Dutch are. Then I walked through the streets and did not look into the Dutch faces, but at those of the teenagers from foreign families. I looked at them in order to understand the Dutch. These masks take that on.' (8) Likewise, Santiago remarks about herself and many of her bi-cultural readers, that when returning to their country of origin, they are identified as Americanized by their former countrymen (Hernandez 163).

<sup>82</sup> See also Simon Jarvis's comments on the topic of reconciliation in Adorno: "This is a hope for a reconciliation of nature and culture within the individual as well as on a broader historical level" (33).

<sup>83</sup> American school of acting based on Konstantin Stanislavky's system (1863-1938), further developed by Lee Strasberg (1901-1982). My information stems from Meyer-Dinkgräfe's *Approaches to Acting* from 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Santiago states more explicitly in the interview with Hernandez: "I wasn't really willing to give myself to the character because I was creating myself. I was already in character" (168).

<sup>85</sup> "He did not approve of what I was doing. Not only was I using his teachings in an unorthodox way, I was preparing for a solo performance after less than two years of training without having consulted him first....When he heard I was combining Kathak with belly dance he nearly had a conniption in the middle of his kitchen. He accused me of disrespecting the tradition and him as my teacher" (307).

<sup>86</sup> Santiago for example says that her experience of being neither American nor Puerto Rican and not knowing where to belong has been echoed by many of her readers who are bi-cultural, regardless what their culture of origin is. Because of this universality of experience, she claims, she wanted to publish more of her work (Hernandez 163).

<sup>87</sup> Meyer-Dinkgräfe discusses this complex issue in *Approaches to Acting* 52-54 and 94-110. In his later works, Stanislavsky turned more towards the prominence of the actor's body in creating emotions within the audience. Apparently Stanislavsky had been influenced by Indian philosophy. This concept had been further developed by Tairov (1885-1950) and Meyerhold (1874-1940). Interestingly, this concept foreshadows Brecht's views, since it moves away from the actor's emotional identification with their characters favored by Strasberg.

<sup>88</sup> In the same TV discussion, Özdamar emphasizes that Brecht's language had promised her a utopia. In the interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* in 2003, she explicitly states: "Es war kein Zufall, dass ich zu einem Sprachmenschen, zu Brecht gehen wollte. Ich wollte die Sprache wiederfinden und wieder lieben können" 'It was no coincidence that I wanted to go a person concerned with language like Brecht. I wanted to rediscover language and love again' (3).

<sup>89</sup> See Meyer-Dinkgräfe, pp. 63-67. "The spectator is led to view the events on the stage in a larger perspective, from the outside. The spectator applies critical judgment. Increased distance thus encourages the development of a historical perspective towards one's own time, demonstrating to the audience that events must be viewed within a particular 'historical field'" (66).

<sup>90</sup> The reasons for Besson leaving East Germany are not entirely clear. There are rumors, also in *Sterne* that he was having problems with the ministry of culture because of putting on plays by Heiner Müller. Özdamar quotes him saying: "Man darf nicht zu lange in Deutschland bleiben. Rette dich vor Deutschland" 'One shouldn't stay in Germany too long. Save yourself from Germany' (236). He himself stated later that he mainly left for France to reactivate his native language. In an interview shortly before his death Besson said: "Was zerstörend für mich war: die Arroganz der Parteileute" 'What was destructive for me was the arrogance of the party functionaries.' (Schütt 2006).  
www.neuesdeutschland.de. 25.2.2006.

<sup>91</sup> *Gauloises*, a French brand of black, filterless cigarettes, was a very popular brand with leftists in the sixties and seventies.

<sup>92</sup> She will leave Puerto Rico after four months, disappointed and frustrated when she is perceived as Americanized, but not willing to give up on her "American" assertiveness (Hernandez 163).

<sup>93</sup> For example, she mentions the ironic comments of her parents and neighbors like: "Meine Tochter, du hast dir wahrscheinlich in Deutschland deinen Kopf erkältet." 'My daughter, it seems you got yourself a head cold in Germany' (*Brücke* 230).

<sup>94</sup> This is what Doris Sommer calls the "cold shoulder effect": ethnic authors "write at length about their apparently private selves precisely to withhold the anticipated intimacy and sting readers with the rebuff" (31).

<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that today, Özdamar is a German citizen, and that the issue of ethnic identity is discussed much more intensively in the present, because of the presence of a whole generation of Turks who were born in Germany.

<sup>96</sup> Santiago mentions to Hernandez that she believes that women subconsciously notice more details than men (161).

<sup>97</sup> See Sommer, who worries about any too easy identification between reader and text: To understand is to establish identity; and this requires conceptualization that generalizes away otherness (27). However, both Santiago and Özdamar tell about their readers' reactions after public lectures, telling them of having had similar experiences, or expressing surprise to find their own ethnic stereotypes corrected.

<sup>98</sup> "In the fascinated rejection that the foreigner aroused in us, there is a share of uncanny strangeness in the sense of the depersonalization that Freud discovered in it, and which takes up again our infantile desires and fears of the other-the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive" (191).

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