

Cold Turkey: Domesticating and Demythologising the Exotic in the German Satires of Şinasi Dikmen, Muhsin Omurca and Django Asül

Graeme Dunphy

Recent critical discussions of German migrant and post-migrant literature has repeatedly focused on the phenomenon of the exotic; where some writers seem consciously to exoticise their writing, exaggerating myths about Oriental culture and thus highlighting differences between East and West, perhaps with the aim of making foreigners exciting, likeable or deserving of sympathy, others react against this, rejecting clichés and highlighting continuities, apparently with the aim of making cultural boundaries traversable. Both are understandable strategies for dealing with displacement.

In this context I should like to adopt a term from quite a different discipline, Bultmann's concept of demythologising. In theology, demythologising means dissecting the "myth" – the sacred but implausible narrative – to distil from it a kerygmatic truth. If we regard the exotic as being, in this technical sense, the "myth", then it is not entirely devoid of a relationship to reality, but it cannot simply be read as "real". Thus demythologising is the opposite process to exoticising.

Drawing on satirical texts by four Turkish-German writers and cabaretists, this paper looks at ways in which this ethnic minority can use ironic self-depiction to capture and defuse the stereotypes with which it is confronted. Under the rubric "cold turkey", that is, Turkishness without the psychedelics, it shows how the satirists transpose clichés into everyday situations, where they become absurd.

The paper's conclusion is likely to be that hybrid communities are inevitably torn between a desire to highlight demarcation lines (exoticism) and a need to accentuate the potential for assimilation (demythologising). Humour, which in any case has a tendency either to underline or to debunk stereotypes, serves as a highly effective tool for working out this dichotomy, and as all four satirists have successfully reached main-stream German audiences, it would also appear to be a key mechanism in achieving inter-cultural understanding.

"There is nothing especially controversial or reprehensible", remarked Edward Said, about "domestications of the exotic".¹ All cultures hang their pictures of all other cultures on the convenient hooks of ready images which are memorable because they verge on the fantastic. Said's critique of western perceptions of the orient has often been misconstrued as a complaint that these perceptions are a construct, not properly representative of the "reality" of the East; however, if it is impossible to have a complete knowledge of any culture, if all views of the foreign are necessarily constructs, this is not in itself the problem. Rather, Said's complaint was that the orientalist construct was used -- and was so designed as to be easily used -- for the anchoring of

Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York: Vintage, 2003), p.60.

imperial and post-imperial power structures. In itself, the addiction to the exotic would seem to be a harmless enough near-universal in cross-cultural projections.²

The word "exotic" means "foreign", "strange", perhaps "outlandish", but in modern usage normally has a positive slant: the exotic is exciting, fascinating, appealing, because of the mystery of its otherness: when we think of exotic birds, the bird of paradise may spring to mind. A sense of the exotic is often the pull which causes people to become fans of foreign languages and cultures, and in itself it can be a very constructive force.³ What Said called the "domestication" of the exotic is its encapsulation in relatively unsophisticated images and accoutrements akin to those of travellers' tales, the second-hand experience of the foreign which conditions most people's perception of cultures they have not encountered directly. This is the exotic canned for the home market. Such a simplified exotic fascination with the cultures of the Middle East, for example, might begin with an enthusiasm for the tastes and styles and colours of the orient, which mingle in the mind's eye with an affectionate caricature of life in Cathay, all imbued with a whiff of the scent of Scheherazade. The attraction of the foreign is that it is conceived as in every respect utterly foreign, and is stylised as idyllic, magical or psychedelic. This may play on some of the same clichés which underlie prejudice, but in contrast to prejudice, a delight in the exotic is well-meaning, though it may be patronising. In essence, it is a love-affair with a half-understood, half imaginary otherworld.

For the ethnic minority in a European context, the element of the exotic is a double-edged sword. It is not necessarily a bad thing to be thought of as exotic: this may convey a desirable status. As an exotic entity, one has one's niche and is valued in it. It can therefore be rewarding as a foreigner to play a rôle in which one's foreignness endows an easy popularity; at any rate this may seem preferable to being in racial confrontation with the indigenous majority. It can also provide an opening through which more meaningful communication becomes possible. But this same dynamic also holds the exoticised object at a distance, artificially widening the gap which intercultural communication seeks to bridge. And it can backfire, since it feeds stereotypes which in turn may nurture xenophobia. It is therefore not surpris-

² For recent work on the exotic, cf. for example "New" *Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*, ed. by Isabel Santaolalla (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000). In her prologue, Santaolalla argues for a more flexible approach to the concept of the "exotic" as "that simultaneous fear and fascination for what comes from beyond [our] limits" (p.9).

³ In German, this is complicated by the fact that the noun *Exot* can be used slightly disparagingly to refer to an "eccentric", but otherwise the semantic ranges of German *exotisch* and its cognates are generally parallel to those of the English forms.

ing that members of migrant communities may feel ambivalent about their own exotic plumage.

Recent critical discussions of German migrant and post-migrant literature have on several occasions focussed on the phenomenon of the exotic. In an essay on the novelist and poet Zafer Şenocak entitled 'Wider den Exotismus',⁴ for example, Ulrich J. Beil described the exotic as "eine Verführung nicht nur für das westliche Publikum"⁵ ("seductive, and not only for the western public"). Drawing on parallel work which has been done on presentations of Japanese culture, he expounds Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner's concept of *Selbstexotisierung* and applies it to the Turkish-German situation.⁶ The basic observation here is that migrant writers, being aware of the predilections of their European readers, often choose to couch their cultural self-portraits in language and imagery which seeks to cash in on the good-will which western appreciation of the exotic appears to promise. The point at issue is whether this is legitimate: Şenocak thinks not.

This debate has also been observed in the context of German-Arab literature by Uta Aifan.⁷ She proffers the helpful term "staging" exoticism to describe the approach of Rafik Schami, who works very consciously with exotic material, often employing the most explicit motifs from the Arabic folk-tale tradition as a platform from which intercultural prejudices can be disarmed. Schami's writing has found a very broad acceptance, but other writers such as Emine Sevgi Özdanar and Saliha Scheinhardt have on occasion been roundly criticised for pandering to the exotic. The opposite, anti-exotic tendency is characterised by Aifan as "demystifying" the exotic, which connotes the clearing up of a confusion. One might wonder if Bultmann's concept of demythologising might come closer to Aifan's intention,⁸ for she means more than just the countering of misinformation; she means the dismantling of the exotic myth itself. In theology, demythologising means dissecting the "myth" – the sacred but implausible narrative – to distil from it a kerygmatic truth. If we regard the exotic as being, in this technical sense, the "myth", then it is not entirely devoid of a relationship to reality, but it cannot

⁴ Ulrich Johannes Beil, 'Wider den Exotismus: Zafer Şenocaks west-östliche Moderne', in *Zafer Şenocak. Contemporary German Writers*, ed. by Tom Cheesman and Karin Yeşilada (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.31-42. Cf. my review of *Zafer Şenocak* in: *Modern Language Review*, 99 (2004), 1112-1113.

⁵ Ibid., p.31.

⁶ Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner, *Das Ende der Exotik: Zur japanischen Kultur und Gesellschaft der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988).

⁷ Uta Aifan, 'Staging Exoticism and Demystifying the Exotic: German-Arab Grenzgänger-literatur', trans. by Susan Tebbutt, in *German-Language Literature Today: International and Popular?*, ed. by Arthur Williams et. al. (Oxford: Lang, 2000), pp.237-253.

⁸ Though Said also speaks of "demystification", albeit in a slightly different context. Cf. Said, p.181.

simply be read as “real”. Whereas staging domestications of the exotic involves exaggerating myths about Oriental culture and thus highlighting differences between East and West, perhaps with the aim of making foreigners exciting, likeable or deserving of sympathy, demythologising is a reaction against this, rejecting clichés and highlighting continuities, apparently with the aim of making cultural boundaries traversable. Both are understandable strategies for dealing with displacement.

Migrant humorists face this choice on a daily basis: do they manipulate exotic clichés about their home countries or eschew them? Three Turkish-German satirists of different generations, Şinasi Dikmen, Muhsin Omurca and Django Asül, provide an opportunity to observe some of the ways this question can be handled. All three first achieved public acclaim through their cabaret, all three have also published in book form. For the present purposes these three must stand as representatives of a strong tradition: other names which could as easily have been highlighted include Osman Engin, Kaya Yanar, Serdar Somuncu, Sedat Pamuk or Kerim Pamuk. The following discussion will focus on Dikmen’s prose satires, Omurca’s cartoon strips, and the CD recordings of Asül’s stand-up comedy.

* * *

Şinasi Dikmen was born in Turkey in 1945, and came to Germany as part of the guest-worker programme in 1972;⁹ he is one of the few German migrant writers who still use the term *Gastarbeiter*, which others find dated or politically loaded. Only after a decade in Germany, now in his late 30s, did he become the full-time humorist whom comedian Dieter Hildebrandt has described as a “satirischer Beobachter des deutsch-türkischen Mißverständnisses”¹⁰ (“a satirical observer of the German-Turkish misunderstanding”). Alongside his television appearances with Hildebrandt in the comedy series *Scheibemischer*, Dikmen is best known for his cabaret tours with Muhsin Omurca under the banner *Knobi-Bonbon* (garlic sweet), which ran for twelve years with five programmes (1985-97), and since 1997 for his solo-tours. In these solo performances, he appears on stage alternately as, for example, a

⁹ Literature on Dikmen, and on German ethnic-minority cabaret generally: Karin Yeşilada, ‘Schreiben mit spitzer Feder: Die Satiren der türkisch-deutschen Migrationsliteratur’, in *Spagat mit Kopftuch*, ed. by Jürgen Reulecke (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 1997), pp.529-564; Mark Terkessidis, ‘Kabarett und Satire deutsch-türkischer Autoren’, in *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Carmine Chiellio (Stuttgart Weimar: Metzler, 2000), pp.294-301; Will Hasty and Christa Merkes-Frei, *Werkheft Literatur: Şinasi Dikmen – Zehra Çirak* (Munich Atlanta: Goethe Institut, 1996).

¹⁰ Dieter Hildebrandt, foreword, in Şinasi Dikmen, *Hurra ich lebe in Deutschland* (Munich: Piper, 1995), 7-9 (p.7).

German land-lord and a Turkish tenant, costumed and propped accordingly, soliloquising on cultural clashes in the dialect of Ulm and in the broken Turkish-German of the recent immigrant respectively. He has also established himself as the author of several volumes of satirical prose. His collection of stories *Hurra, ich lebe in Deutschland* (1995) will serve here a sample of his work.¹¹

To demonstrate the tone of Dikmen's writing, we might take, to choose one at random, the story "Kein Geburtstag, keine Integration". Birthdays are important in German social life, especially for young adults, who are inclined to throw large parties in their own honour. The narrator, Şinasi, regularly has to think up excuses for not inviting his German friends to an annual birthday function, and has begun to feel that his inability to do so is the last great barrier to his integration. The reason for this rather unusual handicap -- unusual when viewed through the lens of western cultural expectations -- is quite simple: he has no idea when his birthday is. Of course there is the requisite entry in his passport, since the German authorities require a date of birth and the Turkish officials processing his immigration papers obligingly invented one. This phenomenon is picked up by other Turkish-German humorists, too: in his book *Sprich langsam, Türke*, Kerim Pamuk describes the astonishment of German civil servants who, while processing residence permits, discover that the majority of the Turkish population were born on the 1st January.¹² For Şinasi, the problem is acute because he cannot bring himself to enter into the spirit of party revelries on the wrong day. So, on his next trip to the village where he was brought up, he sets out to discover his actual date of birth.

Here in Turkey, however, he is confronted by different cultural expectations. His family and friends are bemused by his pedantic interest in such an odd point of trivia, and wonder if too much contact with Germanic precision has addled his brain. But they do their best to help. His mother is able to tell him he was born on the day the family's prize bull escaped, and is irritated that he cannot be satisfied with this. His older sister knows this was the same day when she had her first illicit tryst with her husband-to-be; but the brother-in-law has very different memories of this assignation and ridicules his wife's romantic notions: "die Weiber, die Weiber, die erzählen nie die

¹¹ By the same author: Şinasi Dikmen, *Wir werden das Knoblauchkind schon schaukeln* (Berlin: EXpress Edition, 1983); Şinasi Dikmen, *Der andere Türke* (Berlin: EXpress Edition, 1986). However these earlier collections have been allowed to go out of print, partly because the most successful stories from them were recycled in *Hurra ich lebe in Deutschland*. Two of these stories also appear with lesson plans for the DAF classroom in Hasty and Merkes-Frei. The *Knoblauchkind* volume includes a transcript of one of Dikmen and Omurca's joint stage performances.

¹² Kerim Pamuk, *Sprich langsam, Türke* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 2002), p.67.

wahre Wahrheit, sondern immer nur ihre eigene, weibliche, Wahrheit.”¹³ (“Women, women! They never tell the true truth, but only their own female truth.”) The irony here, of course, is that the superior husband’s own information proves every bit as unreliable as that of his supposedly brainless wife, which not only parodies gender prejudices -- a set-piece in Turkish diaspora writing -- but also suggests that the whole community’s concept of “truth” in such a question is far removed from that of western thinking.

On one level, this is not unrealistic; work on the psychology of orality has shown that non-literate or semi-literate societies do value different kinds of information from that which seems important in the modern typographical world, and that they order and retrieve this information in quite different ways.¹⁴ To this extent, the same story could have been told about a German peasant community only a few generations earlier. However, the implicit raising of simple-mindedness to a Turkish national characteristic coincides too closely for comfort with Said’s observations on the way the West has sought to render Islam harmless by caricaturing Muslim populations as incapable of advanced reasoning. At any rate, a recurring theme in Turkish-German writing is the impression on the part of many Germans that Germany’s Turks are simple. What some may find surprising here is that the same prejudice can be encountered in Turkey. A large proportion of the Turkish guest workers who came to Germany in the 1960s, including Dikmen himself, came from peasant communities, and one of the recurring tensions between the Turkish diaspora and its fatherland is that sophisticated urbanites in Turkey often regard what they see as the country-bumpkin mentality of the ex-pats in Germany with some disdain. This adds great complexity to the whole panorama of perception and reality.

The rural Turkey of this story, then, is the Turkey of German fantasy. It has its roots in reality -- Dikmen himself does not know when his birthday is -- but it is idealised, caricatured, made at once more appealing and more remote, and the village is not inhabited by the flesh-and-blood villagers among whom the author grew up.¹⁵ As always in Dikmen’s writings, the humour points in two directions, the Germans and the Turks being parodied equally, but it is nonetheless a humour of the stereotypes which exaggerates the differences between the two cultures, and this romanticised rustic idyll recurs in the story “Freundschaft”, in which a German family seek the au-

¹³ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.27.

¹⁴ Discussed, for example, in Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London & New York: Methuen, 1984).

¹⁵ Cf. for example the July 1995 interview with Dikmen in Hasty and Merkes-Frei, pp.65-73; here p.66 (on his birthday) and p.72 (on the idealisation of the village).

thentic Turkish experience by holidaying in an Anatolian peasant village, but pack up and head home early when the exotic turns out to be overwhelming.

Interestingly, this sense of the exotic, like the humour itself, works in two directions in Dikmen's writings, for the cultural estrangement of a Turk looking at German culture is portrayed in very similar ways. One of the reasons why the German family in "Freundschaft" are overtaxed by their experience is that they find themselves the exotic westerners who are constantly the centre of the villagers' fascination. The title story "Hurra, ich lebe in Deutschland" has the form of a guest worker's letter home, in which the wonders of the occident are expounded for the amazement of the wide-eyed Anatolian villagers. Germany is the strange and fascinating land of the west where everything is different. The epistler describes toilets on which one can sit, buses in which a mysterious voice announces each stop, and a day of the week dedicated only to car-washing. These almost anecdotal details of German life may be accurate enough in themselves, but picked out of their contexts and reported in isolation they convey a sense of the totally alien. This itself is a "domestication of the exotic", but is compounded by a great deal of accompanying misinformation. The strange rolls of paper beside the sit-down toilets must, the letter-writer deduces, be for scribbling down notes to oneself, no doubt with the intention of harnessing all the great ideas which occur to employees during their "sittings" for the benefit of German industry; perhaps this is how the German economy recovers so quickly after the wars which they periodically lose. Or again, Germans always look sad on the bus home, because they can only be happy when at work:¹⁶

Abends ist es im Bus sehr still, als ob jemand gestorben wäre. Niemand hat Lust, über irgendein Thema zu sprechen. Ich würde dir raten, falls du in Deutschland überhaupt arbeiten könntest, rede nach der Arbeit keinen Deutschen an, sonst bekommst du eine unpassende Antwort, vielleicht sogar eine grobe, unfreundliche. Am schlimmsten ist Freitagabend. Am Freitagabend sind sie wie wilde Tiere, die jederzeit zum Angriff bereit sind.

(In the evenings it is very quiet on the bus, as though someone had died. No-one feels like talking about anything. I would advise you, if you ever do get the chance to work in Germany, never to speak to a German after the end of work, or you may get a short answer, perhaps even a rude, unfriendly one. Friday evening is worst of all. On Friday evening they are like wild animals, ready to attack at any moment.)

The reader is left to guess the real source of the irritability which the guest worker has observed. Obviously, all this is wildly exaggerated for the sake of its humour, but it is not meant entirely ironically: in an interview Dikmen

¹⁶ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.17.

insists that this piece is based on letters which he really did receive from Germany before he emigrated -- "Die Gastarbeiter, die vor mir nach Deutschland gekommen sind, haben über Deutschland ungefähr so erzählt"¹⁷ ("The guest workers who came to Germany before me spoke of it in more or less this way.") -- and other migrants tell how the sense of wonder evoked by such stories was part of what motivated them to leave their homelands. The key question here is the tone in which these convoluted travellers' tales are delivered: amazement, affectionate admiration, and a slight shiver of apprehension about contact with the utterly alien. Strange as it may seem to the German reader, Germany too can be exotic.

This story is a sequel to a piece in an earlier volume with a similar "letter-home" format entitled "Deutschland, ein türkisches Märchen" (Germany, a Turkish fairytale),¹⁸ and this title is telling. Its history would appear to be as follows. In 1978 Aras Ören had published collection of poems with this same title, *Deutschland, ein türkisches Märchen*, obviously in deliberate echo of Heine's *Deutschland ein Wintermärchen*. (Other book titles by Ören are also Turkish versions of western classics: *Berlin Savignyplatz* in allusion to Döblin, for example, or *Paradies kaputt* to Milton.) In 1979, Ören's title was used as the catch-phrase for an intercultural event in Ulm at which Dikmen was asked to speak, and the first version of Dikmen's story was read on that occasion.¹⁹ The title itself, then, is not Dikmen's but its relationship to the material it inspired is nonetheless poignant. In an oriental context, the exotic element of a "märchenhaft", fairy-tale world conjures up visions of the *Arabian Nights* for most western readers. One might go as far as to say that the exotic orient is a "Märchen" of western invention. The idea that the Germany portrayed in Dikmen's story might be a "Märchen" originating in Turkish fantasy is neat reversal of this.

This reversible nature of the exotic is particularly obvious in its relationship to the erotic, which Dikmen himself expresses succinctly: "je exotischer desto erotischer"²⁰ ("the more exotic, the more erotic"). Said complained that an insidious feature of western orientalism was its belief in the sensuality and licentiousness of the oriental. Dikmen enthusiastically reproduces this cliché, the potency of the eastern man and the exhibitionism of the belly-dance, but matches it with what might be termed an occidental stereotype of the sexual willingness of the German woman.²¹ These opposing exoticisms meet and collapse upon each other without any real resolution when it emerges that the

¹⁷ Hasty and Merkes-Frei, p.69.

¹⁸ Dikmen, *Koblauchkind*, pp.5ff.

¹⁹ Hasty and Merkes-Frei, p.66.

²⁰ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.158.

²¹ Dikmen, *Hurra*, pp.27, 95, 157ff.

“Egyptian” belly-dancer in the Turkish restaurant is in fact a German student earning some pocket money.

The primary focus of Dikmen’s satire, then, is the clash of contrasting cultural assumptions. These contrasts allow criticisms to be made of both German and Turkish life. A nice example of humour at the expense of the Turkish side is the story “Eine Reise durch Griechenland”, in which the narrator must spend a night in Greece on his way home to the Bosphorus. He carries with him a racial profile of the Greeks as hateful and murderous and is able to confirm this prejudice through experience because he stubbornly misinterprets every friendly gesture. The message of this story obviously goes beyond the specific Greek-Turkish dynamic to speak of racial prejudice generally, but its focus is by no means accidental: the Greek question is a perennial irritant which calls liberal Turks to serious self-reflection. More frequently, however, social criticism is directed against Germany. Dikmen has spoken in interviews of his disillusionment with Germany: he describes himself as “ein enttäuschter Liebhaber”, a disappointed lover, disappointed by the slowness of the German majority to warm to his attempts at integration.²² While his stories do not blame the German side alone for the failure of communication, their reticence is obviously the problem which most frequently confronts him, and as Germans are his primary readership, it is this that he wishes to write to them about.

Dikmen’s aim, then, is to deal with tensions across this divide. Almost all of his stories are told through the voice of a rather green and gullible immigrant who has a stylised view of the Germans, and himself corresponds entirely to a German stereotype of the Turk. Invariably the Turkish figure is warm and open-minded about the Germans, though sustaining this good-will in the face of a thousand setbacks requires considerable endurance, enough that one protagonist on the hunt for a new flat coins the proverb “As patient as a Turk in Germany.”²³ Some of the Germans in the stories reciprocate this attitude by looking on the Turks with an equal benevolence, and an equal lack of real understanding. This mutual failure of understanding is the source of much of Dikmen’s humour, as when German neighbours, out of pity for the poor migrants, bring unwelcome sacks of second-hand clothes, and the narrator’s reluctant children are forced to wear these in order not to offend their benefactors. Frequently, though, we are made to sense that the friendliness of Germans is limited to a few exceptional individuals or to superficial contacts. Sometimes, indeed, the reader sees more than the narrator can, and recognises that what the naïve newcomer sees as heartiness may be ambiva-

²² Hasty and Merkes-Frei, p.67.

²³ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.71.

lence at best: in “Ein Türkenbub schiebt einen Brief an Onkel Goethe”, the child-narrator repeatedly mistakes insults for complements and is thrilled by the warm reception he receives. And the piece “Wir werden das Knoblauchkind schon schaukeln”, the title story of an earlier volume which is reprinted in *Hurra*, parodies liberal German activists who wish to see themselves helping race relations but only reveal their own inherent prejudices.

Outright hostility is only occasionally the theme of Dikmen's writing, but in the story “Wer ist ein Türke?” which has been discussed thoroughly by Karin Yeşilada,²⁴ it is sheer racism which makes an elderly German couple refuse a Turk a place in a railway carriage, although there is space. The narrator -- if it makes sense to distinguish narrator from author in what turns out to be a recollection of an actual incident -- is the third passenger in the compartment, and happens to be one of those Turks who look and sound German, as does Dikmen himself. When the woman explains that she has no wish to share a compartment with a Turk, the narrator can wrong-foot her by pointing out that she is already doing precisely this. Rather than re-examine her prejudice, however, the woman refuses to believe that the narrator is Turkish; after all, he is reading *Die Zeit*. Dikmen's response to this mindless hostility is an irony which renders the woman absurd. The narrator ponders that if reading *Die Zeit* makes him German, perhaps those Germans who do not read *Die Zeit* become Turks?

It is perhaps significant that Dikmen's humour focuses almost exclusively on the Turkish-German dynamic. Even when he turns his attention to more general matters, the Turkish aspect is always present. For example, his short text in letter form, “Bölls Tod in Deutschland”, inveighs against the outrage that the death on 16th July 1985 of the novelist Heinrich Böll, whom Dikmen so much admires, received less media coverage in Germany than Ronald Reagan's surgery for cancer of the colon, four days earlier. The fictional letter-writer, a German literary scholar, and an admirer of Böll's controversial critic Matthias Walden to boot, finds this normal, “weil der Arsch in Deutschland wichtiger als der Kopf ist”²⁵ (“because in Germany the arse is more important than the head”). It is of course the stock-in-trade of satirists to link such apparently unrelated items in order to comment on the upside-down priorities of society, but Dikmen -- almost gratuitously in this piece -- has a Turkish post-grad expose the discrediting state of affairs like Grimm's boy the emperor's nakedness, while the self-satisfied German expert mocks the Turk's naivety. Dikmen's point-of-view, then, is unwaveringly that of the alien in Germany, whether the material requires this or not. And indeed this

²⁴ Yeşilada, pp.534ff.

²⁵ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.156.

obviously coincides with reader-expectations, for despite the Turkish perspective in this story, Dikmen was criticised for writing about Böll, a *German* author.²⁶ This clear delineation may be considered a prerequisite for exotism: for it could be argued that an author who moves easily between cultural spheres is less likely to accentuate the differences between them.

We see, then, that the world of Dikmen's *Hurra* is characterised by a fairly stark demarcation line across which Germanness and Turkishness are opposing poles. Although he himself is well able to merge into German society,²⁷ none of his Turkish protagonists are, with the exception of that one autobiographical narrator in the railway carriage. The differences between the cultures are constantly highlighted for humorous effect, whereas similarities and cultural continuities go unremarked. To facilitate this widening of the cultural gap, Dikmen's portrait of the Turks, is heavily endowed with exotic elements. There is the pastoral idyll of the Turkish village, the obedience of the Turkish wife, the emotionalism, illogicality and backwardness of the oriental, and generally the sights and sounds of the east, all of which are presented as unquestioned and at least ostensibly unquestionable.

One might wonder whether the innate irony of Dikmen's prose counteracts these features. In some cases it clearly does: when he calls the Turks "rückständig" ("backward"),²⁸ for example, the reader registers powerfully that the author is in fact rejecting, not asserting this prejudice. There is at least a whiff of the ironic in every paragraph of the book, and Dikmen himself has called irony "Haltung", an attitude rather than a technique, a constant in his manner of looking at the world.²⁹ A possible interpretation, then, would be that in presenting the exotic ironically, Dikmen is signalling that it is fake. The difficulty here is that he makes no attempt to put anything in its place. When he refers to Karl May, the 19th-century author of adventure stories for boys, as the greatest authority on the Turks,³⁰ for example, the tone is obviously ironic, yet far from undermining the exotic *per se*, the allusion calls to mind a whole new layer of exotic clichés which surface in the reader's perception and are never discredited. On the contrary, despite the fact that he is clearly not taking the exotic material too seriously, one is left with the impression that he is enjoying it rather than rebelling against it. It would seem, then, that there is no inherent contradiction between irony and the delight in

²⁶ Hasty and Merkes-Frei, p.71.

²⁷ In the foreword, Hildebrandt writes: "Şinasi sieht aus und wirkt so wie ein Deutscher, der türkisch gelernt hat. Erst seine Betrachtungsweise des deutschen Alltags entlarvt ihn als Türke" (p.7).

²⁸ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.80.

²⁹ Hasty and Merkes-Frei, p.69.

³⁰ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.110.

the exotic. With his irony, Dikmen warns the reader to question everything, especially when it seems simple, but the exotic remains a field with which both author and reader can be comfortable.

In a similar way, Dikmen's strategy of extrapolating *ad absurdum* for humorous effect may sometimes have the effect of rendering the exotic unreal; the behaviour of the guests in the story "Wir tun so als ob wir Deutsche wären", for example, who end up drawing knives and stabbing each other, cannot be described as "typically Turkish" without a reverse effect setting in in the minds of the readers. The exaggerated exotic should ring alarm bells. However, this is undermined by the fact that the exaggeration itself is portrayed as an Turkish trait: "denn jeder, Freund oder Feind, weiß, daß wir, die Südländer, eine grenzenlose Phantasie haben und übertreiben."³¹ ("For everyone, friend or foe, knows that we Mediterranean peoples have an unbounded imagination, and exaggerate.") Thus any power that exaggeration might have to protest against the stereotype is negated when the exaggeration and the stereotype are so effortlessly reconciled. Like irony, exaggeration is a relativiser which makes it just a little bit harder for us to take the exotic material at face value, but without presenting an alternative, non-exotic picture.

Occasionally however, the exotic element is sharply reversed by a dose of cold realism, which really does tend for a moment to demythologise. In "Freundschaft", we are left wondering whether perhaps the German family in the Turkish village fled because they discovered that their view of the orient was inadequate -- do they in fact learn anything? Likewise, in "Bauchtanz", the revelation that the oriental dancer is really a German woman must suggest to the reader that the exotic cliché is flawed, or at least potentially deceptive. However such counter-thrusts are by no means found in every story. Only in "Wer ist ein Türke?", politically a key story of the collection, is the exotic entirely abandoned as a tool. In this case, the outright racism of the woman on the train is too blunt to be answered subtly. But in every narrative and technical sense, this story is untypical.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to an exoticised orient construction in Dikmen's writing is the fact that, as we have seen, the exotic element is reversible, the strange and fascinating eastern hemisphere being matched by a strange and fascinating west. The exotic is not a way of viewing one nation, but a way of viewing the world. It should of course come as no surprise that the excitement of looking across cultural boundaries can be reciprocal, but for most western readers, this is not part of their awareness. The reversibility of the exotic therefore has a strategic function: Dikmen's predominantly

³¹ Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.57.

German readership is invited to make the unexpected comparison and thus discover the subjectivity of their personal exotic fantasies.

All these caveats warn against letting exotic stereotypes get out of hand. Nevertheless, in Dikmen's writing the exotic is manipulated, not debunked. The story "Der Kebabstammtisch" is indicative of this. The Kebab, the Turkish speciality most beloved of Germans, is itself an exotic cliché. In this text, the narrator declares his intention to found a Kebab club at which Germans will learn to love the taste of the Turkish:³²

Der Kebab ist nicht nur ein Kulturgut, eine Folklore, eine Gaumenfreude, sondern auch eine Verständigungsmöglichkeit, eine Brücke sozusagen. Ich kenne keinen Deutschen, der nach einer Portion Kebab seine Feindlichkeit den Türken gegenüber aufrechterhalten hat. Hätte Sultan Selim der Zornige Luther eine Portion Kebab geschickt, in den Jahren, als Martin Luther seine 95 Thesen an der Kirchentür aufhing, wäre aus Martin Luther ein lammfrommer Türkenfreund geworden. Ich habe bei meinen eigenen Versuchen festgestellt, daß man nach einer Portion Kebab offener, entspannter, toleranter wird. Der Mensch, auch der Deutsche, macht sich dann auf, er ist dann bereit, seine Mitmenschen in seine Arme zu nehmen.

(The kebab is not only a piece of culture, folklore, a delight for the palate, but also a means of communication, a bridge so to speak. I know no German who has succeeded in maintaining his hostility towards the Turks after a portion of kebab. If Sultan Selim the Furious had sent Luther a portion of kebab in the years when he was hanging his 95 thesis on the church door, Martin Luther would have become a committed turkophile. Through my own experiments I have discovered that after a portion of kebab people become opener, more relaxed, more tolerant. Even a German opens up and is willing to embrace his neighbours.)

The kebab strategy, which includes offering kebab of a variety of meats (bear, wolf, snake, spider and kangaroo) so that the Germans will realise that the veal kebab tastes best, is obviously typical of Dikmen's absurdly exaggerating comedy, but what the narrator seeks with his "Stammtisch" is precisely what the author seeks with his texts, to seduce German readers into an affection for the guest worker by giving them a taste for the exotic. On the whole, one has the impression that Dikmen enjoys the exotic status. He does make several attempts to relativise it and put it into perspective, but as long as its recycling for the German domestic market has the desired narcotic effect of numbing the irritants which lead to hostilities, he is happy to let it thrive.

* * *

³² Dikmen, *Hurra*, p.151.

Muhsin Omurca³³ was born in Turkey in 1959, and came to Germany at the age of 20. His career in stand-up comedy began with his twelve-year co-operation with Dikmen; after the break-up of the *Knobi-Bonbon* team in 1997, Omurca established a series of solo programmes entitled *Tagebuch eines Skinheads in Istanbul* (Diary of a skinhead in Istanbul, 1996), *Kanakmänn* (1999) and *TRäume-alptrEUME* (Dreams-nightmares, 2004). Omurca is also known as a cartoonist, he drew the cover illustrations for Dikmen's books for example, and in his solo programmes he has pioneered what he calls "cartoon cabaret", a new concept in Germany, in which his drawings are projected onto the wall as he performs. The cartoons from the *Kanakmänn* programme subsequently took on a life of their own, appearing first in the newspaper *Etap*, which was circulated free of charge to Turkish households throughout Germany, and then in the mainstream newspaper *taz*, where the comic strip received such reader acclaim that excerpts, fashioned into a continuous narrative, were published in 2002 as a 60-page comic booklet.³⁴

The proactive use of the word *Kanake*, which properly designates a South Sea Islander (from Hawaiian *kanaka*, "man") but in today's German slang has become a racist epithet for "the" Turk, reminds us of Feridun Zaimoglu's volume of fictional interviews *Kanak Sprak* (1995) or Lars Becker's gangster film *Kanak Attak* (2001, based on Zaimoglu's 1997 novel *Abschaum*), both of which contain hard-hitting depictions of urban deprivation and young Turkish drop-outs in the sleazy North German drug scene, or of satirist Osman Engin's novel *Kanaken-Gandhi* (1998) and his volume of stories *Oberkanakengeil* (2001). In a similar way Omurca co-opts the word as an affirmative self-designation. The title-figure, "Kanakmänn" (the *Umlaut* is intended to evoke an English as opposed to a German pronunciation of "man") is nothing less than a large-nosed, moustached and thus obviously Turkish Superman who flies in with his cape and vest -- adorned with the letter *K* where Superman has his famous *S* -- to aid the beleaguered guest-worker in his daily struggles. Unfortunately, *Kanakmänn* is only a dream, or rather, an invincible self-projection, of the bumbling central figure, Hüsni.

As the subtitle *tags deutscher nachts türke* suggests, it is the phenomenon of mixed identity which is the central theme of the cartoon narrative. The key-word of the booklet is *Doppelpass*. For many years, the issue of dual nationality has been on the German political agenda, but despite frequent representations from minority groups, the policy of successive governments of both complexions has been firm: foreign nationals who are long-term

³³ Pronounced 'mu:çsin o'mu:rdʒa. I am grateful to Muhsin Omurca for taking the time to discuss his cabaret with me, and for giving permission to publish photographic reproductions of his cartoons.

³⁴ Muhsin Omurca, *Kanakmänn: tags deutscher nachts türke* (Ulm: omu Verlag, 2002).

residents may apply for German citizenship, but as part of the administrative process must normally give up their previous nationality. Like many Turks, Hüsni cherishes what is for him the impossible dream of the double passport, acquiring the German documents which confer rights and privileges while retaining the Turkish escape-route, an official recognition of dual identity. He dreams of keeping these two passports in his two back pockets like revolvers in a cowboy's holster, ready to draw at a moment's notice. "Ich spüren die Macht und die Härte der beiden Staaten auf meinem Arsch! Meine Arschbacken sind in sicheren Händen!"³⁵ ([In broken German] "I feel the power and the strength of both states on my arse. My two cheeks are in safe hands.")

Hüsni has his own unique angle on the nationality question. He desires dual citizenship because it will facilitate his innate wanderlust. In "Wir Türken sind Nomaden", he explains:³⁶

Das ist unsere Bestimmung. Wir müssen immer weiterziehen. Wie Wanderlachse! Also Türken nix stammen von Affen ab wie Deutsche. Wir vielmehr verwandt mit den Lachsen!

([In broken German] That is our destiny. We must keep moving on. Like migrating salmon! So Turks are not descended from apes like the Germans. Rather, we are related to salmon.)

Salmon, then, are the "Türken der Fischheit", leaving their homes in the river to head out to work in the oceans, and returning to spawn. The difference is that salmon do not need visas; Turks are more like salmon in an aquarium, hemmed in by glass right and left. And the problem is the Turkish passport, which does not open borders, not even to the "German provinces" of Austria, Switzerland and Holland.

So Hüsni's hopes are fixed on the thought of a German passport, "ein Pass wie 'Viagra'!",³⁷ like Aladin's lamp.³⁸ The passport that will get you a Russian wife if no other women will have you. "Bist du ein Schlafwandler? Er ist dein Kompass! Kämpfst du gegen die Römer? Er ist dein Zauberkompass!"³⁹ ([In broken German] "Do you walk in your sleep? It is your compass! Are you fighting the Romans? It is your magic potion!") Hüsni knows that the unbeatable Kanakmännchen is only a dream, but this dream convinces him

³⁵ Omurca, *Kanakmännchen*, p.5.

³⁶ Ibid., p.8.

³⁷ Ibid., p.10.

³⁸ Ibid., p.33.

³⁹ Ibid., p.38.

that he himself will be immune even to the racist violence of the skinheads if he can achieve citizenship.

So he applies for his German passport and is granted it, but his Turkish one is taken away, leaving him feeling as if he has been castrated. This association of Turkishness with masculinity is of course an implicit affirmation of the pervasive clichés of the over-sexed oriental, but there is no doubt that giving up Turkish citizenship, and with it a symbolic connection to one's roots, really is a difficult psychological step for many immigrants. This sense of loss makes it doubly important that the new passport should deliver what it promised, and the latter part of the booklet explores Hüsni's disillusionment as he discovers that in fact it does not. "Deutscher Pass ist wie ein fliegender Teppich! Bei mir aber heben er nicht mal ab!"⁴⁰ ([In broken German] "A German passport is like a flying carpet. But mine won't even take off!"). The biggest problem is that even with the documentation, no-one believes he is German. No matter what the paperwork says, a Turk's Turkishness does not easily become invisible.

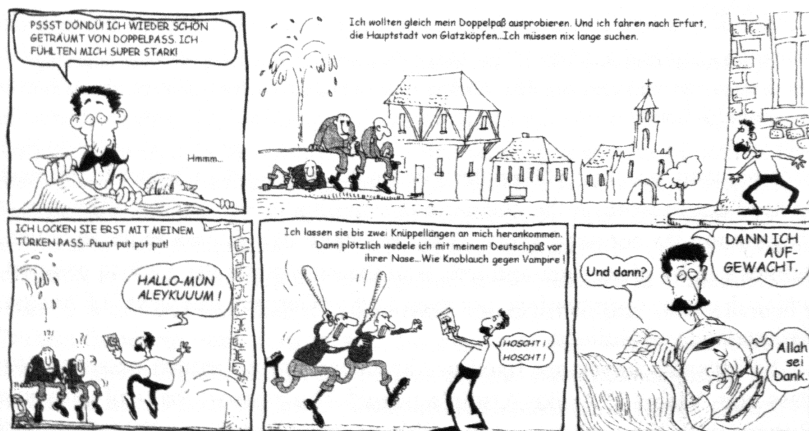


Illustration 1. *Kanakmännchen* 12.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Omurca, *Kanakmännchen*, p.21.

⁴¹ [In broken German]: "Pssst, Döndü! I dreamt about the double passport again. I felt super-strong. I wanted to try out my double passport and I went to Erfurt, the capital of the skin-heads. I didn't have to look for long. First I lured them with my Turkish passport. I let them come within two club-lengths of me. Then suddenly I waved my German passport under their noses, like garlic against vampires!" "And then?" "Then I woke up." "Thank Allah!"

From an intercultural perspective, the German verb *türken*, “swindle”, is extremely interesting. It is said to originate from an 18th-century confidence trick involving a Turkish doll which was supposed to be able to play chess mechanically but in fact was controlled by a man hidden in a box. There are also other explanations of the origins of the phrase, involving ruses in the Turkish wars of the 16th century, but interestingly, what all the explanations have in common is that the original Turk-swindle was not perpetrated by Turks but rather by Germans manipulating an illusion of Turkishness. At any rate, to “Turk” someone is to cheat them, to “Turk” documents or statistics is to falsify them, and the adjective *getürkt*, often in the set-phrase “alles getürkt”, means “fake”. For the Turkish-German satirists, this linguistic quirk is too good to miss. Several unrelated books and films bear the title *Alles Getürkt*,⁴² and Omurca plays on the same idea when he has Hüsnü’s neighbour declare a Turk with a German passport (or should we say, a German with a Turkish name) to be “Ein getürkter Deutsche, eine Fälschung”, in contrast to the real thing, the “Bio-Deutscher”, the pure, organic crop, so to speak.⁴³

This theme recurs throughout the *Kanakmän* strip in a series of variations. The Turkish assimilant may satisfy bureaucratic requirements, but can never really be more than a “Scheindeutscher”,⁴⁴ a humorous neologism which may echo the term *Scheinasyllant*, “fraudulent asylum seeker”, so frequently banded about in the immigration debate. The concept of a pure-blooded German is of course particularly pernicious in view of its National Socialist overtones, but Omurca does not pursue this direction far; he is more interested in the corollary, the feeling of spuriousness engendered by not being native. Changing one’s citizenship inevitably brings complex questions of identity to the surface, and an immigrant with a heavy accent is obviously naïve to imagine that an act of officialdom will allow him to become invisible in German society. A sense of being fake may well be pre-programmed no matter how the indigenous community reacts. What troubles Hüsnü, however, is that the Germans around him so pointedly reinforce the fault-line in his identity. His origins are a stigma from which he cannot escape; as

⁴² For example Osman Engin’s collection of satirical stories, *Alles getürkt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992) or the television police comedy *Alles Getürkt*, directed by Yasemin Samdereli (2002). An academic study with the same title is Margret Spohn, *Alles getürkt: 500 Jahre (Vor)Urteile der Deutschen über die Türken* (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Univ., 1993). In March 2004, ZDF broadcast a documentary report on copyright crimes perpetrated by Turks entitled *Alles Getürkt: Die Buchpiraten vom Bosphorus*.

⁴³ Omurca, *Kanakmän*, p.37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

Omurca puts it, being an "Ex-Turk" is tantamount to having a previous conviction.⁴⁵

However Hüsni has the answer to the disappointment of his semi-successful attempt at integration. In his super-hero fantasy, Kanakmän will change things. The Germans will have to adapt to *his* norms. "Gastarbeiter-deutsch" will be declared to be the standard language, and the annoying articles *der*, *die* and *das*, the source of so many headaches for foreign learners, will be prohibited: "Wer sie dennoch verwendet, werden wegen Hochverrat und Separatismus verklagt."⁴⁶ ("Those who persist in using them will be charged with treason and separatism.") Thus the failure of multi-culturalism is ultimately compensated for, if only in an oriental fantasy.



Illustration 2. *Kanakmän* 20.⁴⁷

Although a vast array of cultural phenomena are touched upon, *Kanakmän* is focussed squarely on a single issue: dual citizenship. The reader, like the audience in the original cartoon cabaret, is led through the ins and outs of the quandary of the Turk who is forced to choose between two passports and

⁴⁵ Omurca, *Kanakmän*, p.46.

⁴⁶ Omurca, *Kanakmän*, p.36.

⁴⁷ [Hüsni's speeches in broken German] "No-one believes that I'm a German. Once for example at a traffic control." Policeman: "Stop! Oh oh oh, in quite a hurry! Papers! WHAT IS THAT?" Hüsni: "My passport, my German passport." Policeman: "Italian or Russian?" Hüsni: "What?" Policeman: "From the Italian or the Russian Mafia?" Hüsni: "Not Mafia! Real German, honest!" Policeman: "Boss! There's a Turked (fake) German here! One of these doubled-up types! What should I do?" Voice from car: "Charge him twice!"

finds neither choice fully satisfactory. Dual nationality would resolve Hüsni's problems, and it quite specifically is the object of Omurca's entreaty. In an interview he explains the importance of this question.⁴⁸

Ich verstehe die Angst derjenigen nicht, die sich gegen den Doppelpass einsetzen. Wie soll die doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft diesem Deutschland schaden? Darauf haben die Gegner des Doppelpasses noch keine Antwort gegeben. Doch sie schaffen es, tausende von Unterschriften im Nu zu sammeln, ohne ein solches Argument vorzubringen. Das ist ein interessantes Phänomen.

Ich will nicht viel von den Deutschen, ich verlange nur Gerechtigkeit. Wir erfahren immer wieder, wie die versprochene Mietwohnung plötzlich vergeben ist, sobald der Bewerber einen türkischen Namen angibt, und das auch bei den Türken, die perfekt Deutsch sprechen.

Das Wort "Integration" ist eine Hülse, es ist leer. Wenn die Türken sich beschweren, wird ihnen vorgeworfen, sie haben sich nicht integriert. Das ist leicht gesagt, und keiner muss so genau erklären, was es bedeutet. Mir geht es nicht um Integration, aber schon um Entgegenkommen. Aber das muss zweiseitig sein. Ich schulde den Deutschen nichts: wenn ich also einen Schritt mache, so sollen sie auch einen machen. Ich zum Beispiel führe mein Kabarett in deutscher Sprache auf. Damit komme ich den Deutschen entgegen. Dafür sollen auch sie was geben. Die doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft wäre eine gute Möglichkeit, den Türken entgegenzukommen.

(I can't understand the fear of those who are opposed to the double passport. What harm would dual nationality do to this Germany? The opponents of the double passport have never given an answer to this question. Yet they can manage to gather thousands of signatures in no time without ever producing such an argument. That is an interesting phenomenon. I don't ask much of the Germans, I only demand justice. We experience time and again how the promised flat suddenly has already been let, as soon as the applicant gives a Turkish name, even from Turks who speak perfect German. The word "integration" is a husk, it is empty. When the Turks complain, they are reproached with a failure to integrate. That is easily said, and no-one needs to explain exactly what is meant. I am not concerned with integration, but rather with give-and-take. But that must go in two directions. I don't owe the Germans anything: so if I make a step, they should also make one. For example, I conduct my cabaret in the German language. That is a step which I take towards the Germans. In return, they too should give something. Dual citizenship would be a good way of making a gesture towards the Turks.)

Thus *Kanakmân* is a satire with a very clear agenda. The same is true of Omurca's other cabaret programmes: *TRäume-alptrEume*, for example, focuses (as the capitalisation suggests) on Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union. All satire challenges its public to re-examine positions, but it is less common for a whole programme to be engaged a targeted polemic; the result is that Omurca's satire is tightly structured and very effective. Omurca estimates that his live audience is equally divided between Turks and

⁴⁸ Muhsin Omurca, in conversation with Graeme Dunphy, 9 April 2005.

Germans, and the same may be true of the readership of the comics. For the former, *Kanakmän* is an affirmation of their right to persist in their citizenship claims, for the latter it is a persuasive argument not to resist this.

The use of the exotic in Omurca's booklet is far less complex than in Dikmen's volume: it is one-sided and consistently applied. The Turkish clichés are far more intense than Dikmen's, the gambling cliché, the kebab cliché, the nomadic cliché, the obedient wife cliché and many others. Throughout the story, Hüsni reinforces the impression of the Turk as a creature from another world. The inclusion of elements of Arab culture reflects the lack of differentiation that has long been inherent the western sense of the eastern exotic; going a significant step further than Dikmen, Omurca plays with such Ali Baba images as the flying carpet, and Aladdin's genie. This mixing into the mythical Turkish identity of images from the Arab fairy-tale could be criticised as a simultaneous pandering to two different mechanisms of western orientalism, namely the smelting of the diversity of oriental cultures into a single orient and the stylisation of this orient as magical and unreal. All this Omurca takes on board. Nor is this play on the exotic mitigated, as it is in Dikmen's work, either by reversal in the sense of a Turkish perception of an exotic occident or by any counter-thrust surreptitiously undermining the exotic image and hinting that may in fact be misplaced. On the contrary, the traditional German domestication of Turkish exoticness is co-opted entirely to the service of the minority voice. "Ich bediene mich der Motive", he explains; "Aber ich verpacke darin meine Meinung, meine Kritik, und liefere sie mit den bekannten Motiven ab." ("I use the motifs. But I pack it with my own opinion, my critique, and deliver these together with the familiar motifs.")⁴⁹ Though the reader suspects that Omurca means much of this ironically, this is less explicit than with Dikmen, and it would be difficult to argue that the aim here is to disarm exoticism by laughing at it. Rather, Omurca's strategy is to win the German reader's sympathy for the Turkish *Mitbürger*, and specifically sympathy for his position on such causes as the dual-citizenship debacle, and in this he is no doubt successful given the popularity of his work, but in the process he takes on board the possibility that the reader is left believing that this -- perhaps in a slightly less exaggerated form, but still, on the whole -- is what Turks really are like.

* * *

Django Asül -- the stage-name of Ugur Bagislayici -- is the youngest of the three comedians under discussion here, and the only one born in Germany

⁴⁹ Muhsin Omurca, in a conversation with Graeme Dunphy, 9 April 2005.

(Lower Bavaria, 1972). He too specialises in cabaret, and his oral-performance satire can be more comfortably studied than Dikmen's and Omurca's, as his three main touring programmes have been released on CD: *Hämokratie* (the neologism is a fusion of "haemorrhoids" and "democracy") in 1997, *Autark* in 2001, and technically his most polished performance, *Hardliner* in 2004.⁵⁰

In all of these, he appears alone on stage, without costume or props, and speaks in alternating personas and voices; Asül has a principal persona in which he acts as a linkman and commentator for his whole act, and the relationship of this persona to the artist might be likened to that of the narrator to the author in written forms. In this persona he speaks in his natural voice, a strongly Lower Bavarian accent, but in grammar and lexis more standard German than dialect. From here he moves into a very convincing dialect to give voice to the typical Bavarian, rather less-convincing stylized accents to represent Germans from outwith Bavaria, and a broken and heavily accented Turkish-German to represent a stereotyped guest-worker, generally styled as the artist's father. These staged voices are all parodies, and it should be noted that Asül's speech-patterns only betray his Turkishness when he deliberately pokes fun at it.

In its inter-cultural dynamic, Asül's satire operates quite differently from that of Dikmen and Omurca. This is at least partly to be explained by his biography -- he is more clearly rooted in Germany than they are. The choice of a stage name is already a mock-exotic cultural mix,⁵¹ and this hybridity is encapsulated in the fact that, even in his narrator voice, "we" can mean either Bavarians or Turks. Thus a large part of his programme deals with German or international issues from a Bavarian perspective, with both Schröder's Social Democratic national government and Stoiber's Conservative state government being lampooned for perceived economic incompetence, while US president Bush's military adventures provide a leitmotif in absurd comparisons of all kinds. In short, "Ein Terrorkommando regiert die Welt -- ein Er-rorkommando regiert Deutschland!"⁵² This is the standard fare of political cabaret, and the overwhelmingly Bavarian audience finds the comedian

⁵⁰ All appear on the Zampano label. He has also published a book containing transcripts from *Hämokratie* and other short texts: Django Asül, *Oh Abendland!* (Viechtach: Lichtung Verlag, 1997).

⁵¹ "Django" is a male nick-name familiar in several Western European countries, which nevertheless has exotic or glamorous overtones; one thinks of the Belgian-born jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt (1910-1953) or the spaghetti western *Ein Fressen für Django* (Eduardo Mulargia, 1996); "Asül" looks and sounds Turkish, though in fact it is not a normal Turkish surname and presumably contains a deliberate echo of the German word *Asyl*, "political asylum".

⁵² Asül, *Hardliner*, track 1.

speaking for them, giving voice to their own frustrations. There are no Turkish aspects in much of this, and even when Asül assumes the broken German of the “father”, he is not necessarily pursuing minority interests. The fact that for much of his act, the rôle which he plays, and in which he is accepted by the audience, is in no sense the “other”, greatly increases the complexity of the reception process. It means that when he does turn to Turkish themes, as he does in a little under half of all the tracks on the CDs, the German audience are listening from a position of prior identification and are thus forced either to stay with the artist and experience an intimacy with Turkish perspectives or to draw back and experience a sharp discontinuity. Either way, the potential fluidity of ethnic identities comes home to the German listener in what may often be a surprising way.

This fluidity receives a clear expression in *Autark*, where the shades of *de facto* cultural integration are humorously contrasted with the relative meaninglessness of paper distinctions:⁵³

Meine Mutter hat seit letztem Jahr übrigens einen deutschen Pass und schaut den ganzen Tag türkisches Fernsehen. Das heißt, erstmals in ihrem Leben beschäftigt sie sich mit fremden Kulturen. Überhaupt bin ich derjenige in der Familie, der am schlechtesten Türkisch spricht, aber ich habe als letzter noch einen türkischen Pass. Ich bin bei mir daheim praktisch eine Randgruppe, und als einziger Ausländer in einem deutschen Haushalt. ... man hat es nicht leicht.

(My mother got a German passport last year, by the way, and she sits all day long watching Turkish TV. That means that for the first time in her life she is taking an interest in foreign cultures. In fact, of all our family I am the one who speaks the least Turkish, but I am the last one who still has a Turkish passport. At home, I am practically an ethnic minority, and when you're the only foreigner in a German household, life's tough.)

The humour here obviously rests on the inversion of expectations, and raises the inevitable question, what *is* a German, what *is* a foreigner? Asül's impressive ability to move easily between these categories is typical of many well-adjusted second-generation Germans of Turkish extraction. And here too, the listeners are drawn in, because much of the play on identities revolves around the traditional inner-German rivalries: Bavaria versus North Germany, with side-sweeps at Hessen and Baden-Württemberg; Upper Bavaria versus Lower Bavaria, with side-sweeps at the Bavarian Franks and the Upper Palatinate; and obviously the glance across the border to the great rivals of the south:⁵⁴

⁵³ Asül, *Autark*, track 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, track 3.

Ich komme aus Niederbayern und ich stelle mich [*sic*] schon so lange die außenpolitische Frage, wie soll es mit dem Österreicher weitergehen? Und vor allem warum?

(I come from Lower Bavaria, and for a long time now I've been struggling with the foreign policy question, what future is there for the Austrians? And why should they have one at all?)

Subsumed in this maze of ethnic fun-poking, which is an innocuous and almost ritual part of German life, comes a similarly structured exploration of the far more sensitive Turkish-German relationships, and the audience, who have been won over by the familiar game, are inclined to accept the Turkish dynamic on a similar basis. All the familiar clichés about both nations are rehearsed, and generally the effect is to house-train the differences and render them harmless. Thus the Turk becomes amiable.

On occasion this allows Asül to make a very poignant exposé of the overt racism of the German right. There is a sequence in *Hämokratie* in which a Turkish voice comments on the series of arson attacks on hostels for asylum-seekers in the early 1990s. His take on this is to distinguish between asylum-seekers and guest-worker, maintaining that only the former are the targets of the violence -- and rightly so!

Wie man sagt auf Deutsch? Brenzlige Situation! Naja aber ich glaube, diese Männer vorher auch schon schwarz. Naja, vielleicht besser ohne Asylheim. Weißt du, sonst immer hat gegeben Missverständnis. Leute nichts haben gewusst, was ist Asylant, was ist Gastarbeiter.⁵⁵

([In broken German:] How do you say in German? Tricky [lit. burning] situation! But, well, I think these men were black already. Perhaps we're better off without the hostel. You know, before there were always misunderstandings. People didn't know who was an asylum-seeker and who was a guest worker.)

He then proceeds to recount such a misunderstanding from his own experience. Three young men try to burn down his house. From his window he shouts "He, Nichts Asylant", but they don't believe him. So they all go together to the local authority office, the *Einwohnermeldeamt*. Here, the speaker's status as a guest-worker is confirmed. Now the three men realise their mistake and to make amends they give him a voucher for a beer festival. In Turkish culture, if you receive a gift you must give one, so the narrator wonders what meaningful gift he can give to the three nice men. He comes up with the idea of a list of names and addresses -- asylum seekers on the left, guest workers on the right. "Warum ich soll nichts helfen für wegmachen Missverständnisse?" ([In broken German:] "Why shouldn't I help to clear up

⁵⁵ Asül, *Hämokratie*, track 20.

misunderstandings?") The point is, of course, that racism does not differentiate; in Mölln (1992) and Solingen (1993) it was Turkish women and children who died in the fires.

Generally, the pillorying of outright racism is not as prominent in Asül's comedy as it is in Dikmen and Omurca, and it is perhaps significant that it becomes even less central in his later programmes than it was in *Hämokratie*. Again, this may reflect his biography, with his origins in a fairly rural part of Bavaria. Thus the skinhead does not appear here as a principal antagonist. It is however a cabaretist's job to highlight the failings of politicians, and when for example Angela Merkel, then leader of the CDU parliamentary party, shows an ambivalence on immigration and integration questions, the Turkish voice in *Hardliner* is heard to mock her:⁵⁶

Frau Merkel ist gegen Alles. Jetzt ist sie gegen Zuwanderung, weil sie sagt, nein, dann kommen Fremde. Dann will sie auch nicht Türkei in EU. Ist extra gefahren nach Türkei und hat gesagt, jo, bleib daheim. Da hat sie gesagt zu Türkei, kannst du haben pi-ri-li-vi-li-gierte Partnerschaft. Ja, das ist wie Homoehe. Sagst du mal zu Türke, willst du Homoehe? Na jetzt ist sie auch gegen Kopftuch. Frau Merkel sagt, mit Kopftuch muslimische Frau in Deutschland macht Parallelgesellschaft. Ja aber jetzt mit neue EU kommen Frauen aus Polen und Tschechien und jetzt hast du horizontale Gesellschaft. Ja Frau Merkel sagt, Kopftuch ist Sache von Fundamentalist. Im Winter meine Mutter auch trägt Kopftuch, und jetzt ist sie Halbjahresfundamentalist oder was? Ja wenn ich mal treffe Frau Merkel, dann sag ich, Angela, solange tu selber hast Gesicht wie Bernhardiner mit Kreislaufschwäche, da musst du nicht tragen Kopftuch, musst du tragen Schleier. Schon damals Jesus hat gesagt, schau nicht auf Kopftuch von deine Nachbar, solange du selber ... eh ... hast Tür ... auf deine ... Tisch ... oder so ähnlich ...

([In broken German:] Frau Merkel is against everything. Now she's against immigration, because she says, no, then foreigners would come. Then she doesn't want Turkey in the EU. She went specially to Turkey and said, oh, stay at home! She said to the Turks, they can have a pi-ri-li-vi-legged partnership. But that's like a gay marriage. You try asking a Turk if he wants a gay marriage! And now she is against the headscarf. Frau Merkel says, with the headscarf Muslim women are building a parallel society. But now with the new EU, women are coming from Poland and Czechia and now you're getting a horizontal society. Yes, Frau Merkel says, the headscarf is question of fundamentalism. In winter my mother wears a headscarf, so now she's a half-year fundamentalist, or what? Yes, if I happen to meet Frau Merkel, I'll say to her, Angela, as long as you have a face like a Bernese dog with circulation problems, you don't need a headscarf, you need a veil. Jesus said, don't look at the headscarf of your neighbour as long as you yourself ... eh ... have a door ... on your ... table ... or something.)

The Turkish persona's lack of education and simplistic approach are evident here at the latest with the inability to pronounce the word "privileged", and ultimately results in the collapse of the whole passage into confusion as he

⁵⁶ Asül, *Hardliner*, track 8.

tries to cite a half-remembered Bible verse. But even in this chaotic form, the verse is unmistakably Matt 7.3ff (removing the plank from one's own eye first) and its message against hypocrisy and intolerance rings out.

In a similar vein, in *Autark* he turns this barbed humour against the Bavarian interior minister Günther Beckstein, who had made a series of pronouncements on immigration which minorities understood as disparaging. Here, however, it is the Bavarian narrator-voice speaking, and therefore the approach is ironic sympathy rather than overt criticism.⁵⁷

Für Leute, die jetzt ethnisch nicht so bewandert sind, sei erklärt, der bayerische Innenminister Beckstein ist ja gar kein Bayer. Er ist ja Franke. Und die Franken, die haben alle einen Komplex, weil die sind ja in Bayern die Underdogs. Und was macht ein Underdog? Er sucht sich einen anderen Underdog! Und im Falle von Beckstein, ist es der Ausländer. Jetzt gibt es böse Menschen, die sagen, ja der Beckstein, das ist ein Ausländerfeind. Das ist natürlich Blödsinn. Nur weil einer keine Ausländer mag, ist er noch lange kein Ausländerfeind.

(For those of you who are not so experienced in ethnic questions, I should explain that the Bavarian interior minister Beckstein is not in fact a Bavarian. He's a Frank. And the Franks all have a complex, because they are the underdogs in Bavaria. And what does an underdog do? He looks for another underdog! And in Beckstein's case, that's the foreigner. Now, there are some nasty people who say, Beckstein is a xenophobe. That of course is nonsense. Just because someone doesn't like foreigners doesn't make him a xenophobe.)

The implicit racism of Beckstein's remarks does not need to be exposed; it is enough that his supposed motivation is portrayed as ridiculous. However, despite such occasional forays into the race issues of German foreign and immigration policy, and the rather more frequent bemusement about the German ambivalence towards Turks, Asül never gives the impression of the kind of disillusionment to which Dikmen gave voice. It is his calling as a cabaretist to be critical, but on the whole he seems comfortable in and with Germany.

Consequently, the most frequent focus of Asül's satire is on economic and general social issues, and the intercultural take on these is mostly on the level of fun and nonsense. The problems of German reunification, for example, are discussed repeatedly, and in *Autark* the suggestion is made that the Federal Republic would have done better to unite with Turkey: "Dann kann Türke arbeiten in eigene Land und Deutscher kann Urlaub machen in eigene Land."⁵⁸ ([In broken German:] "Then the Turks could work in their own country, and the Germans could go on holiday in *their* own country.") The

⁵⁷ Asül, *Autark*, track 3.

⁵⁸ Asül, *Autark*, track 6.

German economic doldrums of the first half-decade of the new millennium have left wide-spread frustrations to which the cabaretist must give voice. Here too, Asül often does this with an inter-cultural aspect, typically connecting the theme to quite different topics, such as the following comment on proposals by Edmund Stoiber (Bavarian Minister President, CSU candidate for Federal Chancellor) relating to the "war on terror":⁵⁹

Wir kriegen ein Antiterrorgesetz, hat der Stoiber gesagt, wo drin steht, a Ausländer, der sich verdächtig macht, gleich ausse damit, verstehst? Und i sag, a Ausländer, der heut noch nach Deutschland kummt, der *ist* verdächtig.

([In light Bavarian:] We're getting an anti-terror law, says Stoiber, which says that a foreigner who makes himself suspicious, throw him out, understand? And I say, a foreigner who comes to Germany these days *is* suspicious.)

The implication: the current state of the German economy would not encourage honest migrants to come.

There is relatively little sense of the exotic in Asül's monologues. Neither the general characterisation of Turkey and the Turkish minority in Germany nor the presentation of Germany through the eyes of the Turkish persona are marked by wide-eyed amazement at the foreign. There is no Ali Baba, no idealising of the East in paradisiacal visions or picturesque scenes, nor anything of the inverted exotic occidentalism which we saw in Dikmen. Individuals, both Turks and Bavarians, are depicted for humorous effect as naïve, chaotic or simple, but these features are not attached to ethnic profiling, nor is the broken German of the first-generation migrants linked to these characteristics as it is in Omurca's cartoons: Asül's father persona is an incisive observer of political affairs.

Asül does of course work with clichés and stereotypes, which are almost unavoidable for a satirist. He does, for example, score points with his audience by blatant ethnic labelling: "Niederbayerische Intellektuelle ... ein Widerspruch in sich"⁶⁰ ("Lower Bavarian intellectuals -- a contradiction in terms"). The Turkish stereotypes have moved on from Dikmen's generation: Asül's diaspora Turks are no longer grocers, they are travel agents: "Das ist das Perfide am Türk -- statt dass er froh ist, dass er hier sein darf, schickt er uns weg."⁶¹ ("That's the perfidious thing about the Turk -- instead of being glad to be here, he sends us away!") Asül encapsulates this shift in the social rôle of the German Turk in the catch-phrase: "früher Türk, jetzt Unternehme-

⁵⁹ Asül, *Hardliner*, track 12.

⁶⁰ Asül, *Hämokratie*, track 7.

⁶¹ Asül, *Hardliner*, track 12.

ner" ("once Turks, now entrepreneurs"),⁶² which might remind us of Omurca's *Ex-Türk*, but with a rather different gloss. However, such jibes lack the sense of wonder which might allow us to find anything exotic in them; they might even be taken to be mildly malicious were they not rendered harmless by being dosed out equally in all directions.

In some cases, clichés which traditionally belong to the exotic picture are debunked, such as the erotic-exotic of 19th-century orientalism. Asül assures us, persuasively enough, that if circumcision really did increase the virility of Turkish men, Germans would have been circumcised long ago. And as for the sensuality of the Eastern woman, it only takes the grotesque image of a father hiring a porn video and seeing his daughter in it to bring home to the audience that the tensions between sexual appetite and social restraint run along much the same lines in East and West: "Nicht jeder Türke, der kreativ ist, ist automatisch Pornodarsteller und nicht jeder Pornodarsteller kriegt automatisch auf der Berlinale einen Preis. Deshalb überlegen Sie es sich bitte sehr, sehr gut, falls Sie Türke werden wollen."⁶³ ("Not every creative Turk acts in porn films, and not every porn actor gets a prize at the Berlin film festival. So please think very, very carefully before you decide to become a Turk.")

Asül's social and political critique of both Turkey and Germany has a general demythologising thrust. In comparison to parallel discussions in Dikmen's texts, the element of cliché is very much reduced, as the immediate point of reference becomes actual current events, which fosters a sense of realism and sobriety despite the humour. When he picks up on actual cultural divergences, it tends to be those which have immediate political relevance -- the headscarf issue is a case in point -- and which are too concrete and controversial to be the stuff of folklore.

Above all, however, the exotic element is diminished because the foreign is brought closer, made to feel familiar, like a minor variant of the homely. Where Omurca's passport experiment failed through an inability to bridge the personal gap, Asül wanders effortlessly back and forth across this bridge and has no need even to attempt the irrelevance of integration on paper.

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⁶² Asül, *Hardliner*, track 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, track 9. The reference is to the Turkish-German Sibel Kekilli, who starred in the film *Gegen die Wand* (English title *Head On*), which won a Golden Bear (best-movie award) at the *Berlinale* in February 2004: in the ensuing publicity she was berated by *Bild* for her earlier involvement in hardcore erotica.

Strategically constructing the “other” was always integral to the European imperial project, and it is therefore easy to dismiss any addiction to the lure of the exotic as complicity in prevailing power-structures, especially when the exoticised object is an ethnic minority which has experienced a history of disempowerment. It is no doubt in this vein that critics of German foreigner literature have seen the self-exoticising trend, when it can be discerned in the works of migrant authors themselves, almost as an unconscious betrayal. It is my contention that, in itself, the exotic is ethically ambivalent, in which case the western addiction to an exotic east, and indeed the instinct for exoticism which appears to reside in all cultures, is a potentially constructive force which migrant writers may legitimately harness. Whether in fact they choose to will ultimately depend on how they wish to locate themselves in relation to the “host” population. Hybrid communities are inevitably torn between a desire to highlight demarcation lines and a need to accentuate the potential for assimilation. Demarcation can be fostered by exoticising, fluidity of identity by rejecting the exotic. Humour, which in any case has a tendency either to underline or to debunk stereotypes, serves as a highly effective tool for working out this dichotomy.

The three satirists discussed in this essay have been seen to have quite different approaches to the exotic. Where Dikmen and Omurca internalise every cliché, Asül either discredits or simply ignores them. It will be no coincidence that this difference falls across the generation gap. The first generation, born in Turkey and painstakingly learning German in adulthood, is primarily aware of differences, and finding integration (let alone assimilation) illusive and possibly threatening, can take refuge behind the exotic, whereas the second generation can wander between its identities, benefiting from both of them, and does not want to place obstacles along the way. The variety of migrant experience is too vast to permit simple generalisations, but these patterns do appear relatively common; at any rate, in the debate about the use or rejection of the exotic in Schami and Şenocak, the same generation difference can be observed.

However, Dikmen and Omurca also differ considerably in their approach. Dikmen plays with the exotic for its own sake. His love affair, as he puts it, with Germany, itself begins with a fascination for the bewitchingly strange world of Europe, and his discovery that Europeans have a rather different yet in a sense parallel construction of the Middle East seems to have inspired him to take these divergent perspectives as obvious sources for his comedy.⁶⁴ The domestication of the exotic in simple images of the absolutely other, the idealised, the pure, the paradisiacal, the picturesque, the magical. When the

⁶⁴ Hasty and Merkes-Frei, p.67.

exotic clichés threaten to get out of hand, he is willing to rein them in a little, but in principle his playful handling of them is not disapproving. The ironic tone and above all the reversibility ensure that the reader will demythologise where appropriate, and in the process will learn to question the hypocrisies and presumptions of both cultures.

In Omurca's satire we see at its clearest how an exotic presentation of the ethnic minority widens the gap between the communities. The basic thesis of the strip, given the ultimate failure of Hüsnü's integration, would seem to be that without dual citizenship the cultural gulf between Turk and German may be insuperable; indeed, we are left with the strong impression that even with the double passport the gap will remain a significant one. Consequently, the accentuation of the alien is unmitigated. This corresponds also to the political message, which is more strident, more unrelenting and certainly more consistently structured than Dikmen's. With Omurca one senses far more strongly that the exotic is being manipulated in the service of a message.

Where Dikmen's and Omurca's exoticisms widen the cultural gap, perhaps in a manner indicative of their experience that it really is wide, Asül's defusing of the exotic narrows the gap, just as it is *de facto* narrow in his own hybrid interaction with diversity. Despite the irreverent humour and sheer sense of nonsense, there is a fundamental sense of realism in Asül's satire. He is clearly not interested in exoticising the orient, let alone simplifying the exotic picture for easy domestic consumption. Sometimes the exotic appears to irritate him, and here he demythologises consciously. For the most part it is simply not part of his picture. Asül offers us Turkey, and Turkish Germany, without the psychedelics -- cold Turkey, so to speak -- and thus reveals the hybridisation of his own identity which brooks no discontinuity. Germanness and Turkishness are no longer opposing poles: they are familiar, natural and unremarkable parts of the artist's world.

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