Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Julien Nathan April 12, 2022

Who is the Nation? Democratization of Leftist Media in West Berlin

by

Julien Nathan

Dr. Paul Buchholz

Adviser

Department of History

Dr. Paul Buchholz

Adviser

Dr. Astrid M. Eckert

Committee Member

Dr. Matthew Payne

Committee Member

2022

Who is the Nation? Democratization of Leftist Media in West Berlin

By

Julien Nathan

Dr. Paul Buchholz

Adviser

An abstract of

a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences

of Emory University in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of the degree of

Bachelor of Arts with High Honors

Department of History

2022

Abstract

Who is the Nation? Democratization of Leftist Media in West Berlin

By Julien Nathan

This thesis examines the relationship between second- and third-generation Turkish-Germans in Kreuzberg, West Berlin and the local leftist art scene. This exploration begins with a discussion of the *Gastarbeiterprogramm*, through which the West German government hired temporary "unskilled" workers from surrounding countries to help counteract the postwar labor shortage. While the West German government advertised the program as a temporary solution, often participants chose to stay in West Germany and raise or build families. By the 1960s, most "Guest workers" were Turkish, and this association was maintained in the greater German consciousness throughout the 20th century. In order to understand how West Germans reckoned with national identity in the postwar period, one must examine how those with "migration background" interacted with modes of cultural production. To preface a discussion of individual artists, I first examine the history of leftist and independent publishing methods in West Berlin and suggest that various groups—collective publishing houses, independent galleries, and underground publications—all stood to benefit from publishing pro-"guest worker" narratives, though often obscuring their voices in favor of widespread appeal. This thesis also features three artists as case studies: first, as a reference for German leftist artists of the time, infamous communist playwright Bertolt Brecht; second, established artist who moved from Istanbul to West Berlin, Aras Ören; and finally, Turkish-German scholar and artist Feridun Zaimoglu who sourced and transcribed interviews from Kreuzberg residents in the 1990s. By comparing Aras Ören's poetry to both Bertolt Brecht's scripts and Feridun Zaimoglu's transcriptions, I establish

how Turkish-Germans in the leftist art scene transitioned from appealing to the broader German public for approval to championing an anti-assimilationist approach.

Who is the Nation: Democratization of Leftist Media in West Berlin

By

Julien Nathan

Dr. Paul Buchholz

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences

of Emory University in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of the degree of

Bachelor of Arts with High Honors

Department of History

2022

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

In 1977, interdisciplinary artist Drago Trumbetas released a book of ink drawings titled "Gastarbeiter [in Frankfurt]." Trumbetas migrated to Germany from Croatia for labor opportunities and lived there for three decades. He was inspired to create these drawings from his personal experiences and those of his friends and family. He premiered his collection at the Elefanten Press Galerie, a small gallery in Kreuzberg founded by cultural studies students at the Technische Universität Berlin and led by experimental artist Tom Fecht. As part of the festivities for the book release, the Türkischer Arbeiterchor (Turkish Workers' Choir) gave a special performance in the gallery (fig. 1)[1]. Since the 1960s, Kreuzberg held a reputation as a migrant neighborhood, particularly as a settling place for labor migrants from Turkey. Trumbetas's choice to premiere his collection in Kreuzberg emphasizes the national importance Kreuzberg held as a geographical origin point for *Migrationshintergrund*[2] cultural production.

fig. 1

[1] FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. "Kleinbildnegativ: Ausstellung Drago Trumbetaš, Elefanten Press Galerie, 1977" last modified 2021-11-02. https://berlin.museum-digital.de/object/42788

[2] (people with a 'migration background')

In the same archive collection as this photo is a candid shot from the release night depicting a group of predominantly young people watching the performance and talking amongst themselves (fig. 2). The group appears ethnically diverse, suggesting that young white Germans engaged with and supported "migrant" art and media. Tom Fecht and his co-founders were young white Germans in university, yet they opened a gallery in a neighborhood predominantly working-class migrant neighborhood. Kreuzberg was known for its avant-garde artistic scene and cutting-edge leftist thought, which could explain why politically engaged artists would see value in having gallery space there. These connotations did not develop in a vacuum; how did Kreuzberg emerge as the West German hub for leftist art and praxis, and how did white German leftists interact with labor migrants? Was this relationship closer to spectatorship than support, and how are these approaches distinguished?

fig. 2

Trumbetas is one example of a group of artists in Kreuzberg who had personal experience with class adversity and labor migration, and whose work expressed this subset of their identity and outlook. One can assume from this picture and associated metadata that the artists were

performing at a community center. These spaces were integral to the democratization of art and popular communication in the 1970s. This picture is an example of the circular and intertwined nature of democratizing art in Kreuzberg, in which every stage of production, distribution, and documentation was interconnected and relied on an established network of community. I will argue that the Kreuzberg leftist art scene in the 1970s diverged from prior leftist German art movements because of this community interconnectedness and independence from large-scale, profit-driven publishing infrastructure.

We must first look to the surrounding historical context. In the 1950s, the West German government began recruiting laborers from surrounding countries, seeking to meet the need for "unskilled" labor in the postwar economic boom. After the Second World War, United-States-controlled West Germany experienced the so-called 'Economic Boom', during which the GDP grew by 8 percent every year between 1950 and 1959[3]. West Germany was a relatively small country and a large portion of its population was highly educated and working white collar jobs. The factories—cars, steel, consumer goods—experienced the brunt of the labor shortage. The West German government made an agreement with Italy first to allow "guest workers" to take short-term positions in Germany, called the *Gastarbeiterprogramm*. There was also a consistent stream of new workers from East Germany that helped flesh out the workforce. When the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, the West German government once again had to look for a new source for workers and signed new agreements with Yugoslavia, Spain, Greece, and Turkey to accept guest workers from these countries.[4]

---

[3] Barry Eichengreen and Albrecht Ritschl, "Understanding West German Economic Growth in the 1950s" (Working paper, London School of Economics, 2008), 1.
[4] Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.

These "guest workers" were intended to stay in Germany only a couple years, but soon they built lives and families, choosing not to return to their native countries. The process to get a position through the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* was taxing, requiring arduous journeys, long wait times, and invasive physical examinations. Once workers arrived in Germany, they were expensive to house and time-consuming to train. Also, translators had to be provided because the program did not see value in investing in long-term language acquisition. Because of these costs, business owners often opted to keep employing the same guest workers rather than hiring new people, even if their visas expired[5]. In contrast, the West German government initially marketed the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* to the German public by emphasizing the workers' temporary stay.[6] With the Nazi period in the very recent past and nearly eighty years of tension around "German" identity, the German public was not quite ready to accept foreign workers, especially not as permanent citizens.

In 1973, the OPEC oil crisis marked the end of the postwar economic boom. The crash especially affected factories, which were primary employers of foreign workers. Foreign laborers had the least legal protection and most social ostracization, so German workers scapegoated them and factory owners cut their hours and pay.[7] Because of this, foreign workers and labor migrants occupied a peculiar political position - they were functionally powerless in West German society, but therefore more willing to take risks in their fight against workplace mistreatment. They had the most to gain from organization and the least to lose from retaliation, because bosses had already made their lives nearly unlivable. German leftist artists and activists

---

[5] Chin, 10.
[6] Ibid, 5.
[7] Jennifer Miller, "Her Fight is Your Fight: 'Guest Worker' Labor Activism in the Early 1970s West Germany," *International Labor and Working-Class History* Special Issue: Crumbling Cultures: Deindustrialization, Class, and Memory, No. 84 (Fall 2013): 229.

understood this, and had no qualms using "guest worker" struggles as a *Projektionsfläche*, or projection surface, in order to motivate an anticapitalist movement. After the 1970s, when the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* was suspended, second and third generation Turkish-Germans explored their tenuous position – born and raised in Germany, but not considered *German*.

In order to contextualize this struggle for identity, both for labor migrants and their descendants, as well as a larger discussion of late 20th century "Germanness", I will analyze the work of two Turkish-German writers within their artistic and political periods. I will begin with Aras Ören in the 1970s and conclude with Feridun Zaimoglu in the mid-to-late 1990s. Along with specific authors, I will examine structural and communal aspects of artistic and political agency in Kreuzberg. One aspect is the history and function of community cooperative publishing houses, specifically Elefanten Press and Rotbuch Verlag. The other aspect is the efficacy of state-sponsored efforts for community engagement, which blossomed with the *NaunynRitze* youth center in the 1990s.

I argue that this cultural and literary shift happened as a result of the gradual democratization of media in West Berlin over this twenty-year period, specifically in the neighborhood Kreuzberg. At the center of these developments in cultural production is the publishing house *Rotbuch Verlag* in Kreuzberg, West Berlin. Since the press was cooperative and explicitly leftist, it published works without much care for profitability and provided a political platform for oppressed peoples. One of Rotbuch's first publications was Ören's *Berliner Trilogie,* and in 1995, it published Feridun Zaimoglu's anthology of essays sourced directly from the Kreuzberg Turkish-German working class. These two texts delineate the scope of this exploration. *Kanak Sprak* evolved from *Berliner Trilogie*, in literary and cultural terms. At the

root of this development is the amount of agency allowed to the authors in both the cultural reception and literary discourse.

Simultaneous with my discussion of *Kanak Sprak*, I will address the role of the NaunynRitze youth center in Kreuzberg in providing a space for young Turkish-German artists to express themselves, work with one another, and gain exposure. What both *Kanak Sprak* and the NaunynRitze youth center have in common is the platform they provided for Turkish-Germans at the heart of cultural movements to share their opinions, experiences, and insights on a public scale. I will approach these themes of 'authenticity' and 'agency' through the lens of Stuart Hall's essay "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'", which argues against an absolute truth of authenticity. I will instead contextualize and analyze the social, economic, and cultural factors that influenced how these authors wrote as well as their cultural presence.

In 1973, Aras Ören published the first of his collection of poems which he would go on to title "Berliner Trilogie". This novella-length first poem was titled "Was Will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße?" and it tells the story of a working-class town reckoning with its Nazi past, and the Turkish labor immigrants in the town working to bridge the gap with their German counterparts. Ören's protagonist organizes and rallies his neighbors around leftist ideals of multiculturalism and workers' rights. Ören continues the story with tangential plotlines and characters in his future works, which carry similar themes and tone. This poem is a well-known example of "Gastarbeiterliteratur", a literary movement categorized by works by and about labor migrants and their descendants.[8]

[8] Heidrun Suhr, "Minority Literature in the Federal Republic of Germany," *New German Critique*, No. 46 Special Issue on Minorities in German Culture (Winter, 1989): 76.

Ören was a Turkish leftist intellectual and artist who moved to West Berlin in 1969. He wrote in Turkish but had his work translated to German before any other language. His style was didactic, and despite his beautiful worldbuilding and prose, the characters are markedly one-dimensional, their actions predictable, and their monologues featuring an unambiguous ideological message. This didactic style has deep roots in German leftist literary tradition, and it makes sense that Ören would utilize these techniques. Ören came to West Berlin a year after the height of the highly anticipated but ultimately lukewarm New Left Student Movement in 1968, and he was acutely aware of this. The New Left was an academic socialist movement that boasted progressive intellectualism but failed to establish a political alliance with the working class that New Left activists supported in the abstract.

From the 1920s until the immediate postwar period, playwright Bertolt Brecht was one of the most prominent communist artists writing in German. Throughout the 1950s, he fell somewhat out of fashion, but in the 1960s after his death, New Left artists returned to his work. Ören's poems are undeniably linked to Brecht's work in style. Brecht died long before Ören came to West Berlin or started writing, so there is no personal mentorship to speak of here. While there existed an element of professional admiration as evidenced by Ören's staging of Brecht's plays for the Turkish theatrical scene in the 1960s[9], this is more easily explained by Ören's disciplinary awareness than by a specific appreciation of Brecht's works. Ören understood the West Berlin leftist artistic discourse he was entering into, and he understood that his thematically revolutionary work would be digested more readily in a familiar style.

[9] Ela Gezen, "Convergent Realisms: Aras Ören, Nazim Hikmet, and Bertolt Brecht by Ela Gezen," *Colloquia Germanica* 45, No. 3. Themenheft: Triangular Readings Gastherausgeber: Martin Kagel and Alexander Sager (2012): 370.

The scholarly discussion of the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* was tangential to the historiography on postwar West Germany until the late 2000s. Labor migrants were rarely mentioned even in works discussing postwar economic recovery. Studies of "guest workers" were also tangential to prominent questions in German Studies throughout the 1980s—specifically, the study of citizenships, belonging, and defining "Germanness." A shift in scholarship occurred in the 1990s after German Reunification, when scholars acknowledged the existence and experience of guest workers within the context of foreign labor policies in modern Germany. It wasn't until the late 2000s, however, when an independent discussion on guest workers emerged. Studies of the guest worker experience increased in popularity in the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, but few scholarly works exist which recognize the connection between the democratization of cultural production and multicultural communities in Germany, and even fewer acknowledge the role Kreuzberg as a city played in this story. While the "guest worker" discussion has been often cast aside as a supplemental discussion, a selection of scholars understand how central it is to understanding the German struggle for identity in the second half of the twentieth century.

Leslie A. Adelson's 2005 work *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* sets the foundation for my research framework, as well as for many scholars after her. In this monograph, Adelson pushes back against the narrative that immigrants were "caught between two worlds", and instead suggests that Germans with a *Migrationshintergrund* (migration background) have a more complicated relationship with their national identity.[10] Discrediting this "bridge theory", Adelson asserts that multicultural

[10] Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005) Accessed March 17, 2022, 5.

Germans as well as migrants exist in a unique sphere which is a full experience on its own; it is a necessary aspect of German cultural studies, not an adjacent fact. Written just one year before, Turkish scholar Levent Soysal's article "Rap, Hiphop, Kreuzberg: Scripts of/for Migrant Youth Culture in the WorldCity Berlin" offers a direct spotlight to working-class Turkish migrant youth culture.[11] Soysal establishes here how Turkish-German youth have a particular relationship with their national identity that goes beyond being caught between German and Turkish – he articulates the instinct to identify with Kreuzberg rather than Germany or Turkey. This emphasizes Adelson's argument that aesthetics and social conflicts of identity are deeply intertwined; young Turkish-Germans worked through their identity with reference to a specific locale in their relatively unique and organic artistic expression.

The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany by Rita Chin is a central work in the discussion of "guest workers" and their descendants. In this book, Chin unifies the intellectual threads of her predecessors by asserting the relationship between spectacle, West German leftist movements, labor migration, and cultural expression.[12] Ela Gezen's work in cultural and literary studies further adds to this discussion by exploring the prominent literary and theatrical voices in the West German leftist scene during the 1980s. In her 2012 article "Convergent Realisms: Aras Ören, Nazim Hikmet, and Bertolt Brecht", Gezen explains the influence of past leftist artists' theory on migrant artists in Germany.[13] She explains how Turkish immigrants who moved to West Berlin for the intellectual and artistic scene, like writer and playwright Aras Ören, utilized accepted German traditions and techniques to establish their presence in the scene. Gezen's work

---

[11] Levent Soysal, "Rap, Hiphop, Kreuzberg: Scripts of/for Migrant Youth Culture in the WorldCity Berlin," *New German Critique*, no. 92 (2004): 83. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4150467.
[12] Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
[13] GEZEN, ELA. "Convergent Realisms: Aras Ören, Nazim Hikmet, and Bertolt Brecht." *Colloquia Germanica* 45, no. 3/4 (2012): 369–85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43653019.

diversifies the discourse on the immigrant artistic voice by challenging the narrative of the immigrant voice always being ignored. In this piece, she asserts that this relationship was more complicated – the immigrant voice was more often obscured or misrepresented than ignored. Furthermore, she emphasizes the role of class in artistic visibility, which Chin briefly discusses.

I intend to take these scholars' arguments and weave their loose threads into a discussion of media, spectacle, representation, and identity for "guest workers" and their descendants in the 1970s-1990s. The importance of socialist cooperative printing presses is underrepresented when discussing of accessibility to media production. I will argue that the co-op presses Rotbuch and Elefanten in Kreuzberg helped shift the spotlight onto marginalized voices, and throughout the 1970s-90s, those voices went from being presented to representing themselves. Using Adelson's approach, I will take a holistic view of multicultural communities in Kreuzberg as inherently involved in the lore of the Berlin leftist scene, revealing how integral this relationship to popular media was for shaping contemporary German leftist discourse. I will demonstrate how the democratization of media through the implementation of cooperative media distribution methods diversified the scene. In the 1990s, voices of those with "Migration background" emerged not as a propagandistic tool or platitude, but as a search for identity and a demand for recognition. Overall, I examine the shift in the cultural discourse on "guest workers", exploring the emergence of Turkish-German voices and their political influence in the 1970s through the 1990s.

Structured around the analysis of two "eras" in West Berlin cultural production, this thesis contains two chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter provides a survey of three publishing avenues for leftist works, specifically leftist works from migrant and/or multicultural authors. This includes a discussion of the publishing house Rotbuch Verlag, the gallery space

and publishing house Elefanten Press Galerie, and the independent self-published alternative underground publication *Agit 883*. These three examples are a sample of different West Berlin leftist approaches to both migrant voices in the artistic discourse and ideological strategies with regards to inciting social change. Former employees of larger publishing conglomerates formed Rotbuch Verlag with pure intentions, hoping to create a collective and cooperative workspace. I examine how this vision interacted with economic forces at the time, specifically with regards to the signing of writer Aras Ören. Elefanten Press Galerie regularly hosted multicultural artists and positioned itself as a community center in West Berlin. However, photos from the time show that their community base likely did not feature minority populations. Throughout its 2-year run, *Agit 883* published a small but still relevant number of articles on the guest worker program and the experience of migrants in West Berlin. Still, these articles were one-dimensional and intended for German leftists. This chapter shows how, in the 1970s and early 1980s, West German infrastructure for cultural production prioritized convincing German leftists to be accepting of migrant populations rather than considering those populations part of the discourse themselves.

The second chapter discusses Aras Ören's collection of poetry *Berliner Trilogie* and how it engaged with the literary and political theory of his contemporaries. I explain Ören's past as an up-and-coming theatrical and literary star in both Istanbul and Berlin, and how this background impacted the lens and audience of his work. Ören was familiar with and respected the work of notable German communist playwright Bertolt Brecht, and because of this, I suggest that Ören's work was deeply influenced by Brecht's approach, particularly his approach to inciting social change. Brecht spearheaded the "alienation effect" which utilized distancing techniques to push the audience to identify the patterns they see in the play in their own lives, rather than become overly invested in the emotions and plight of the characters. Through comparative textual

analysis of Brecht and Ören works, I argue that Ören utilized Brechtian techniques for two reasons: firstly, because they were popular at the time and he was well-established enough in the scene to know this, and secondly, because, as a migrant artist publishing in Germany, he worked with pre-established aesthetics to make his work more appealing.

The project concludes with a discussion of the youth cultural center *NaunynRitze* and its role in engaging Turkish-German youth in cultural production, as well as the collection of essays *Kanak Sprak* edited by Feridun Zaimoglu, which is the first example of migrant artistic works sourced directly from the populace. I will demonstrate the struggle for authenticity in Turkish-German voices and examine how Turkish-Germans responded to the German leftist narratives which attempted to speak for them.

CHAPTER 1

The Development of West German Leftist Publishing Infrastructure

The New Left movement and spirit of 1968 affected not only the content in the Berlin leftist art scene, but the structure of the scene as well. The Berlin leftist publishing world experienced a fundamental shift in the typical organization and goals of publishing houses in the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, prewar conceptions of publishing values—like artistic individualism and adherence to disciplinary frameworks—were challenged by the introduction of editorial and production teams and new marketing strategies. Publishing houses in the late 1970s and 1980s began to view their work as part of the communications industry, as part of a larger machine of media production—rather than an isolated industry.[14] I argue that this shift was threefold. First, the art gallery associated with the publishing house Elefanten Press was acted as a nexus for social commentary and artistic innovation—a connecting point between the Kreuzberg community and the intellectual Berlin left. Secondly, anti-establishment independent political groups constructed and self-published zines like *Agit 883*, which reflected the political and social avant garde in real time. Finally, the development of collective presses like Rotbuch Verlag presented a platform for marginalized writers in the 1970s and 1980s because of their small size and alternative business philosophy. All three of these innovations in the publishing scene provided new platforms for Turkish-German artists, but they all had their unique limitations, and I will argue how these limitations influenced the way Turkish-German artists interacted with these publishing methods.

[14] Mark W. Rectanus. "Literary Publishing in the Federal Republic of Germany: Redefining the Enterprise." *German Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (1987): 105. https://doi.org/10.2307/1430445.

For those involved in the New Left Student Movement, the old guard of publishing was intertwined with oppressive forces. For example, in his book *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978*, Timothy Scott Brown explains that, during an annual *Buchmesse* (book market) in Frankfurt, students protested the Axel Springer Verlag alongside the military dictatorship in Greece.[15] Student Movement protesters understood the pivotal role publishing houses played for leftist thought and social change. From this protest, it is clear restructuring and democratizing the publishing process was a top priority. As Brown asserts, this was a "battle…over the means and conditions of cultural production."[16]

To analyze the conditions of cultural production on a concrete level, we will return to a discussion of the Elefanten Press Galerie, with pictures from the Drago Trumbetas premiere shown above. In order to contextualize these photos, one must look at the photographer for the release event, Jürgen Henschel. He was the photographer for *Die Wahrheit*, the official newspaper of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins (Socialist Unity Party of West-Berlin). The Socialist Unity Party of West-Berlin was initially a subset of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, but in 1962 it separated and became its own party. In his work for *Die*

15 Timothy Scott Brown. *West Germany and the Global Sixties: the Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 119.
[16] Ibid., 120.

Wahrheit, Henschel focused on development in Berlin and gave special attention to Kreuzberg. He gained notoriety initially for his picture of Benno Ohnesorg's death, which made for one of the most sensational moments of the 1960s Student Movement in West Berlin when he was killed by a police officer during a protest. Henschel's documentation brought Ohnesorg's death to international attention.

Henschel's choice to document this piece for *Die Wahrheit* demonstrates how German leftists viewed Kreuzberg. These photos are candid, but visually appealing. In Fig. 2, there is a clear fore-, middle-, and background—the group talking on the floor acts as a focal point and counterweight to the rest of the spectators swarmed in the room. The line of sight in the photograph gives the illusion that the viewer is a participant in the event, included as an actor rather than an onlooker. Fig. 1 utilizes similar techniques; the viewer looks directly at the choir, giving the impression of being part of the performance or an active audience member in the front row. Like Fig. 2, this photograph is candid. The choir is mid-performance, but some members are distracted. All are expressing what appears to be genuine, unposed emotion. On one hand, cultural production here was a point of spectacle and a potential ideological *Projektionsfläche,* or projection surface. On the other hand, Kreuzberg became the nexus for the future of German leftist. This interaction depicts the wider relationship between German leftists and migrants. Henschel's candid photos that invite the viewer in as a participant emphasize the German left's desire to consume and be invited into labor migrants' lives and communities. In one respect, German leftists were genuinely concerned for migrants' wellbeing and wanted to spread their experiences to a larger audience. However, this was undercut with a fetishistic, removed lens through which migrants were stripped of their cultural and artistic agency.

While the event depicted in the above photograph shows a simultaneous guest worker and artist presenting his own work, and therefore exercising his cultural agency, this platform is also heavily organized, managed, and distributed by those who had a distanced and theoretical of Trumbetas' experience. This collection is a fascinating interim point between appropriation of migrant narratives, such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1974 film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul,* and autonomous representation of cultural stories like Feridun Zaimoğlu's anthology *Kanak Sprak.* While Trumbetas was undeniably the center of this event, his ink drawings were appreciated for their own merit, and he controlled the cultural narrative in his work, he had to rely on the methods and systems in place to publish, promote, and distribute his work.

Alongside independent publishers, small leftist groups formed in West Berlin who created and distributed their own underground periodicals. One notable, and perhaps the most notorious example was *Agit 883.* Inspired by Benno Ohnesorg's death, a group of West Berlin leftists began publishing a zine out of one of the Dirk Schneider's—one of the editors—apartment in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. The zine was radically and militaristically leftist, and was controversial in the leftist scene at the time. [17] Between 1968 and 1972, 91 regular issues and 5 special issues were published. Because of the at times radical nature of the zine's content, the editors' working space was closely monitored and often raided by police, which led to *Agit 883* being discontinued in 1972. As a result, the zine was also highly inaccessible and only the central leftist groups in West Berlin could obtain copies. This also made *Agit 883* quite inefficient as a teaching tool for newly engaged leftists since there were no reprints.[18]

---

[17] "Agit 883," Project der Bibliothek der Freien, Berlin Datenbank des deutschsprachigen Anarchismus – DadA, last modified July 28, 2020, https://katalog.bibliothekderfreien.de/dadap/P0000921.html.

[18] "Der bizarre Klang der Revolte: Ein Rückblick auf das linksradikale Zeitungsprojekt *agit 883,"* analyse&kritik, last modified Decemeber 15, 2006, https://archiv.akweb.de/ak_s/ak512/13.htm.

Agit 883 was an expression of a radical and at times violent sector of West Berlin leftism that was not representative of the entire scene, and even within the issues of *Agit 883*, different articles expressed various and contradictory views. However, this context is necessary to understand that the *Agit 883* editors curated articles for dedicated leftists—the radical suggestions carried an implicit leftist context that was eschewed in explanation because it was assumed the audience would recognize it. For example, one of the most prominent examples of a controversial *Agit 883* article was the publishing of the Red Army Faction manifesto.[19] This manifesto also gained viewership outside of the German leftist scene and was a testament to the international values *Agit 883* expressed. Although overall political stances in *Agit 883* were quite fluid throughout its run, multiple issues repeatedly urged West Berlin leftists to connect with the working class from other nations, arguing from the Marxist tradition that capital has no nation.

Like Elefanten Press Galerie, *Agit 883* urged its supporters to learn about the struggles of workers in foreign countries and oppressed groups in West Berlin. Another similarity between the two groups was the *Projektionsfläche*-nature with which they treated the groups they attempted to support. Throughout the four years that *Agit 883* was active, nine issues included articles about foreign workers in Berlin[20]. All these articles were geared toward West Berlin leftists with the sole purpose of convincing them of the importance of worker solidarity. Most of the articles were written by German leftists for other German leftists about the deplorable conditions that foreign workers in West Berlin suffered[21]. However, some articles told personal stories from nameless labor migrants—one, signed "a Greek worker in Berlin", another told in

[19] "Die Rote Armee Aufbauen!," *Agit 883*, June 5, 1970, 62.
[20] Issues 10, 15, 18, 19, 47, 54, 55, 58, and 84
[21] Presumably German leftists—often these articles had no names attached, but without additional context I will assume the authors were West Berlin leftists.

first person perspective from a Greek labor migrant[22]. These perspective pieces are didactic and repetitive in nature. I have also identified a standard structure—the author explains the horrors of life for labor migrants in detail, and in the last paragraph of the article, the author makes an argument for the importance of German solidarity with migrant laborers. For example, in issue 18 an article titled "ARWA-BERLIN" details the experiences of a "guest worker":

> Wir sind in unserer Firma etwa 200 Griechen und 100 Deutsche,die im Akkord arbeiten. Unsere Misere began sohon mit dem Arbeitsvertrag, in dem uns 3,30 DM Stundenlohn zugesichert wurdem, der nach 4 Monaten auf 4,60 DM erhöht warden sollte…Von unseren deutschen Genossen erfahren wir, daß sie 2700 Stück pro Arbeitstag leisten müssen, wo wir jetzt 4800 Stück für das gleiche Geld abliefern müssen…Das zweite Problem ist der Wohnraum. Auf 8-12m^2 leben drei bis vier Personen…Der Dolmetscher stachelt reaktionäre Griechen an, uns zu prügeln. Unsere Erfolge, die wir dennoch erzielten, sind zurückzuführen auf die Zusammenarbeit mit deutschen Kollegen und Genossen, die sich für uns eingesetzt haben.[23]

In other articles with a similar topic, the structure is identical, and even most of the facts are the same. In this article's conclusion and others, the author pleads with the *Agit 883* readership to act in solidarity with the labor migrants because they are disenfranchised. Most articles featured in *Agit 883* are not associated with an author's name, so it is not out of the ordinary for the "guest worker" articles to be anonymous, but it is important to note that the descriptors for the authors are incredibly vague or even absent. Even more important is the fact that all the articles are composed in grammatically correct, eloquent, and complex German. One possible explanation for this language disparity could be that the articles were initially interviews, and someone from *Agit 883* translated the "guest workers'" statements. In this case, the failure to disclose translation suggests that the editors cared more about motivating their

[22] *Agit 883*, June 12, 1969 and April 3, 1970, 18 and 55.
[23] "ARWA-Berlin," *Agit 883*, June 12, 1969, 18.

constituency with an accessible and powerful message than accurately depicting the "guest worker" experience. In the case where the articles were entirely fictionalized, *Agit 883* is the extrapolation of the German leftist *Projektionsfläche*-fication of the "guest worker". The authors provide no context for their own background which might explain their command of the German language. The vast majority of "guest workers" had no exposure to the German language prior to their employment, and one of the primary barriers to their liberation was the inaccessibility of language classes either for monetary reasons or the time commitment. If every "guest worker" author featured in *Agit 883* came to Germany with prior knowledge of German to the point of fluency, then they are not representative of the vast majority of "guest workers" and display a similar issue to Aras Ören's role in the leftist discourse. These articles do not depict labor migrants as individuals with complex lives, but rather helpless victims of a state that bought them as "slaves"[24] and need to be rescued by the radical West Berlin leftists.

I will return once more to the established publishing infrastructure in West Berlin with a discussion of Rotbuch Verlag. Rotbuch was founded in 1973 by a group of former Klaus Wagenbach Verlag employees. Anne Duden, F.C. Delius und Ingrid Karsunke established Rotbuch with collective values—they wanted the owners of their press to be synonymous with the employees[25]. To understand the significance of this departure, we must view the development of Rotbuch Verlag in the context of the *Buchmesse* protests against publishing conglomerates. These protests were not only a meeting point between the leftist student movement and the broader counterculture, but also articulated the steps to take for a democratized press, such as author-editor collaboration.[26] In 1984, a scholar in *The North American Review* described the

[24] "Menschenhandel," *Agit 883*, April 3, 1970, 55.
[25] "Über uns," Rotbuch Verlag, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://www.rotbuch.de/verlag/ueber-uns.
[26] Brown, 121.

press as a "radical commune," suggesting that the collective founders were the "dissident offspring" of Klaus Wagenbach publishing house[27]. This survey of the Berlin literary scene also established that Berlin publishing houses were often small, independent, and focused on specific subjects rather than attempting to be as broad as possible. Kostelanetz ultimately asserts that these alternative presses published the kinds of books that "bigger boys would not touch.[28]"

One of Rotbuch Verlag's first publications, as well as first commercial and critical success, was the first installment of Aras Ören's *Berliner Trilogie*, published in 1973. Ören was established in the Istanbul and Berlin leftist theater scenes as an actor and dramaturg by 1973 but was less recognized for his poetry. In a sense, Rotbuch Verlag took a risk by publishing an up-and-coming migrant artist's poetry. However, when considering the new attitude gaining popularity in the publishing scene in the 1970s, it is more accurate to argue that Rotbuch Verlag intended to develop an artist base like Aras Ören. Rotbuch Verlag was founded by established participants in the publishing industry who saw potential in small, communal, specialized presses. As Kostelanetz points out, smaller presses were willing to take on projects that larger publishers would not. I argue that this decision is not quite as passive as Kostelanetz described; communal presses were not simply more willing to take a chance on a riskier artist because they did not have another option. Rather, publishers like Rotbuch sought out emerging and marginalized artists because their perspectives reflected the stated motive of the press.

One can determine from Rotbuch Verlag's long-term projects and offshoot branches that the press specialized in intention—i.e., works with a leftist focus—rather than disciplinary content. For example, Rotbuch Verlag published the journal "Frauen und Film" for a seven-year

---

[27] Richard Kostelanetz. "Literary Berlin." *The North American Review* 269, no. 1 (1984): 4–7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25124478.
[28] Ibid., 5

period, beginning in 1976.[29] In the last year Rotbuch published the journal, 1983, Rotbuch founder Eberhard Delius wrote a retrospective on the press's relationship with "Frauen und Film." He established that, while Rotbuch was not particularly attuned to the field of film criticism as a publishing house, he and his coworkers were impressed with the "creative radicalism" of the journal[30]. In line with larger movements in the international artistic scene at the time, Rotbuch Verlag participated in an art world with a more malleable idea of genre, as well as experimentation with medium. In his article "Literary Publishing in the Federal Republic of Germany: Redefining the Enterprise" from a 1987 issue of the *German Studies Review*, scholar Mark Rectanus supported the connection between the experimental works that alternative presses published and the experimental structure of the publishing houses themselves.[31] He elaborated, stating, "[t]his structure was by no means static, but in a constant process of evolution - and therefore to a certain extent quite unstable and fragile.[32]" Alternative, collective presses were as much a manifestation of the sentiment in the leftist artistic scene of the time as they influenced its development. In the case of "Frauen und Film," Delius acknowledged how much Rotbuch Verlag had evolved in the seven years they published the journal, to the point in which the "Frauen" editorial team decided to switch publishers because of creative differences[33]. With a focus on the social and political message of the works they published instead of the disciplinary or academic genre, Rotbuch Verlag opened their doors to a more robust, avant garde selection of the Berlin leftist artistic scene.

---

[29] "Geschichte," Frauen und Film, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://frauenundfilm.de/about/.
[30] Eberhard Delius. "Sieben Jahre „Frauen Und Film" Im Rotbuch Verlag." *Frauen Und Film*, no. 34 (1983): 14. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24056025.
[31] Rectanus, Mark W. "Literary Publishing in the Federal Republic of Germany: Redefining the Enterprise." *German Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (1987): 104. https://doi.org/10.2307/1430445.
[32] Ibid., 105
[33] Delius, 15.

Rectanus further stated that by the mid-1970s, collective presses were not outliers or exceptions in the West German publishing world, but now a legitimate sector. This shift in relationship to the larger publishing scene also motivated collective presses to begin aggressively marketing their catalogue to the book market and consumers[34]. This reflects the newfound influence collective presses like Rotbuch Verlag gained in the late 1970s and 1980s. Because collective presses gained prominence in the general leftist book trade through intense marketing, it was important for these alternative publishing houses to maintain a brand—i.e., to maintain a small, cooperative, and experimental image.

Furthermore, Rectanus also asserts that in the 1970s, publishers began vying for international publishing rights, and because of this, West German publishers identified increased value in signing contracts with foreign authors. Rectanus argued, "[t]hus publishers now think in terms of acquiring world rights to a promising author whenever possible, rather than limiting their program to national boundaries, and then market those rights domestically and internationally."[35] As the children of labor migrants grew up and contributed to the Berlin leftist art scene as Turkish-Germans, they often preferred the bilingual options and translation services collective presses like Rotbuch Verlag offered.[36] Alternative presses opened their platform to avant garde and marginalized artists not because they had no other options, but because they had built a reputation that necessitated artists like Aras Ören in their catalogue.

[34] Rectanus, 105
[35] Rectanus, 109.
[36] Elisabeth Siedel. "Zwischen Resignation Und Hoffnung. Türkische Autoren in Der Bundesrepublik." *Die Welt Des Islams* 26, no. 1/4 (1986): 108–8. https://doi.org/10.2307/1570760.

CHAPTER 2

Aras Ören's Predecessor and Success

Aras Ören was born in 1939 in Istanbul, Turkey, and moved to Berlin in 1969.[37] By the time he arrived in Berlin, he was an established artist and was well-versed in dramatic and political theory. Ören established his career in theater in Istanbul in 1959, a decade before his immigration to Berlin. Ören's first experience with theater was at the Gençlik Tiyatrosu in Istanbul, and he engaged early and often with German theater, including two acting roles with Goethe University's student theater Neue Bühne in Frankfurt am Main.[38] One of these plays was Bertolt Brecht's *Die Ausnahme und die Regel*, which establishes a basis for Ören's interest in Brecht's work[39]. In the following years, Ören would go on to adapt *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* for the Turkish context and regularly attend Berliner Ensemble rehearsals.[40] Ören's demonstrated practical knowledge of Brechtian theater and his theoretical grasp of Brecht's work–as evidenced by his translation and adaptation of Brecht's work–establishes a clear connection between Brecht and Ören's work, and provides reasonable evidence that Brecht was influential for Ören in his writing.

For the scope of this chapter, I will focus on one of Ören's most prominent works, a poem published in 1973 titled Was will *Niyazi in der Naunynstraße?* (What does Niyazi want in Naunyn Street?). This poem is the first installment in a collection of poems titled *Berliner Trilogie.* Between 1973 and 1980, Ören published three installments of poetry. These poems are

---

[37] "Aras Ören," *Verbrecher Verlag,* Accessed March 17, 2022, https://www.verbrecherverlag.de/author/detail/210.
[38] Ela E. Gezen. "Didactic Realism: Aras Ören and Working-Class Culture." In *Brecht, Turkish Theater, and Turkish-German Literature: Reception, Adaptation, and Innovation after 1960,* NED-New edition, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 39.
[39] Ibid., 40
[40] Ibid., 41

extended, novella-length epic poems and contain a narrative, and the three installments are loosely connected in character, plot, and setting. The poems are titled, in order of publishing date: *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße?, Der kurze Traum aus Kagithane* (The Short Dream from Kagithane) (1974), and *Die Fremde ist auch ein Haus* (The Foreign Place is also a Home)(1980). Although Ören presumably spoke German–considering his participation in German theater and his residence in Germany–he wrote in Turkish and had his works translated into German.

Niyazi in der Naunynstraße? features multiple perspectives from residents in a central neighborhood in Kreuzberg, organized around the titular Naunynstraße. Among the ensemble are the Turkish guest worker Niyazi, whose name is featured in the title, an elderly German woman and longtime resident of Naunynstraße Frau Kutzer, and another Turkish guest worker named Ali. Ören also presents the German worker's perspective and addresses gender conflicts as well. As Yasemin Yildiz explains in her article "Aras Ören's *What Does Niyazi Want in Naunyn Street*: A Partial Translation with a Translator's Introduction," "Treating neither Turkish nor German residents as homogeneous, the poem uses them instead to delve into a variety of histories, memories, experiences, dreams, and hopes. In this manner, it provides both a diversified perspective on working-class lives as well as an account of settlement in process.[41]"

This heterogeneity in perspective in *Was will Niyazi* is a marked divergence from the one-dimensional narrative about guest workers in the German literary canon at the time. For example, a year after *Was will Niyazi* was published, Rainer Werner Fassbinder directed *Ali: Angst essen Seele auf* (Ali: Fear Eats the Soul). This film follows the story of a Moroccan guest worker who immigrates to West Germany and begins an affair with a widowed German woman

[41] Yazmin Yildiz, "Aras Ören's *What Does Niyazi Want in Naunyn Street*: A Partial Translation with a Translator's Introduction," *Monatshefte* 112 no. 4 (January 2021): 660

who works as a maid. Their relationship is repeatedly challenged by the social expectations of their respective cultures and undercut by their mutual desperation. While the film is emotionally affecting, the story is quite one-dimensional, especially in its portrayal of the guest worker character, named Ali. Ali is a strong and silent type, often seen brooding. He struggles with sex and alcohol as vices, and Fassbinder provides little context for Ali's family or inner world. Fassbinder depicts Ali's emotions as he reacts to other German characters, but does not show his own emotional experiences until he has an affair with the owner of a local bar, who also immigrated to Germany. Fassbinder critiques the commodification and subsequent consumption of the "guest worker" image and archetype. Ali's German wife, Emmi, wrestles throughout the film with her allegiance to Ali versus her former German community. In the end, she chooses to dehumanize Ali in order to retain her acceptance from her friends. When her friends meet Ali, they do not meet him as her significant other, but more akin to a pet—they marvel at the fact that he showers, and they fondle his muscles.[42] Even with this pertinent critique, Fassbinder's portrayal of the guest worker is all-encompassing; that is, Fassbinder uses his character Ali to make a statement about the experience of guest workers in West Germany while Ören utilizes various perspectives to communicate common struggles and experiences of guest workers.

Aras Ören debuted in the German leftist artistic scene with a cogent understanding of the disciplinary discourse and context in which he was writing. Ören published *Was will Niyazi* during the height of the New Left movement. This movement included established scholars and artists, but was largely characterized by its prominent student involvement. In 1968 in West Germany, the New Left student movement led a series of protests for workers' rights, peace, and

---

[42] Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Ali; Angst essen Seele auf,* (1974; Berlin: Tango-Film), film.

environmental protection. Their radical extraparliamentary efforts reacted against their parents' conservatism. West German mainstream society sought predictable, middle-of-the-road policy. In doing so, they minimized responsibility for the Holocaust and overlooked the mistreatment of workers in favor of economic success and stable, middle class lives. The revitalized left saw itself fighting on behalf of the oppressed labor migrant population.[43]. Some members of the New Left student movement tried to connect with the working class by leaving university and working factory jobs, but ultimately these were isolated efforts that, at worst, members of the working-class received as out-of-touch and offensive.[44]

The New Left student movement, which boasted progressive intellectualism, attempted to connect with "guest workers" but failed to establish the political alliance that they supported in the abstract. Before Aras Ören, there was not a prominent Turkish-German artistic presence in the German leftist artistic scene. German leftists overlooked the specific experiences of labor migrants–or they never had a platform. Instead, artists like Bertolt Brecht and Rainer Werner Fassbinder were more prominent in the German leftist cultural sphere, and they spoke merely *about* the injustices "guest workers" faced. The New Left movement spoke about the mistreatment of those with a *Migrationshintergrund* (migration background) but did not platform Turkish-German voices. Aras Ören's work resonated with a broader audience in Germany–*Was will Niyazi* is the first example of Turkish-German literature to gain popularity and disciplinary significance in the general German leftist context.[45]

I argue that Aras Ören gained recognition within the German left because he utilized the literary and political theory that the New Left was familiar with and regularly used. Ören's work,

---

[43] Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 50.
[44] Ibid., 270.
[45] Yildiz 659.

especially in the era of the *Berliner Trilogie* poems, exhibited structural and thematic similarities to Bertolt Brecht and Nazim Hikmet's styles[46]. Nazim Hikmet, a Turkish poet, utilized similar techniques as Bertolt Brecht in his writing. This suggests that the tactics Brecht used were rather ubiquitous in the European leftist artistic discourse, and therefore I argue that Ören was adapting his socio-political goals–namely, to represent Turkish-German labor migrant experiences and motivate the German and migrant working-class to cooperate–to the accepted style of the time. Because Ören did not speak on this issue, one cannot know for sure if this was a conscious choice or a choice motivated by a desire for recognition, but I argue based on Ören's circumstances that it was advantageous for him to utilize already accepted practices in German (and broader European) leftist written art to present an unfamiliar perspective.

At the heart of the stylistic similarity between Ören and Brecht's work is the use of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or Alienation Effect. Brecht utilized this technique to remind audiences that the story he was presenting to them was a story, and to focus on the morals in the plot instead of being emotionally invested in the characters. This approach, broadly called "epic theater" is heavily associated with Brecht's work. As opposed to Aristotelian drama, the main goal of which was to draw the audience into the characters' emotions and to maintain the audience's suspension of disbelief, epic theater decentered the plot and emphasized the ideas expressed in the play, actively breaking the audience's suspension of disbelief. Characters tend to be one-dimensional, with digestible personalities and motivations. The intention is to inspire audience members to identify similar dynamics presented in the play in their own lives, and to imitate the actions suggested on stage. Brecht's intended audience for his plays was the proletariat, the

[46] Ela Gezen, "Convergent Realisms: Aras Ören, Nazim Hikmet, and Bertolt Brecht," *Colloquia Germanica* 45, no. 3/4 (2012): 370.

working class. Therefore, he did not rely on obscure, pretentious allusions in his writing–it was meant to be accessible.[47]

To establish a reference for Ören's use of *Verfremdungseffekt*–and more broadly, his didactic approach to the displaying lessons and morals in his work–as informed by the work of Bertolt Brecht, I will provide a short analysis of excerpts from the fifth act of Brecht's play *Trommeln in der Nacht* (Drums in the Night). This play premiered in 1922 in Munich at the Münchner Kammerspiele[48]. Set in the immediate post-World War One period, *Trommeln in der Nacht* tells the story of the relationship between Anna, the daughter of a bourgeois family, and Kragler, who fought in World War One and was presumed dead. Although the two were lovers before Andreas left for war, Anna's parents convince her to marry a wealthy man when Andreas does not return from the war. When he does return alive, tension between him, Anna, and Anna's parents ensues. The play takes place over the course of one night, in the context of a conflict between the Spartacist League (a Communist group) and the Social Democrats.

In the fifth and final act, Kragler realizes he drunkenly agreed to take part in the Spartacist revolution in the previous act. He wants out, and while on a bridge under a red moon, he addresses the audience as well as Anna and his comrades:

> Es ist gewöhnliches Theater. Es sind Bretter und ein Papiermond und dahinter die Fleischbank, die allein ist leibhaftig.[…] Der halbverfaulte Liebhaber oder die Macht der Liebe, das Blutbad im Zeitungsviertel oder Rechtfertigung eines Mannes durch sich selbst, der Pfahl im Fleisch oder Tiger im Morgengrauen […]Ich ziehe ein frisches Hemd an, meine Haut habe ich noch, meinen Rock ziehe ich aus, meine Stiefel

[47] Terry Eagleton. "Brecht and Rhetoric." *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985): 633–38. https://doi.org/10.2307/468845.
[48] "Trommeln in der Nacht," *Berliner Festspiele*, December 14, 2017, https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/de/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_250005.html.

> fette ich ein[…]Das Geschrei ist alles vorbei, morgen früh, aber ich liege im Bett morgen früh und vervielfältige mich, daß ich nicht aussterbe. Glotzt nicht so romantisch! Ihr Wucherer![49]

After his short monologue, he and Anna discuss the weather and they walk off-stage together as screams from the revolution echo in the background. It is clear that Brecht is emphasizing Kragler's anger at violence and the oppression of the working class, rather than the supposed "happy ending" for him and Anna. While in an Aristotilian drama, the focus of this story might be on Anna and Kragler expressing their true love for one another and ending the story as a couple despite their class differences, Brecht emphasizes the class struggle at the heart of this story, crafting a rather dry and one-dimensional relationship between the romantic leads. Kragler breaks the fourth wall when he points out the paper moon (referring to the set piece)--he acknowledges that he is quite literally an actor in a play, which detaches the audience from the emotional aspects of the play, and then follows this statement with a passionate condemnation of the violence from the Spartacist league uprising. He states "[d]on't gape so romantically! You profiteers!", suggesting that the very act of reading this story as a romance, or as a traditional escapist drama, is a bourgeois act. In this rejection of traditional dramatic expectations, Brecht asserts his ideological intent.

Half a century later, this once shocking tactic became a common approach to theater and literature in the German leftist scene. As an example of Ören's approach, I will analyze a portion of the sub-poem "Kazim Akkaya" in *Was will Niyazi.* This section introduces the "guest worker" Kazim Akkaya, who is the "boss's favorite." He is being interviewed by a TV reporter. Akkaya explains his work responsibilities, his relationship to his coworkers, a brief history of his time in Naunynstraße, and how economic troubles of the 1960s affected his job as a "guest worker." The

[49] Bertolt Brecht, *Trommeln in der Nacht,* (Berlin: Im Propyläen Verlag, 1922), 94.

diction is simple and straightforward, directly teaching the reader as well as introducing a character. In the penultimate and final stanzas of this section, Ören writes:

> Jetzt sind es drei Monate,
> daß ich diese Arbeit mache.
> Und ich bin der Liebling des Meisters,
>
> Nächste Woche kommt ihr meine Wohnung filmen?
> Dann erzähl ich euch wieder mein Leben.
> Mein Leben ist sowieso
> wie ein Film.
> Dann mach ich euch einen Tee,
> dunkel wie Hasenblut,
> und ihr dreht Bilder von mir,
> auf denen ich mich gut mache
> in meinem dunkelblauen Anzug.[50]

This poem critiques not only the expectations of "guest workers" to overperform in order to be respected and maintain their jobs, but also examines the way that Germans consumed content about "guest workers"--viewing these people as exotic but digestible. Like the *Trommeln in der Nacht* excerpt, the narrator subtly addresses the audience as well as their in-world conversation partner. Akkaya asks the reporter as well as the reader, '[n]ext week will you come film my home? Then I'll tell you about my life again. My life is like a film." I argue that this is an implicit, sarcastic, perhaps unintentional callback to "don't gape so romantically." The reporter films Akkaya's home and asks him to share intimate details about his life, and presents this romanticized picture to Germans, complete with a dark blue suit and homemade tea the color of

[50] Aras Ören, *Berliner Trilogie: Was Will Niyazi In Der Naunynstrasse? Der Kurze Traum Aus Kagithane. Die Fremde Ist Auch Ein Haus* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2019), 40.

rabbit blood. Contrasting this image with other vignettes of Turkish-German life which are not so romantic, Ören asks his readers to view these presentations of "guest workers" critically. Furthermore, by presenting the character of the "ideal" guest worker, Ören also creates a character devoid of substance, suggesting that the focus of this work is on its connections to similar figures and events in real life rather than on the emotional impact of the stories he presents.

In 1964, Armando Rodrigues from Portugal entered West Germany as the one-millionth guest worker[51]. When he exited his train, he was met by a gaggle of journalists who handed him a bouquet of carnations and led him to a motorcycle, which they told him belonged to him. Chin asserts that Rodrigues' portrayal in the media was curated specifically to endear Germans to "guest workers." She states that he was "[n]eatly yet humbly dressed, he looks like a man of modest means who will apply himself industriously to the job ahead." Furthermore, Chin remarks that the setting for this photo–a train station–worked to ensure German viewers that guest workers were *guests*, attempting to ease German anxiety about foreigners immigrating permanently. Also, this picture depicts a purely positive image, purposefully omitting any reference to the more unseemly experiences of a labor migrant like separation from family, substandard living and working conditions, and xenophobia.[52]

In "Kazim Akkaya," Ören depicts a similar media portrayal of "guest worker" life. He critiques popular images of "guest workers," especially those accepted and promoted by German leftists. In this section of the epic poem, a friendly reporter inquires about Akkaya's life and intends to present a positive, upstanding image to readers. However, Ören points out the

[51] Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.
[52] Ibid., 5.

suffocating standard of perfection for "guest workers," as well as the German public's refusal to acknowledge hardships of the life of labor migrants. I argue that Ören made this critique easy to digest for German leftists by utilizing a formula which they were familiar with, and employing an artistic device–*Verfremdungseffekt*–that German leftists already associated with self-critique.

However, Ören's recognition for portraying the "guest worker" experience was still a far cry from widespread distribution of a direct narrative from a Turkish-German labor migrant. Ören was first and foremost a scholar and artist. He was well-established in the theater scene in Istanbul, and when he came to Germany, he was connected to the Berliner Ensemble. While he knew firsthand the Turkish-German experience, and certainly provided a more nuanced view of the everyday life of a "guest worker," it was still not a firsthand narrative. This emphasizes the intersection between immigration status and class in the German leftist scene. Like Brecht's attempt and arguable failure to reach the working class with didactic art, Ören's actual audience was not socio-politically unaware working class Germans, but Rotbuch Verlag's usual readership–New Left students and artists. Ören, who was not a "guest worker" himself, sold a (however more nuanced) narrative of the "guest worker" experience to educated German leftists. In the end, I would argue *Was will Niyazi* was more effective in critiquing the patronizing attitude of many German leftists rather than promoting community engagement between working-class Germans and labor migrants.

CONCLUSION

Feridun Zaimoglu's 1995 book *Kanak Sprak* marks the end of the philosophical trajectory in "*Migrationsliteratur"* expressed in the previous sections. In the 1970s and 1980s, Aras Ören was the prominent voice in the Turkish-German literature scene. He wrestled with articulating a sense of identity in Berlin culture alongside promoting unity with the strong moral undertones of his work. In various articulations, Rotbuch Verlag, Elefanten Press Galerie, and *Agit 883* bolstered similar values in the types of work they published. While Elefanten Press Galerie hosted cultural events and artists, *Agit 883* published articles from the perspective of a guest worker, and Rotbuch Verlag championed their success with Aras Ören and proceeded to establish themselves as the prominent name in *Migrationsliteratur* publishing. These three institutions were overwhelmingly if not entirely staffed by German leftists, and the rhetoric they platformed from immigrant authors explicitly promoted cooperation between Germans and migrants. By the mid-1990s, the discourse shifted from a focus on appealing to larger German society towards a focus on the place for Turkish-Germans and those with *Migrationshintergrund* in general in contemporary Germany.

Kanak Sprak is a collection of essays from Turkish-Germans in Kreuzberg assembled and edited by artist Feridun Zaimoglu. Zaimoglu was born in Turkey and immigrated to Germany with his family at one year old. Although his family originally moved to Berlin, they later settled in Munich and this is where Zaimoglu grew up. The essays are Zaimoglu's dramatizations of recorded conversations with Turkish-Germans over many years. Written in Turkish-German vernacular German with elements of the metropolitan dialect Kiezdeutsch, the collection makes no attempt to be widely accessible or appeal to German society for acceptance or assimilation. Zaimoglu spearheaded the anti-racist project "Kanak Attack," which was also known for its anti-

assimilationist stance[53]. I argue that *Kanak Sprak* is representative of the end of a literary era advocating for assimilation.

As this new anti-assimilationist sentiment rose to popularity in the Turkish-German artistic sphere, greater German society resisted the change. One pertinent example is the debate between Feridun Zaimoglu and the Minister-President of Schleswig-Holstein, Heide Simonis, on the show *Drei nach Neun*. Featured in the debate is a reading from Zaimoglu's piece, *Allemannenbeschimpfungen.* After the reading is finished, the moderator resumes discussion with the question, "Meinen Sie, Sie machen damit Freunde in Deutschland?" Zaimoglu responds by explaining that the point of his work is not to make friends—the context of his work matters, and he is attempting to display the stories of second and third generation Turkish-Germans whose stories go unheard. Simonis argues that Germany does so much for its Turkish population and that Turkish-Germans should be grateful without complaint. Zaimoglu asks her if she is saying that Turkish-Germans are responsible for their own oppression, and while she initially resists this characterization of her argument, she eventually agrees.

In the beginning of the discussion Zaimoglu asserts that Turks are often discussed in the media, but their own narratives aren't displayed.[54] He also discusses the identity crisis second and third generation Turkish-Germans experienced in the 1990s and their subsequent move towards identifying as "Kanake[55]." Zaimoglu defends his argument by stating that he asked Turkish-Germans what it is like to live "as a Kanak." In his work, he argues, he is simply displaying their answers. One important quote from the debate is: "What is real to me? This is

---

[53] "Feridun Zaimoglu," Marginalized Voices, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://my.vanderbilt.edu/amylynnehill/authors/feridun-zaimoglu/.
[54] Feridun Zaimoglu, interview by Heide Simonis, *Drei nach Neun,* Radio Bremen TV, May 8, 1998, 1:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Redlbxp0284.
[55] Ibid, 2:40.

real, that is real, there are many realities."[56] Here he is introducing the idea that the Turkish-German experience is not monolithic. When art about or from Turkish-Germans focuses on the "authentic" perspectives rather than appealing to unity and assimilation, one must accept Turkish-German experiences as individual narratives instead of examples of a larger sentiment.

One roundtable guest questions Zaimoglu's use of aggressive language and asks whether it is useful or necessary[57]. He reiterates that he is displaying people's experiences, and he asserts that those who have not had those experiences cannot speak on the kind of language they use to tell their stories.[58] One of the actors from the performance chimes in on the discussion of aggressive language and argues that this is the "authentic language" of the second and third generation Turkish-German youth, and it matters to be as accurate as possible in depicting this sentiment in art.[59] He says it does not matter to him if they are offended by the aggressive language because it is authentic and realistic.[60] The response from the Germans is that, essentially, using this kind of language is the beginning of the end of civil discourse because it is not productive and alienates greater German society.[61]

Simonis consistently refers to Zaimoglu as Turkish and categorizes the narratives in *Kanak Sprak* as Turkish narratives, and Zaimoglu responds to her by saying that he is "in this land, this [Germany] is where he grew up."[62] Simonis counters that he is Turkish because of his parents and grandparents.[63] Here a conflict in the German psyche becomes explicit—Turkish-Germans should attempt to assimilate, but they can never truly be German because of their

[56] Ibid., 11:46. Translation my own.
[57] Ibid., 3:45
[58] Ibid., 4:10
[59] Ibid., 7:37
[60] Ibid., 8:53
[61] Ibid., 8:01
[62] Ibid., 12:27
[63] Ibid., 3:04

ancestors. Throughout this debate, Zaimoglu repeatedly appeals to authenticity in speech, storytelling, and cultural production. The central element of this debate is not that Feridun Zaimoglu's language is too aggressive to be productive, or that narratives must be as authentic as possible to be influential. What is being argued in this debate is the question of who is allowed to produce complex narratives in postwar German society.

Because *Kanak Sprak* was published by Rotbuch Verlag and was also one of the publishing house's most popular releases from a Turkish-German author, I argue that *Kanak Sprak* exists in the discourse as a spiritual successor of Aras Ören's *Berliner Trilogie.* From 1973, when Rotbuch Verlag published the first installment of *Berliner Trilogie*, "Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße?", until the 1995 release of *Kanak Sprak,* the literary and cultural discourse around authenticity in narrative shifted dramatically. In 1973, Aras Ören, who was an established artist when he moved to Berlin and not personally familiar with the experience of labor migration, published a dramatized narrative about "guest workers" and Germans working together to challenge capitalist forces. Because of his utilization of Brechtian alienation techniques, I argue that Ören was concerned more with the greater societal outcome of his work than whether he presented a narrative that was his to tell. In contrast, Feridun Zaimoglu explicitly expressed how meaningless the greater German cultural response to *Kanak Sprak* was to him in his *Drei nach Neun* debate and was entirely concerned with the "authenticity" of the narratives he platformed.

Why was Zaimoglu so concerned with justifying his identity as a "Kanak" to the roundtable guests during the Simonis debate? What makes "Kanak" more than a descriptive term in the mid-1990s in Germany? To answer these questions, we must look to how Berlin as a city evolved after German reunification in 1989. In the divided Germany period, from 1945-1989,

Kreuzberg was ghettoized as a result of its proximity to the Berlin wall. When the wall was in place, this was a dangerous area and labor migrants settled there because Berliners did not. After the wall fell, Kreuzberg transitioned from a border neighborhood to a central location in Berlin. Around this time, central business and governmental locations were also under construction, like Potsdamer Platz in 1993 and the reconstruction of the Reichstag building in 1990. With this reestablishment of a cultural, political, economic, and social center of Berlin post-reunification, Kreuzberg—which was already well-known as an alternative hub for migrants and young people—gained social significance and popularity.[64]

I argue that Kreuzberg's physical shift to the middle of Berlin was also tied to a mental shift to the center of German consciousness about identity and citizenship. In the post-reunification era, the children and grandchildren of "guest workers" were becoming young adults and wrestling with their place in German society. While the artistic generation that had come before them—with Aras Ören as a pertinent example—was concerned with, while not entirely assimilating, but perhaps integrating into German culture, the Turkish-German artists and activists of the 1990s confronted their ghettoization both physically and psychologically in German society. In order to wrestle with their identity, Turkish-Germans first had to isolate a set of descriptors and conditions for their identity. In terms of material change, a good option was unifying around the conditions of oppression, symbolized by the reclaiming of "Kanak," a pejorative term for Turkish people that Germans had hurled at them for decades. "Kanak" was an experience, a narrative. Because of this, I argue "authenticity" was the primary concern for Feridun Zaimoglu and his contemporaries in the time of *Kanak Sprak's* publishing.

[64] Levent Soysal, "Rap, Hiphop, Kreuzberg: Scripts of/for Migrant Youth Culture in the WorldCity Berlin," *New German Critique*, no. 92 (2004): 67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4150467.

Integral to this examination of "authenticity" in the Turkish-German artistic discourse of the 1990s is the role of the German state. First, I will return to Leslie A. Adelson's observation that second and third Turkish-Germans did not exist on a "bridge" between two cultures. Rather, their experience was completely their own, with a unique set of descriptors and challenges.[65] Levent Soysal expands upon this idea, arguing that this group is not stuck in the liminal space between tradition and modernity.[66] This is particularly relevant for the development of youth culture and creation of a youth identity. As Soysal further explains, in the post-reunification period Berlin emerged as a WorldCity, and with this came the city's investment in youth organizations like educational programs, sports clubs, and cafes.[67] Among these social efforts was the Kreuzberg youth center NaunynRitze. Although it operated under Kreuzberg municipal government, this center was and remains the centermost location for hip-hop in Berlin. Centers like NaunynRitze worked together to bring social work efforts to Kreuzberg youth, like a music festival co-hosted by a major Berlin music studio and Dschungel Info 95, which was a state organization that provided cultural education to youth.[68] At the same time that anti-assimilationists like Zaimoglu shocked broader German culture when he dared to critique the way it treats multicultural citizens, the German government and the Berlin government in particular were actively working to foster cultural engagement and identity among Kreuzberg youth.

---

[65] Leslie Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), Accessed March 17, 2022, 5.
[66] Levent Soysal, "Beyond the "Second Generation": Rethinking the Place of Migrant Youth Culture in Berlin," in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship,* ed. Daniel Levy, Yfaat Weiss (New York City: Berghan Books, 2002), 122.
[67] Ibid., 127
[68] Soysal, "Rap, Hiphop, Kreuzberg: Scripts of/for Migrant Youth Culture in the WorldCity Berlin," 69-70.

The emphasis on "authenticity" was also expressed directly in the texts of *Kanak Sprak* itself. One essay in the collection, titled "Pop is ne fatale Orgie" and told by 24-year-old rapper Abdurrahman, explores pop music as a type of opium-of-the-people. He explains that the desperate popular love songs meant nothing to him, someone who survives on backbreaking work and faces crushing oppression.[69] For Abdurrahman, pop music could never display his authentic experience and so he turned to rap as an alternative. In "Der direkte Draht zum schwarzen Mann," 23-year-old rapper Ali (from "da-crime-posse") explains the cultural significance of rap in America, championing the movement's ability to bring attention to America's cultural and political problems, speaking truth to power.[70] Soysal asserts, "It is never clear why pop music does not represent "the feelings of youths" but rap music does, unless one assumes the authenticity of the latter over the former. More importantly, though, the authenticity credited to the voice of Cartel derives from Turkishness. Only from the grounds of Turkishness, Istanbul that is, can Cartel [a popular rap group in the 1990s] legitimately speak."[71]

Proximity to Turkishness was synonymous authenticity in the context of 1990s Kreuzberg. For these men, there is a clear link between the "Kanak" experience and the ability to understand and communicate the realities of life. Certain forms of cultural production were also more amiable to the goal of presenting an "authentic" narrative; in these two case stories, rap is this medium. When Turkish-Germans had repressed their explicit Turkishness for the sake of palpability in the greater German context, German leftists manipulated and puppeteered their voices as a *Projektionsfläche* for their own ideological gain. Ultimately, anti-assimilationists in

---

[69] Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft,* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995), 14.
[70] Ibid., 20.
[71] Soysal, "Rap, Hiphop, Kreuzberg: Scripts of/for Migrant Youth Culture in the WorldCity Berlin," 72-3.

the 1990s gravitated towards an obsession with “authenticity” as it relates to Turkishness because this movement was the antithesis of the vision German leftists prescribed them.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Agit 883, June 12, 1969, 18.

Agit 883, April 3, 1970, 55.

"ARWA-Berlin," *Agit 883,* June 12, 1969, 18.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Trommeln in der Nacht,* (Berlin: Im Propyläen Verlag, 1922)

"Die Rote Armee Aufbauen!," *Agit 883,* June 5, 1970, 62.

FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. "Kleinbildnegativ: Ausstellung Drago Trumbetaš, Elefanten Press Galerie, 1977" last modified 2021-11-02. https://berlin.museum-digital.de/object/42788

"Menschenhandel," *Agit 883,* April 3, 1970, 55.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Ali; Angst essen Seele auf,* (1974; Berlin: Tango-Film), film.

Zaimoglu, Feridun. Interview by Heide Simonis, *Drei nach Neun,* Radio Bremen TV, May 8, 1998, 1:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Redlbxp0284.

Zaimoglu, Feridun. *Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*, (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995)

Secondary Sources

Adelson, L. *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005.

"Agit 883." Project der Bibliothek der Freien, Berlin Datenbank des deutschsprachigen Anarchismus – DadA, last modified July 28, 2020, https://katalog.bibliothekderfreien.de/dadap/P0000921.html.

"Aras Ören." *Verbrecher Verlag*, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://www.verbrecherverlag.de/author/detail/210.

Brown, Timothy Scott. *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Chin, Rita. *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Delius, Eberhard. “Sieben Jahre „Frauen Und Film“ Im Rotbuch Verlag.” *Frauen Und Film*, no. 34 (1983): 14. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24056025.

“Der bizarre Klang der Revolte: Ein Rückblick auf das linksradikale Zeitungsprojekt *agit 883,”* analyse&kritik, last modified Decemeber 15, 2006, https://archiv.akweb.de/ak_s/ak512/13.htm.

Eagleton, Terry. “Brecht and Rhetoric.” *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985): 633–38. https://doi.org/10.2307/468845.

Eichengreen, Barry and Albrecht Ritschl, “Understanding West German Economic Growth in the 1950s.” Working paper, London School of Economics, 2008.

“Feridun Zaimoglu,” Marginalized Voices, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://my.vanderbilt.edu/amylynnehill/authors/feridun-zaimoglu/.

“Geschichte,” Frauen und Film, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://frauenundfilm.de/about/.

GEZEN, ELA. “Convergent Realisms: Aras Ören, Nazim Hikmet, and Bertolt Brecht.” *Colloquia Germanica* 45, no. 3/4 (2012): 369–85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43653019.

Gezen, Ela E. “Didactic Realism: Aras Ören and Working-Class Culture.” In *Brecht, Turkish Theater, and Turkish-German Literature: Reception, Adaptation, and Innovation after 1960*, NED-New edition. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018.

Kostelanetz, Richard. “Literary Berlin.” *The North American Review* 269, no. 1 (1984): 4–7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25124478.

Markovits, Andrei S. and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.

Miller, Jennifer. “Her Fight Is Your Fight: ‘Guest Worker’ Labor Activism in the Early 1970s West Germany.” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 84 (2013): 226–47.

Rectanus, Mark W. “Literary Publishing in the Federal Republic of Germany: Redefining the Enterprise.” *German Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (1987): 95–123.

“Über uns,” Rotbuch Verlag, Accessed March 17, 2022, https://www.rotbuch.de/verlag/ueber-uns.

Siedel, Elisabeth. “Zwischen Resignation Und Hoffnung. Türkische Autoren in Der Bundesrepublik.” *Die Welt Des Islams* 26, no. 1/4 (1986): 108–8. https://doi.org/10.2307/1570760.

Soysal, Levent. “Beyond the “Second Generation”: Rethinking the Place of Migrant Youth Culture in Berlin,” in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship,* ed. Daniel Levy, Yfaat Weiss (New York City: Berghan Books, 2002), 121-136.

Soysal, Levent. “Rap, Hiphop, Kreuzberg: Scripts of/for Migrant Youth Culture in the WorldCity Berlin,” *New German Critique*, no. 92 (2004): 67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4150467.

Suhr, Heidrun. “Minority Literature in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *New German Critique*, No. 46 Special Issue on Minorities in German Culture, (Winter 1989).

“Trommeln in der Nacht,” *Berliner Festspiele*, December 14, 2017, https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/de/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_250005.html.

Yildiz, Yazmin. “Aras Ören’s *What Does Niyazi Want in Naunyn Street*: A Partial Translation with a Translator’s Introduction,” *Monatshefte* 112 no. 4 (January 2021).