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Translating Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Feridun Zaimoglu's *Koppstoff*

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Feridun Zaimoğlu's second major book, *Koppstoff: Kanaka Sprak vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (1998), opens with a poem that calls "uns Spielern in den Städten" to action. The poem ends with a set of dedications to a number of subversive figures, such as "widerständlern," "agenten im Mainstream," "asylantenflut," "kriegern aller stämme," "rassenschändern" and "metropolenmenschenmüll." Already in these dedications, Zaimoğlu evokes a complicated notion of community loosely constructed around the concept of resistance. This idea further evolves in the book, which presents the voices of 26 women of Turkish background living in Germany. *Koppstoff*, which literally means "head material," refers both to the actual fabric of the headscarf worn by many Muslim women and to their thoughts and perspectives that make up the book's powerful content. While the headscarf is often employed by Western media as a symbol of victimization, Zaimoğlu's book works against such limiting categorizations of Muslim women by presenting a diverse range of voices, from students and political activists to prostitutes, cleaning women and professionals. *Koppstoff* resists common conceptions of belonging and challenges readers to rethink conventions of religion, nationalism and femininity.

One of Zaimoğlu's most interesting dedicatees is the "agent in the mainstream." By creating a work with widespread popular appeal in Germany that at the same time complicates the very essentializing tendencies that make it attractive, Zaimoğlu positions himself—and his characters—as such agents of internal resistance. By re-appropriating cultural stereotypes such as the hate speech term *Kanake* and by integrating elements of ethnographic writing into his texts, Zaimoğlu parodies the genre of *Betroffenheitsliteratur* spawned by Günter Wallraff's seminal book *Ganz Unten* (1985) (Cheesman 2002: 184). Whereas Wallraff sought to expose an authentic truth regarding the reality of the guest worker, Zaimoğlu disrupts the very possibility of

one single such reality by constantly referring to the constructed and creative element of his texts (Cheesman, 2002: 187). While the introductory details preceding each woman's text in *Koppstoff* suggest a certain claim to authenticity, the extent to which Zaimoğlu has altered the women's statements remains intentionally unclear. Zaimoğlu further transports these female voices from the so-called "margins of society" into the center of the German *Popliteratur* scene, where he is an established celebrity. This repositioning of social hierarchy effectively undoes the very truth Wallraff claims for the subaltern Turk.

As a group of three translators working within an academic setting, we seek both to unpack what it means to be an agent and to exercise our own individual and collective agency as translating subjects in the "mainstream." This involves providing greater access to *Koppstoff* through the English language, while respecting the complexity of Zaimoğlu's original texts and their subversive power to both build and obscure notions of community. In this introduction to our collaborative translations of two exemplary texts, "Sistem versus Soopcoolture" (Sistem gegen Süppkültür) and "Everything in this World is Fleeting" (Alles in dieser Welt ist vergänglich), we will discuss our translation process in reference to existing theories of translation and current criticism on Zaimoğlu's work, underscoring the ways in which Zaimoğlu complicates prominent models of community formation and the relevance of these models to current German society. In accordance with the nature of Zaimoğlu's work, which constantly undermines the possibility of finite interpretation, this discussion will highlight the act of translation as an exercise in subjectivity. Rather than objectifying the "translatable" or "untranslatable" qualities of *Koppstoff*, we hope to demonstrate that our translations represent one of multiple ways Zaimoğlu's texts could be effectively rendered into English.

The text “Sistem gegen Süppkültür” is attributed to Ferah, a twenty-four-year-old film and television student who works part-time as a go-go dancer. In the text, Ferah argues that the mainstream lurks everywhere, waiting to devour us at every turn. She warns that even in the subculture there is no escape, for it is nothing more than a construction of the mainstream in disguise. “Alles in dieser Welt ist vergänglich” is ascribed to Hatice, a twenty-two-year-old law student. In her text, Hatice argues that her religion, including her decision to wear a headscarf, keeps her grounded and helps her face any adversaries in the mainstream.

We have chosen to compare these two texts due to the differences in both content and linguistic register they exemplify. Hatice is especially concerned with personal experiences and goals, while Ferah seems to lack any belief and is more concerned with condemning the entire public, sinners and innocents alike. Furthermore, while Zaimoğlu sought out most of the women he interviewed, he claims to have been approached by Hatice at a reading; she was concerned about the language in his novel *Abschaum* and the misrepresentation of Muslims in Germany. Hatice’s concern with language is reflected in the careful and slightly rigid nature of her speech, which may also be connected to her interest in law, her strict religious convictions and her previous trials with the German language. Ferah’s speech is anything but conventional. Her use of slang, metaphoric language and disregard for grammatical rules make her text extremely difficult to read. In the following article, we will discuss both the ways we sought to preserve these contrasts in narrative voice in our English translations, and the importance of such contrasts for the book as a whole.

### Situating *Koppstoff*: Existing Models of Community

Our translation of *Koppstoff* was informed by political and theoretical debates surrounding the concepts of community, migration and integration both within Germany and abroad. Before offering a more detailed linguistic analysis of our translation, we will first situate the book within this broader context. In recent years, Germany had begun to look to the United States as a model for a well-functioning multicultural society. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, however, the idea that a country like the United States could be heterogeneous *and* safe has been called into question. In an age in which fear dominates many debates about migration and multiculturalism in the U.S. and in Germany, existing models of community have become highly contested.

German politicians and media have frequently intimated the existence of “parallel societies”; Turkish and German communities are portrayed as living *next to* each other rather than *with* each other, which perpetuates an image of Turkish and German communities as separate, discrete entities. One response to this perceived problem has been the Christian Democratic Union’s insistence that migrants adopt a German *Leitkultur*, suggested by party chief Friedrich Merz in 2000 (Brüning 2000). The idea of *Leitkultur* alleges that in order to belong to the “German community,” one must share familiar traditions and let go of some individuality represented in past traditions that may not fit the national identity. Although the CDU’s proposal met with protest, there is still evidence of this understanding of community in current German politics.

Instead of promoting the idea of assimilation into a *Leitkultur*, the current administration argues for integration into the democratic state, and has even organized two consecutive

Integration Summits to address related issues with leaders from migrant<sup>1</sup> communities. Nevertheless, the terms of integration have yet to be clearly defined. With suggested conditions ranging from mandatory language classes to rejecting homophobia, many migrants are reluctant to take part in this project. Public opposition to more multicultural models has also played a role in hindering these aims. One recent example of such opposition is the September 2008 anti-Islam conference, organized in protest of the construction of a major mosque in Cologne and what the conference's leaders perceived to be the Islamicization of Europe.

Nevertheless, certain sectors of the German media continue to promote the possibility of community as a heterogeneous utopia. The September 2008 special edition of *Der Spiegel* magazine, "Türkei: Land im Aufbruch," in conjunction with the 2008 Frankfurt Book Fair's choice of Turkey as its guest of honor evidence a growing interest in the heritage of German-Turks. Such mainstream acknowledgement of Turkish culture in Germany stands in contrast to the assimilatory conformity stipulated by the *Leitkultur* model.

Furthermore, from November 5-19, 2007, the German public television channel Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) showcased a series called *Wohngemeinschaft Deutschland*, consisting of exposés, talk shows, films and documentaries with a focus on immigration. Since Germany has only recently foregrounded its status as a country of immigration, the station suggested that more attention must be paid to issues of integration. At stake in the project of *Wohngemeinschaft Deutschland* was an attempt to prove that the "multikulturelle Gesellschaft" could still be saved, contrary to Chancellor Merkel's assertion the previous year that it had failed. While ZDF's program shows overwhelmingly positive examples of diversity in Germany,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Cheesman notes that "the term 'Migrant' is used as a self-description among young people whose parents or grandparents migrated to Germany" (Cheesman 2002: 181).

the program was not reluctant to address the problems in the *Wohngemeinschaft* such as racism and right-wing extremism.

ZDF's choice of the title for this series, *Wohngemeinschaft Deutschland*, is significant. *Gemeinschaft*, the more common German word for community, is extremely weighted and historically has many negative connotations. While *Gemeinschaft* is often linked to National Socialist ideas of homogeneity, a *Wohngemeinschaft* is more suggestive of a '68 commune and implies several people, often young and from different backgrounds, sharing a living space. *Wohngemeinschaft Deutschland* may therefore suggest a model for community, in which, with the help of integration, diverse individuals can live together as long as they are willing to abide by common rules. *Wohngemeinschaft Deutschland* appears to reject the generalization of the migrant experience found in *Betroffenheitsliteratur* and instead presents individual ethnic groups that make up the patchwork community that is Germany. However, this does not mean that *Wohngemeinschaft Deutschland* acknowledges the different identities *within* each ethnic group.

By focusing on the diversity *among* Turkish individuals, Zaimoğlu's works such as *Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (1995) and *Koppstoff* undermine the possibility of one authentic Turkish voice. Although both *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff* claim to present marginalized voices, significant differences between the two works must be considered. The majority of the voices presented in *Kanak Sprak* are those of lower-class males, though a social worker, a rapper and a breakdancer are also included. While Zaimoğlu parodies the exposé-like style of Wallraff's *Ganz Unten*, because Zaimoğlu intentionally uses stereotypes that conform to German society's conception of Turkish males, some readers saw these voices as representatives of an authentic Turkish community to which they had voyeuristic access through reading the text.

*Koppstoff*, which includes much more diverse registers—ranging from the views of students, a cleaning woman, a single mother, a prostitute and a social worker, to a writer and a political activist—may more successfully resist oversimplified conceptions of a unified community of Turkish women. Indeed, Zaimoğlu consistently subverts any common understanding of community as familiar, homogenous and utopian. While the female voices do make up a distinctive whole, they lose nothing of their individuality by being compiled in a collection. And the unconventional use of language in *Koppstoff* has an alienating rather than familiarizing effect on the reader. The book nevertheless enacts community on other levels. Through reading the compilation of texts, for example, one becomes versed in their language and begins to feel included in the text's community.

Because Zaimoğlu has positioned himself against the essentializing tendencies of *Betroffenheitsliteratur*, one must inevitably address the question of who does or does not have the right to speak on behalf of Muslim women in Germany. While *Koppstoff* seems in many ways an empowering text due to its apparent expression of Muslim female subjectivity (Weber 33), it should not be overlooked that Zaimoğlu is effectively speaking *for* the relatively anonymous women he represents. As a successful, respected male author, Zaimoğlu wields considerably more influence and power in the public than an anonymous Muslim woman might have, which adds another dimension to the problem of representation. Furthermore, while Zaimoğlu claims to have interviewed all of his subjects, it is unclear to what extent he has manipulated their stories and speech patterns. When Zaimoğlu dedicates *Koppstoff* to the subversive “agents in the mainstream,” readers may question the extent to which Zaimoğlu himself functions as such an agent: Are the grammatical failures in many of the women's texts natural or affected, and to what degree has the rigid or lyrical quality of the women's voices been



enhanced? To what extent is the organization of texts within the collection driven by Zaimoğlu's own agenda, and what effect does this have on one's interpretation of the text? The questions of authenticity and authority raised by such considerations add yet another layer to the act of translation when considering issues such as tone, word choice and syntax, and will be addressed more thoroughly in later sections of this introduction.

### Rethinking a Minor Literature

In his book *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (2007), Tom Cheesman argues that Zaimoğlu's writing complicates Deleuze and Guattari's idea of a minor literature. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari 16). *Koppstoff* adheres to this idea in its presentation of voices of people who are minorities in three senses of the word: Muslim, Turkish women living in Germany.

A second characteristic of minor literature is that it deterritorializes the major language, thereby undermining the major literature from within, like the agents in the mainstream to whom Zaimoğlu dedicates the book. Cheesman argues, however, that rather than deterritorializing the German language, Zaimoğlu actually *reterritorializes* it:

The opposite of deterritorialization is reterritorialization, and its sign is, in a migrant context, linguistic hybridity. Özdamar's literal translation of the territorialized, idiomatic resources of vernacular Turkish into German is an act of reterritorialization. Zaimoğlu's *Kanak Sprak* excavates the territorialized, idiomatic resources of vernacular German, in order to assert, through style, the

reterritorialized settlement of the subsequent generation's culture on German soil.  
(Cheesman 99-100)

Drawing upon Cheesman, one could consider other forms of linguistic hybridity tied to migration and diaspora, such as African-Americans' variations on Standard English, as reterritorialization rather than deterritorialization. Even if Zaimoğlu reterritorializes the German language, the *Kanak Sprak* he has presented to the mainstream, which is spoken not only by migrants, but by German youth exposed to the language as well, could still be perceived as a threat by advocates of *Leitkultur*. The positioning of *Kanak Sprak* as a threat to the German *Leitkultur* led us to consider translating selected texts in *Koppstoff* into an equivalent English vernacular that has also been perceived as threatening, such as African-American Ebonics<sup>2</sup>. This desire was also influenced by the sense of solidarity some Turkish-Germans and Germans with an immigrant background feel toward African-Americans, which is even expressed in Zaimoğlu's *Kanak Sprak* (Hestermann 362).

Antoine Berman, however, warns against translating a foreign vernacular into a local one in his essay "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign." In a discussion on the pitfalls of translation, he writes: "Unfortunately, a vernacular clings tightly to its soil and completely resists any direct translating into another vernacular . . . An exoticization that turns the foreign from abroad into the foreign at home winds up merely ridiculing the original" (Berman 286). Berman's warning revealed what exactly could be confounded if we were to translate *Koppstoff* into African-American vernacular. First of all, the first school of thought on the origin of

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<sup>2</sup> In Harry N. and Charlene M. Seymour's article, "The Symbolism of Ebonics," the Seymours trace two historical ways of understanding Ebonics in the United States. The first understanding does not recognize Ebonics as a language in need of support, rather it argues that African-American children are linguistically deficient in Standard English. The other understanding recognizes Ebonics as a language different from but equal to mainstream English. The "different but equal" thesis caused alarm among those who believed support of Ebonics would only threaten progress towards racial equality (Seymour 401).

Ebonics argues for the pidgin/Creole theory: African-American vernacular developed in direct relation to the history of American slavery and the African diaspora (Williams 210-211). If we consider the language in *Koppstoff* to be a “literary re-creation of ‘Kanak Sprak’” (Hestermann 360) and not just Zaimoğlu’s creation, then this language would be grounded in the post-war experiences of the *Gastarbeiter* and their descendants, a completely different context than that of American slavery. Secondly, if we tried to render the foreign vernacular of *Koppstoff* with a local one, we would have to consider that just as there are many different forms of *Kanak Sprak* inflected by German regional dialects, there are also a variety of vernaculars in the U.S. How would we decide which vernacular best resonates with the text? With these ideas in consideration, we decided to translate the text into a more universal American slang that is accentuated and often affected by the foreign language.

It is important to note that the texts in *Koppstoff* are neither strictly in “broken German” nor in a pure mixture of German and Turkish. These texts show that most of these women are capable of speaking standard German, for when Turkish words are used, they are used sparingly and quite precisely in order to express a certain point. Additionally, these women not only enrich their German with Turkish phrases, but sometimes use English and, on one occasion, Latin, which stresses that many of them are educated, multilingual, and possess transnational sensibilities for language.

A third characteristic of minor literature is the presumed inability of the minority to speak in the major language. Even before the first guest-workers and children of guest-workers began writing literature in German, an assumption prevailed that minorities were unable to express themselves well in German. In the nineteenth century, for example, Germans believed Jews were only capable of speaking a “deficient German” which was referred to as *mauscheln* (Wirth-

Nester 48). This past prejudice is reflected in later discourses about the speech of immigrants after the war. For years, the idea existed that Turkish-Germans, as well as other immigrants, lived *between* languages, unable to really express themselves in their parents' language or in German. Zaimoğlu challenges this assumption by introducing readers to numerous Turkish-German women who can express themselves very well in German. In this way, he functions as a mediator, enabling each woman's voice to reach a mainstream audience.

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari characterize minor literature as something that "takes on a collective value" as opposed to being familial (Deleuze and Guattari 17); through voicing the concerns of the collective, minor literature is inherently political. We believe that aside from Cheesman's argument for reterritorialization, *Koppstoff* also diverges from the idea of a minor literature in this regard. *Koppstoff* may take on a collective value for some due to the fact that Turkish-German women rarely receive the chance to speak on their own behalf in large-scale public debates. One might feel compelled to read *Koppstoff* as representing all Turkish-German women. Yet Zaimoğlu confounds this impulse by presenting *Koppstoff* as a *collection* of voices, rather than a *collective*. While a collective implies a certain sense of unity, *Koppstoff* does not put forth one unified voice, but rather a collection of very different and often conflicting voices. Although political issues are often discussed in the texts, and even private issues, such as whether to wear a headscarf, have political implications, we must still look at each text on its own as the expression of a single individual, as well as looking at the texts in relation to each other in a heterogeneous community.

## Communities of Readership

If the multiplicity of voices in *Koppstoff* complicates the collective nature of a minor literature and thereby also traditional conceptions of community, the act of translation only furthers this effect. In exposing the original text to diverse contexts, translation engenders the formation of a new set of communities. The following section will address key decisions we have made concerning our translation process with regard to the two main types of communities made possible through our translation of *Koppstoff*. By utilizing the metaphor of translation as a form of displacement, we will first consider shifting communities of readership, and the role that questions of audience have played in our overall translation process. By then extending this notion of readership to the metaphor of translation as an intimate act of reading or interpretation, we will examine the sense of community that grew out of our collaborative translation project, and how we believe this has affected our approach to and understanding of the texts in *Koppstoff*.

Translation displaces an original text on two levels: it both uproots the original linguistically, and exposes the text to an entirely new community of readers. Berman discusses this process in terms of a positive exile. As he argues, the work's "core of meaning"—which is expressed through key tensions within the text—becomes even more apparent in translation, as the text's most inherent meanings are literally distanced from itself in a foreign language (Berman 278). This idea has proven crucial to our translation project, as we have come to understand *Koppstoff* not as one overarching text, but as a collection of texts that must be read through their complementary and contrasting relationships to one another. Together, the texts comprise a disunified whole, in which seemingly opposing elements actually work together to undermine the possibility of any one stable meaning.

This functions first and foremost on the level of the individual section. The linguistic complexity and extremely nuanced resistance to common conceptions of belonging in “Sistem gegen Süppkültür,” for example, calls into question the validity of subculture as a true alternative to the mainstream. As such, the text asks both who is actually *in* the subculture, and who is *in on* the intricate word play that makes up the section itself. “Süppkültür” stages these questions through the use of seemingly light humor that functions as serious political commentary.

The prominent use of repetition, for example, calls into question the very concept of authenticity. While constructions such as *Ünterüntergründ* (16) and “heimlich heimlich” (16) are linguistically original, the repetition in the second half of each term challenges the uniqueness of the first half. As a result, this type of redundancy ultimately reveals the term to mean the opposite of what it purports to express: “underground” becomes a mainstream cliché and the man who believes himself to be “stealthy” is actually quite obvious. In a similar way the construction “jeder jederman” (16) (every everyman) emphasizes an absurd opposition. In contrast to the first term “every” which suggests a multiplicity of separate voices, the second term “everyman” posits a sense of collectivity that undoes the individuality suggested by the first.

In general, one can translate these expressions quite literally, without losing any sense of irony. The phrase *ünterüntergründ*, however, poses an additional problem, as its superimposed umlauts make reference to Turkish grammatical rules of vowel harmony, and to common conceptions of a Turkish accent in German. Play with vowel harmony occurs at other moments in the text as well, poking fun at the Turkish accent while simultaneously deploying such pronunciation mistakes subversively. The exaggeration involved in this repetition allows Ferah to perform a common stereotype associated with the “uneducated Turk,” while simultaneously “theoriz[ing] the cultural space [she is] made to occupy” (Adelson 117). Along with vowel

harmony another connection to the Turkish language is the repetition of adjectives, often used to create emphasis in place of a word such as “very.” The more subtle nature of this linguistic subversion (which speaks only to those with a deeper knowledge of Turkish) is one of many markers that show how Zaimoğlu’s texts function on multiple levels, resisting any one stable interpretation.

In addition to references to the Turkish language and common perceptions of immigrants’ speech patterns, Zaimoğlu also employs purely creative wordplay and grammatical structures. “Scherbenklirren” (17) (glass-shattering) and “Bullenklirremachen” (17) (cop-crazy-making), for example, manipulate the German grammatical construct of compound nouns by combining nouns and verbs into one word. They are also semantically innovative, as they occur within the same sentence but do not generate a parallel meaning for the repeated word *klirren*. Beyond such identifiably playful aspects of the text are denser, seemingly unintelligible passages such as the following:

wer wann wo dufte oder nicht n abrutschiges Parlieren hinbekommt, und wer  
wann wo dufte oder nicht n Rauhschrauf aus n paar Rillen rausgemaust, und wer  
wann wo dufte oder nicht n Kült-Spur hingeschissen innen Preussdrill, und  
insgesamt wie Süppkültür ruppig der Puppe Staat was wer wo ordentlich geboten.

(18)

and who when where hip or not ripped a raw scratch from a few grooves, and who  
when where hip or not shat a cult-trace in a Prussian drill, and altogether what  
who where the puppet state roughly amply offered as soopcoolture.

In our attempts to maintain these equally playful, but semantically and syntactically distinct levels of comprehensibility within the original text, we became particularly aware of what

Berman terms “clarification.” As he argues, translation allows us to understand something we would otherwise not have been able to, simply by making it accessible in a new language. Yet this type of accessibility can manifest itself in varying degrees: Translation can make apparent something that was intentionally repressed in the original, clarifying the text in an unnecessary and perhaps even detrimental way. In the movement from language to language, however, translations also have the potential to create new openings that were not available in the original and that positively impact the meaning of the text.

In the act of translating there is always a desire to make sense of the original, and to render this understanding of the text in the target language. This is particularly relevant to “Süppkültür,” which resists quick and easy comprehension on all levels. Consequently, by translating very literally, we sought to leave the text slightly unclear in sections where the reader is meant to puzzle out the meaning for herself. Certain situations, however, offered the possibility of enriching the translation through a word play that is available in English, but not in the original German. One significant example of this in our translation is the title “Sistem versus Soopcooltüre.” By leaving “sistem” in its original form, we were able to maintain Zaimoğlu’s direct reference to the Turkish language. While we lost his second reference in dropping the umlauts on *Süppkültür*, we nevertheless gained new nuances in meaning through the use of a consistent “oo” in “soop” and “cool”. Soop—although misspelled—plays off the idea of the melting pot addressed in the text. By maintaining this spelling, we were also able to add the word “cool.” This reflects the text’s own self-awareness of the very clichés it criticizes, and also the risk it runs of simply becoming another cliché.

This translation of the title is directly related to a larger question of readership: How will this collection of texts speak to and be perceived by an English-speaking readership? And to



what extent should an envisioned target audience affect translation choices? Can an accessible translation with cultural parallels only be rendered at the expense of nuance and meaning?

In our attempts to answer these questions, we first considered the nature of the original and its intended audience. Despite the smatterings of Turkish throughout *Koppstoff*, as well as the all-Turkish cast of women, the often elusive speech patterns, complicated wordplay and specifically staged grammatical mistakes demand less knowledge of Turkish than of German, as well as a significant amount of time and interest. Indeed, the text constantly attempts to alienate the reader. Consider, for example, that the first text in *Koppstoff*—“Ich bin n taffer Liberalkiller” is not only one of the most difficult to read but also insults a key demographic of the text’s potential audience. This text reveals the book’s immediate resistance to any form of easy participation in its contents. The challenge thus becomes one of maintaining the extremely difficult nature of Zaimoğlu’s work, while nevertheless providing access to a new American readership.

Gayatri Spivak’s thoughts on translation offer a potential solution to this struggle by calling for an alternative type of community to be forged between translator and text. It is this very personal and intimate relationship, she argues, that should determine translation choices, rather than any consideration of a larger target audience. While we ultimately deviated from her decision to disregard questions of audience in order to remain true to the work itself, her thoughts on the ethical decisions involved in translation have largely informed our project and thus warrant discussion.

In her essay “The Politics of Translation,” Spivak discusses translation as an act of intimate reading in which the translator must surrender herself to the inner workings of the text at hand. At the same time that Spivak demands a borderline erotic identification with the text, she

nevertheless recognizes its potential dangers, and asserts the need for a certain critical distance between text and translator. This distance is depicted through a metaphor of love:

The task of the translator is to facilitate...love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay. (Spivak 370)

Spivak's conception of love can best be understood by extending the metaphor of fraying: Whereas the selvedge line of the original text(ile) acts as a measure of containment, a loving translation allows for a certain fraying or opening in the text. This opening is not one that simply allows the text to fall apart, but rather one that carefully attends to the delicate nuances of the original. Love is thus very different from the deeply emotional concept of intimacy; it holds agency and audience at bay through a more measured form of respect for the inherent meanings of the original.

Failure to maintain this critical distance that love enables results in what Spivak terms "translatese," (372) or a kind of catch-all English that expresses a false solidarity among texts. Here it is important to emphasize that Spivak's essay specifically addresses texts by *women* from *Third World countries*. Above all, she argues, one must avoid translating feminist texts from Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic, for example, into one universal "English" feminist voice. Spivak cites in particular the heavy connotations of British feminism, which has developed in opposition to Britain's imperial past and "often racist present" (Spivak 370). While translating texts into English certainly provides access to the largest audience, it also runs the risk of undoing the specificity of the original, through a type of translation that simply creates cultural parallels understandable to the new target audience.

Although *Koppstoff* was authored by a man and in a Western European language, it nevertheless portrays Muslim, Turkish women, who represent a minority within Germany. As three American non-Muslims, we have constantly questioned our own agency while translating *Koppstoff*. One way that we have sought to counter our own subjectivity is by maintaining linguistic and imagistic distinctions between texts to the largest extent possible. While all texts are written in the same language, there are nevertheless differences in age, class, level of education and religious belief among the women represented that play out in terms of voice.

In an effort to maintain the individuality of each voice, we have taken several factors into consideration. The most important of these is what Spivak terms the “rhetoricity of language” (Spivak 371). In contrast to logic, which offers clearly indicated connections between words and ideas, rhetoric is articulated in the silences between words. It is in this absence of language or sound, Spivak argues, that meaning is often grounded. Translators must therefore pay specific attention not only to words themselves, but also to their placement within the text. This idea can be clearly demonstrated in reference to individual words that contain larger cultural implications. Translating such words involves careful consideration of that which is not articulated, but rather tacitly understood.

Two examples of this are the words “Hauptschule” and “Gymnasium” (69), which occur in the text “Everything in This World is Fleeting.” In this text Hatice expresses her father’s reluctance to send her to the *Gymnasium*; the local hodja convinces him otherwise with the reasoning that she can always return to the *Hauptschule* if the *Gymnasium* “changes” her too much. When considering how to translate *Hauptschule* in this context, we consulted forums on various online dictionaries. Among the suggestions we found were “low-chance education” and “minimum requirement education with low employment chances upon completion” (LEO).

While such translations reflect the emotionally charged weight of the word *Hauptschule*, we rejected them precisely because their over-explanatory nature fills in the silence surrounding the original word. Furthermore, due the nature of Hatice's text, in which she consistently asserts her ability to make independent choices about her lifestyle, we did not want to draw unnecessary attention to the negative connotations surrounding this word. We felt that this would place excessive attention on the small role that the two male figures played in the text. Nevertheless, we sought to accurately convey the drastic difference between these two schools. As a result, we chose the terms "university-track high school" and "general education," which evokes the American GED. This example illustrates how our translation both adhered to and contradicted Spivak's theories. While we chose a word with larger implications to maintain a certain amount of resonance, this resulted in a translation that speaks to a specifically American audience.

In addition to the resonances of individual words, we paid careful attention to the larger implications of linguistic style as a reflection of each woman's distinct character. This can be demonstrated through a comparison of "Sistem versus Soopcoolture" and "Everything in This World is Fleeting." The language in "Sistem versus Soopcoolture" depends heavily on rhythm; attention is paid to alliteration and syllable length, vowels are elided and words are made to flow into one another. The rhetoric of this style thus lies partly in the musicality of the text. This is especially clear in places where the text does not seem to follow a logical progression; it is rather the sound of the words that holds the sentences together. In sections such as this, rhetorical silence can be understood as the moments spent puzzling over hidden meanings. Read aloud, the text flows easily from word to word. When read at a slower pace, however, this "smooth" quality gives way to a much rougher impression. If the manipulation of language does indeed serve to obscure meaning, this can also be understood within the larger scheme of the text. Just as Ferah

rejects the “system,” which is understood to mean mainstream culture, her text could also be read as a challenge to the very structure of language, as a regulated system of communication.

In contrast to Ferah’s style, Hatice’s language is very straightforward, clear and precise. The rhetoric of her text lies in her deference to the systematic rules of language. This can be understood on one level as a parallel to her deference to God and the Islamic religion. Within the text, however, we discover that Hatice learned German as a foreign language, and that as a child she was forced to repeat kindergarten and then nearly sent to a remedial school due to her poor language skills. Hatice’s very precise usage of German can also be understood as a response to this false equation between her language ability and intelligence. Despite the passive nature of her text, Hatice’s language thus reasserts her aptitude and her academic success, serving as a silent form of rebellion. One way in which we preserved this aspect of Hatice’s speech is by omitting all contractions. This gives the text a more deliberate and academic tone, which reflects Hatice’s appropriation of the German language for her own purposes.

In addition to the “community” we have attempted to establish with the texts in *Koppstoff*, our collaborative project has also allowed for the formation of an additional community among ourselves as translators. This second community has informed our translation in many ways: As three non-native German speakers, there were certainly moments when we found the text utterly foreign. While this could be construed as a *lack* of intimacy with the text, it has actually informed our translation in a positive way, by sensitizing us to the dangers of mistranslation. Working in a group has also forced us to justify our every decision and thus also examine each text in detail.

If it is precisely this level of engagement that Spivak evokes with the term intimacy, we can return to the larger community of readership addressed earlier in this section. Does a truly

“intimate” translation demand this same level of understanding from the text’s larger readership, and if so, how reasonable is this expectation? In other words, if Spivak asks what is at stake in translations that take audience into account, we have asked ourselves what is at stake in disregarding questions of audience completely. While Spivak suggests rhetoric as an answer to the first situation, we would posit community as an answer to the second. While the original text of *Koppstoff* puts up certain obstacles to easy or instant comprehension, it simultaneously presents each woman’s story as one that *wants* to be heard. In this sense, we believe that the linguistic complexity and at times dense content of *Koppstoff* actually challenge the reader to step up to the level of the text, rather than simply being turned off by it. Similarly, while the disparate voices in *Koppstoff* call into question traditional conceptions of community, they by no means reject the possibility of community formation altogether. They rather create a group based as much on the differences as on the similarities among its members. We believe that the text calls for a similar community of readers: If the act of slowing down to think critically about the text binds readers together, all other aspects of the community remain potentially open.

A translation without *any* parallel cultural references—translations that replace German cultural points of reference with ones familiar to US readers—would thus run contrary to the very nature of *Koppstoff*. The few parallel translations we offer are key moments that actively invite the reader to participate in the text. While such moments occur only sparingly, they are nevertheless crucial, as a translation devoid of any such parallels risks being read only by those already interested in, or at least familiar with the book. By placing these key sections among other very literal translations, we seek to strike a balance between linguistic complexity and accessibility. This will help to make excerpts of *Koppstoff* available to a truly new set of readers, which can only extend the book’s conception of community in a positive way.

## Authenticity and Origins

In addition to such considerations of readership, questions of what is present in and inherent to the original text are further complicated by the issues of origin and authenticity that permeate Zaimoğlu's work. Through ambiguous and potentially contradictory references to the source of the material presented to the reader, Zaimoğlu subverts any fixed notion of authenticity. As translators, we worked to convey this playful negation of true origin, while at the same time maintaining a high degree of fidelity to the specific power of language in each woman's voice; indeed, these two aspects function together in crucial ways.

On the one hand, Zaimoğlu asserts that his book transmits a series of "real life" experiences spoken by "real women." In his introduction to *Koppstoff*, Zaimoğlu uses the term "*Protokolle*" to refer to the statements of the women he interviewed. The word *Protokoll* implies the transmission of actual facts; a protocol is a log or record of events that transpired, a transcript of a statement or conversation. Every section of the book is framed by an introduction, describing the circumstances under which Zaimoğlu's interview with each woman took place. This emphasis on origins seems at first to promise the reader access to raw and unfiltered experiences straight from the source; its aura of "street cred" seems to offer a peek into "the way things really are" for Turkish women in Germany.

The reader is nevertheless constantly prompted to question how "real" the women's statements as presented in the book truly are. Each protocol takes the form of a linguistically complex monologue, several pages in length. Often containing run-on sentences, grammatical errors and copious slang, these texts do seem in many ways to depict actual speech. Yet the texts are also rhetorically dense, full of clever neologisms and skillfully constructed phrases. Readers

may have the reaction that “people don’t really talk like this,” but they cannot be entirely sure to what degree these texts are artistic interpretations or adaptations of real speech.

Zaimoğlu also appears to account for certain stylistic similarities among the various statements in *Koppstoff* by explaining in his introduction that almost all of the women interviewed were already familiar with his earlier work *Kanak Sprak*. We therefore cannot know to what degree these women shaped their statements to conform to their own expectations, based on their acquaintance with *Kanak Sprak*. Does this prior knowledge make their statements somehow less authentic, in the way that reality TV participants who know they are on camera may be accused of “not acting real”?

Additionally, while the framing information provided by Zaimoğlu refers to an “authentic source” of material, it also highlights his mediating role. The reader is constantly reminded that these women are not speaking directly to her, but rather that her consumption of their voices is mediated by Zaimoğlu. Although all of the texts are written primarily in German, the language of the original interview often remains unclear. In some situations, one assumes based on factors such as references to language ability and location that Turkish was the language of conversation, in which case the “transcription” has been translated by Zaimoğlu from one language to another and is therefore already a site of transformation. We are told that one text was handed to Zaimoğlu by a student who knew of his project and wanted to be included: “Beim nächsten Treffen legte sie mir das von ihr selbst verfaßte Protokoll auf den Tisch” (56). We are not told, however, how much of this original source text is reprinted in the book or whether it was edited at all by Zaimoğlu. This story functions to further foreground the ambiguity of origins in all of the texts. Is this written protocol, which may or may not be printed in its original form, more or less authentic than the possibly altered conversation transcriptions?



In his introduction to *Kanak Sprak*, Zaimoğlu drops additional hints that complicate matters. He explains that in order to gain access to many of his male interview subjects, it was necessary to win their trust and prove his credibility. For these reasons, it was often not possible for him to record his interviews on tape or with notes; instead, he would wait until the interview had ended to reconstruct what he remembered. Zaimoğlu thus situates his sources in real life; he explains how he entered into a world to which most Germans do not have access, adopted its conventions and emerged to bring back information straight from the street. At the same time, however, he openly acknowledges a literal *Nachdichtung*, or a certain kind of adaptation, without being specific about the extent of his creative role (Brunner 86).

By playing with such notions as the authenticity of the text's source, Zaimoğlu also complicates broader concepts of cultural authenticity. If a German audience expects to consume some type of authentic cultural experience or essential cultural identity by reading *Koppstoff*, Zaimoğlu challenges this expectation. Through the structure of the book, Zaimoğlu also pokes fun at ethnographic field studies and their conventions, in which only first names are given and excerpts from transcribed conversations are held up as evidence of widespread practices from which general conclusions about a cultural or ethnic group can be drawn.

In translating sections of *Koppstoff*, we considered these complications of origin carefully. Questions that any translation must address, such as how loyal to the original text to be and how to reproduce the original meaning of that text in the target language, take on new dimensions when one cannot be sure how to define what the original actually is. In relation to these issues, we considered Benjamin's assertion that there is an essence or essential quality (*das Wesentliche*) within a text, which the translator should strive to convey. In translating a text that

seems to resist the very idea of essence, we questioned what the essential quality of *Koppstoff* could—or could not—be.

Through the process of translating, we came to realize that our decisions reflected a conclusion that we had not drawn at the outset of our project: While keeping in mind the ambiguities of the text's origin, we ultimately translated the text not as an artifact of social science, but rather as a carefully constructed work of art. We perceived a very particular tone or emotional register in each woman's statement, as well as an underlying force throughout the work that does, in some ways, unify the project, and we sought to preserve and convey both of these aspects. While we were not bound by a more traditional concept of "giving voice" to individual women's authentic lived experiences, our translation project nonetheless demanded fidelity to Zaimoğlu's construction in all of its complexity; because so much of the book's power resides in the linguistic specificity of each of the voices as part of a polyphonous whole, we took great pains to convey this specificity in the English language.

An example of this kind of decision can be found in our translation of "buden-eigenen Perser" as "brand new Persian" in the following sentence:

Und das System fängt ja an vor der Haustür, und was wir so reinbringen ist wie Hundescheiße aufm buden-eigenen Perser geschmiert, Frisch vom Absatz...

And the system starts right outside your front door, and what we bring in is like dog shit smeared on your brand new Persian, fresh from the heel...

The impact of this passage is strong on several levels. A Persian rug carries associations of the Orient, closely related in the German imagination with Turkish culture. In most Turkish households it is customary to remove shoes before entering the home, and such a dirtying of the home is greatly heightened by the contrast of the dog feces on a carpet described in personal

terms. “*Buden-eigen*” is an unusual formulation in the German; it stresses ownership of the rug and the personal insult done to its owner. To convey the strength of this image of defilement to an American English-speaking audience, we chose the contrast of the term “brand-new,” which connotes something clean, fresh and still pure. Our most important decision, however, was to translate “*Perser*” simply as “Persian,” rather than over-clarifying with “Persian rug.” This preserves some of the ambiguity of the German, wherein a noun of nationality can more easily be used for either an object or a person. The image of abuse and desecration is intensified by the possibility contained within the German formulation, that the dog feces are smeared on a person, and one of Middle Eastern origin. It also captures a sense of objectification, that an ethnically or nationally defined person can be referred to using the same terms as those used to describe an object.

Our attempts to preserve key cultural parallels in our translation of *Koppstoff* were complicated by specific references in the original text that had no satisfactory equivalent in English. In such cases we had to carefully consider what was lost and gained in our translation choices, and how these choices affected the rhetoricity of the text. In making such choices, we took Jacques Derrida’s essay “What is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?” into consideration. In this essay, Derrida addresses the possibility of a pure translation, as well as resistance to such a translation. Derrida has reservations about Walter Benjamin’s ideal of a pure language that can be reached through a transcendent and in many ways religious view of translation. For Derrida translation is both a transformation and a transaction; through his discussion of the economy of words necessary for a relevant translation, Derrida points to a price to be paid. He emphasizes that if translation functions as a kind of transcendence, then there is always the flesh of the body that is left behind; this is “the price of a translation” (Derrida 443). In our process of translating,

we were also aware of what was lost. While translation theories have the luxury of laying out an ideal, in practice a translator is often forced to choose between imperfect options. Intimacy with both the original and target languages as well as the text may greatly improve this set of options, but decisions must eventually be made. By striving for the best possible translation, in some sense what Derrida problematically terms the most “relevant” translation, we acknowledged that making a translated form of this text available in English was worth the price of what was lost (Derrida 427).

We felt such a loss keenly in the translation of certain derogatory terms for which there is no exact equivalent in English. Words such as “Maul,” “Fresser” and “Weib” carry a particular affective weight which is not fully evoked by either more neutral or pejorative terms in English such as “mouth,” “yap” or “puss” for *Maul*; “eater,” “glutton” or “devourer” for *Fresser*; or “woman,” “chick” or “bitch” for *Weib*. This loss was further complicated by Zaimoğlu’s use of compound words such as “Seminarfresse” and “Weiberhaß.” In these cases, it is possible to achieve a similar emotional impact through a longer, more complex construction. This comes, however, at the expense of preserving the larger rhetorical framework within which the particular compound is situated. The economy of words that Derrida describes was thus not an arbitrary rule to which we were loyal, but rather a crucial factor in deciding what could be saved.

Such calculated losses were tempered by gains in other areas. In several cases, our inability to find a similar word or meaning in English that worked in the context of a given passage resulted in the creation of something new, which, as Benjamin argues, can enrich the text in its new life as an English translation. For example, we translated “ne Idee zur Abrutsche” as “an idea towards the edge” in the following section:

Such a multiarmed middle-class sowed its kids in all the fields, and they're running 'round with their seminar pussies: an idea forwards, an idea towards the edge, where one can rustle around unnoticed, for a minute, an idea into bizarre leather and back to just doing things for the sake of happiness, they run 'round...

While the sense of slipping down is now more implied than explicit (to fall off the edge, go over the edge), the word "edge" does maintain a certain spatiality that is present in the German passage. Additionally, "edge" in English can connote a social periphery and is closely related to the word "edgy," referring to daring, trend-setting behavior. Our use of "edge" thus underlines the sense of irony directed at the kids who temporarily adopt provocative fashions and attitudes before returning to their comfortable middle-class lifestyles.

Sometimes a literal translation resulted in a new field of associations in English. For example, we chose to translate "zieh das Genick ein" as "pull in your neck," which is not a common expression itself, but which does conjure up a number of neck-related idioms in English (save your neck, risk your neck, put your neck on the line, stick your neck out). Also, a somewhat playfully literal translation of "ne Bourgeoisie voller Künste" as "an art-full bourgeoisie" retains a range of associations similar to those of the German phrase, potentially referring to a superficial interest in art or the avant-garde, while being full of art (in the sense of crafty or cunning), or full of artifice (in the sense of artificial or *künstlich*).

In Benjamin's discussion of the ways in which translation can enrich language, he quotes Rudolf Pannwitz to argue that the translator must "expand and deepen" his own language by means of the foreign language (Benjamin 82). Such a mode of translation moves language closer to Benjamin's ideal of a pure language, which can be realized when the totality of the intended meanings at the core of all languages are able to supplement each other, adding up to a pure

whole (Benjamin 78). We see such enrichment in Zaimoğlu's German text through words that reflect a Turkish spelling such as "Ünterüntergründ" as well as through the frequent construction of neologisms. Terms such as "Ihr Schlawwerden" and "Vielfressal" may at first appear to be grammatically awkward constructions by a non-native speaker, but they are in fact poetic inventions that push the boundaries of what the German language can do. Many of the women who speak in Zaimoğlu's text seem to regard German more as a tool that can be utilized in whatever way necessary to express themselves, rather than as a set of rules to be obeyed. Our challenge as translators was to preserve or at least convey a sense of Zaimoğlu's occasional "Turkification" of the German language while also seeking to "Germanize" our English. German allows for the building of compound words in a way that English simply does not. We weighed radical newness against reader alienation, and sometimes we mirrored the German compounds in words like "menfrustration" and "womenhate," while in other cases we hyphenated words to at least give a sense of this possibility.

In seeking to generate a parallel impact of the text on American English-speaking readers, we also resisted the use of translators' notes. Zaimoğlu does not footnote or explain cultural or political references made by the women in the text; instead, possibilities of interpretation are often left open, and the reader engages with the text in a particular way by either picking up on certain references or experiencing a sense of uncertainty or estrangement. Such references play a role in creating a feeling of community; readers can affirm membership among those who "get it," and those more uncertain are encouraged that these references may be puzzled out and such access obtained. Even more important, however, was our sense that having sufficient factual information would ultimately not convey or impede the reader's access to an accurate sense of Zaimoğlu's work. Furthermore, translators' notes would create stumbling

blocks, breaking up the rhythms and rhetoricity that we perceived as integral to the experience of reading the text. Our continued insistence on preserving this rhetoricity leads again to a practical answer to the question of translating the text with regard to its origins. The use of notes in poetry or fictional prose differs fundamentally from the use of notes in an essay or a study designed to provide information. In practice, we view the text as a work carefully constructed by an author—as a work of art, rather than a collection of reports.

The rhetorical structures that we sought to preserve are quite distinct in each section of the book, yet in working closely with several sections, parallels in content and similarities in word choice became apparent. At the same time, though, the sections of the book are dramatically different from one another, and these very differences constitute an important unity. The essence of the book lies in its dramatic resistance to essentialization, in the way the various women's voices can form a whole through their differences, and this whole is orchestrated by Zaimoğlu as its author.

The rhetorical complexity of the text challenges the reader to engage with the work in a nuanced, sophisticated way, and the ambiguity of the text's origins can be read as another element within the text that prevents the reader's immediate or complete comprehension of it. In constructing a balance between access and exclusion, Zaimoğlu resists simplistic ideals of community while promoting the reader's engagement with a more complex, yet potentially more inclusive, understanding of community. By translating the text into English, we add further complication to its ambiguities of origin, while at the same time expanding the sense of community that it puts forth. As an "agent in the mainstream," Zaimoğlu injects polyphony into a German public discourse on immigration and integration that can often be simplistic and one-sided. In translating *Koppstoff*, with great respect for the subversive qualities of the text and its

powers to both build and complicate notions of community, we hope to exercise such agency in the mainstream ourselves.



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