
“Was deutsch ist, bestimmen wir:”¹ Definitions of (Turkish-) Germanness in Feridun Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff*

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Introduction

Children of former *Gastarbeiter* are still often perceived as “Turks” or “foreigners.” They do not seem to be granted a German identity and largely remain at the margins of German society. However, while these prescribed margins are, on the one hand, not accepted, they are, on the other, embraced by those in the German Turkish community who challenge and, consequently, redefine the “center” of the German mainstream they are living amongst.

This article² focuses on the self-portrayal of young male and female German Turks in “Kanakistan, einem unbekanntem Landstrich am Rande der deutschen Gesellschaft,” as Feridun Zaimoğlu puts it in his *Kanak Sprak: 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (1995) (2). This collection of “protocols” of allegedly authentic interviews with German Turks and its female pendant, *Koppstoff: Kanaka Sprak vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (1998), center around young German Turkish men and women whose identity is often rendered as being “different.” As a result, they often see themselves as angry young men and women in an essentially “foreign” environment.³

In this article, I ask whether the “oppositional discursive strategy” of Zaimoğlu’s interlocutors, their verbal expression of deliberate “difference,” is part of the re-definition of (Turkish-) Germanness, and, if so, how (Huggan 20). I argue that Zaimoğlu’s characters appropriate their position at the “margins of society” beyond general perceptions of Germanness and Turkishness. I thereby examine how the female *Kanaka* and the male *Kanaken* (and with these terms I follow Zaimoğlu’s generalization of his interviewees) create their own spaces of belonging, with a particular focus on language and performativity.

 As “Foreigners” Among and Against the “German Mainstream”

Judith Butler’s exploration of (gender) performativity serves as a valuable tool to describe how these young German Turks redefine their identities. The notion of acting out a particular role is significant here. According to Butler, “[p]erformativity is [...] not a singular ‘act,’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (*Bodies That Matter* 12). The young men and women portrayed in *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff* tend to struggle against the mainstream’s perception of them within normative roles such as that of “the exotic Oriental” or “foreigner,” or the radical, young Muslim and the submissive, veil-wearing Turkish woman. Yet they are also aware of their situation at the margins of society and consciously deal with these margins by re-appropriating and subverting those prescribed roles.⁴ On the one hand, these German Turks perceive margins as a bygone experience – they have forced their way into the centre (the consciousness of the mainstream) – on the other hand, they purposefully use these margins as a liberated position from where they can challenge the “center.”

Zaimoğlu’s group of German Turks or Turkish Germans rejects margins as an exoticizing element. I use the terms “German Turks” and “Turkish Germans” interchangeably, and I use them in order to differentiate the men and women Zaimoğlu interviewed from “mainstream Germans.” I am aware of the complexity of this, as any, dichotomy, but will refer to it throughout this article as it is also applied in *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff*. The writer makes the problematic issue of the margin explicit by describing a variety of German Turks in his preface “Kanak Sprak” to his first volume. Here Zaimoğlu lists the different roles *Kanaken* can play and breaks the group that the German mainstream superficially perceives as a collective group of “foreigners” or “Turks” into subgroups and individuals:

Über einen Zeitraum von zwölf Monaten gelang es mir, das Spektrum weit zu öffnen: vom Müllabfuhr-Kanaken bis zum Kümmel-Transsexuellen, vom hehlenden Klein-Ganeff, dessen Geschenke ich nur mühsam zurückweisen konnte, bis zum goldbehängten Mädchenhändler, vom posenreichen Halbstarke bis

zum mittelschweren Islamisten. Sie alle eint das Gefühl [*sic*], “in der Liga der Verdammten zu spielen”, gegen kulturhegemoniale Ansprüche bestehen zu müssen. Noch ist das tragende Element dieser Community ein negatives Selbstbewußtsein, wie es in der scheinbaren Selbstbezeichnung seinen oberflächlichen Ausdruck findet: Kanake! Dieses verunglimpfende Hetzwort wird zum identitätsstiftenden Kennwort, zur verbindenden Klammer dieser “Lumpenethnier”. Analog zur Black-consciousness-Bewegung in den USA werden sich die einzelnen Kanak-Subidentitäten zunehmend übergreifender Zusammenhänge und Inhalte bewußt. Die Entmystifizierung ist eingeleitet, der Weg zu einem neuen Realismus gelegt. Inmitten der Mainstreamkultur entstehen die ersten rohen Entwürfe für eine ethnizistische Struktur in Deutschland. (*Kanak Sprak* 16-7)

I read Zaimoğlu’s allegedly anthropological approach and ethnicization of the *Kanaken* as a deliberate form of subversion: it is the beginning of the self-imposed exclusivity that many of the *Kanaken* aim at because they do not want to be mistaken for mainstream Germans or for assimilated Turks.

However, *Kanaken* is not an exclusive term for German-Turks and can include everybody who is politically active in race-related issues. As Tom Cheesman has argued:

“Kanak” is a parody identity, a flagrantly artificial and intentionally slippery construct: Zaimoğlu denies that only “Turkish Germans” or “German Turks,” or only “ethnically non-German” German denizens and citizens can be “Kanaken” or “Kanakstas” [which is a combination of the words “Kanake” and “gangster,” thus emphasizing the “fight”-aspect of this identity; F.M.]. Instead it is a political category: “Viele Deutsche sind Kanakstas. Du bist in dem Moment Kanaksta, wo du die Gesellschaft durchschaust.” The launch of “Kanak” as a cultural label aimed to make visible the artificiality and rigidity of the conventionally ascribed identities derived from the history of colonialism and of post-colonial migrations. (187)

Being of Turkish origin himself, Zaimoğlu seems to focus on German-Turks in *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff*. They are all united in the struggle against cultural hegemony which gradually transforms a negative self-perception into a positive one. Stuart Hall points out that “it is always about shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; it is always about changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power, not getting out of it” (468). The *Kanaken* shift this power by breaking “(Turkish-) German culture” into subidentities.⁵ This is based on the fight against “Mültikültürälizm” (the “Kanak Sprak” term for “multiculturalism”) (*manifesto* of “Kanak Attak” 1).⁶ The *Kanaken* therefore criticize homogenizing tendencies amongst both the mainstream and any subculture.⁷

Part of this subversion process is the re-appropriation of the term *Kanake*. Similarly to the term *nigger*, it is usually used pejoratively to describe a gap between “foreigners” and the mainstream (for the *Kanaken*, this is the German mainstream). However, Zaimoğlu as well as most of his interlocutors, redefine this term as a means of expressing a proud difference from the German population. In the Hawaiian/Polynesian language *kanaka* means human being or man, and denotes the native population of the South Sea Islands (particularly New Caledonia).⁸ During immigration processes to Germany, the German word *Kanake* gained a derogatory meaning and now refers to immigrants and foreigners, originally of Italian, Greek and Spanish descent, but is now more commonly used against immigrants of Turkish and Arab descent.⁹ Similarly, the word *Kümmel* (derived from the pejorative expression *Kümmeltürke*), which seemingly restricts the identity of German Turks to their allegedly high consumption of cumin, is deliberately used to ridicule this perception of Turks as people who strongly smell of spices. I also regard “Fremdländer” as opposed to the more commonly used “Ausländer” as a deliberate form of protest: *Kanaken* who use this word make the mainstream aware of its deliberate and ridiculous detachment from people of a “different” background. Yet despite the fact that Zaimoğlu freely appropriates these terms to “label” the young German Turks he supposedly interviewed, some *Kanaken* have identified potential problems with this specific form of identification: it is still often perceived as a racist term and thus an insult.¹⁰

Furthermore, some German Turks feel that their identity as *Kanake* has been constructed by the writer Zaimoğlu. As “translator,” “writer” and allied “fighter” he takes advantage of his power as “editor” and molds the interviews of his interlocutors into “works of art” (Skiba

187). The creation of his “Kanak Sprak” and the label *Kanake* associated with this language is Zaimoğlu’s artificial construct.¹¹ Despite the fact that the texts are based on interviews whose recordings Zaimoğlu deleted, he creates fiction to suit the purpose of his self-representation. In his preface to *Kanak Sprak*, Zaimoğlu claims to have recorded the language of “authentic” German Turks (13-5), yet simultaneously makes clear that he manipulated the material for his “protocols:” “Kanak(a) Sprak” is no longer the language of real-life German Turks (Pfaff 220). The style in *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff* seems, therefore, to be Zaimoğlu’s rather than his interviewees’ style and the question arises whether these books (as a form of self-staging) are more about himself than about the *Kanaken*. Zaimoğlu acts as a filter in *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff*. He did let the *Kanaken/Kanaka* speak for themselves when he interviewed them, yet we are reading his and not his interlocutors’ direct words. In that sense, Zaimoğlu offers consciously created “Nachdichtungen” (*Kanak Sprak* 15), since he wants to identify closely with both his male and his female interlocutors. His firm pretense of authenticity reveals his agenda: to be seen as a mouthpiece for young German Turks, beyond gender boundaries.

However, many interlocutors in Zaimoğlu’s texts do not allow themselves be labeled *Kanake*, and instead create their own, individual “labels.”¹² Neologisms such as “Starkfrau” (Nesrin, 24, Rapperin und Street-Fighterin; *Koppstoff* 13) and “Kanak-Weib” (Aynur, 34, Künstlerin; *Koppstoff* 34) often include both a feminine and a strong component. These are individual “titles” and used like proper names which suggests a reaction against belonging to a group.¹³ The *Kanaka*’s linguistic innovations also point out their individual performances as young German Turkish women. In this context, one can refer to Butler when she asks: “What does it mean for a word not only to name, but also in some sense to perform and, in particular, to perform what it names” (*Excitable Speech* 43). The *Kanaka* probably do not consciously perform according to their own “labels,” yet they certainly refer to themselves according to how they feel they act, and, in that sense, “perform what they name.” Whatever “labels” they use, they put themselves in clear opposition to mainstream German women, whom they call, for example, “Sauertopf-Frauen,” “deutsches Liebchen,” and “diese Bundesfrauen” (Esra, 19, Abiturientin; *Koppstoff* 117, 119). By labeling themselves they assert their own power¹⁴, their newly-appropriated self-definition, in deliberate delimitation to other, non-*Kanake* women.

Zaimoğlu’s interlocutors seem to be accustomed to being different: as Akay says, “Den Fremdländer kannst du nimmer aus der

Fresse wischen” (Akay, 29, vom Flohmarkt; *Kanak Sprak* 23). The parents of young German Turks came to Germany as “foreigners” – and usually remained in that position. Growing up in Germany, their children often tried to become “German,” but then had to realize that the mainstream still regarded them as foreign. Zaimoğlu’s protagonists have learned to accept this label as something that one has to deal with – and ultimately be proud of. On the basis of this new sense of belonging to difference, it seems that young German Turks negotiate a number of ways of looking for alternative spaces of belonging. Furthermore, there tends to exist a deep mistrust for anything German amongst children of former immigrants, which may be based on their parents’ humiliating *Gastarbeiter*-history; hence they have no desire to be like Germans. As Büyük Ibo puts it: “Den deutschen traust du nich übern weg, weil sie, die haben durchblick in ne andre richtung, und da willst du ums verrecken nich hin” (Büyük Ibo, 18, Packer; *Kanak Sprak* 45). This attitude implies a reversal of old imperial patterns and a “repuzzling of history” as a means to “create security and new self-esteem” (Güngör/Loh 58).¹⁵ Mimicry – by which I mean the effort to integrate, to become like Germans as the state expects them to – occurs to a limited extent only and exclusively as a means to an end: Germany is only desirable as a dwelling place; its values are re-appropriated as deliberate difference and “otherness” by a generation that feels more consciously excluded than their parents. One of Zaimoğlu’s interviewees, Hasan, for example, expresses this feeling:

Auch mit der familie und auch mit nem namen bleibst du ein bastard, du hast krause haare und benimmst dich nicht wie die deutschen, denen das licht längst ausgegangen is, du hast was vor, aber ne menge arschlöcher möchten dich aus der gegend haben, und wenn du dich nicht wehrst, kappen sie dir die leitung und machen dich zur dunklen memme [...]. (Hasan, 13, Streuner und Schüler; *Kanak Sprak* 93)

For most of Zaimoğlu’s interview partners, opposition to the *alemannen* becomes the determining factor in their self-positioning. Interestingly, the choice of word for the Germans derives from Turkish (*alman*) but is linguistically Germanized – another form of subversion. Zaimoğlu’s interlocutors make clear linguistically who has the (linguistic) power; they have the advantage of being bi- or even multilingual (often in contrast to their parents) and are able to show disrespect for the

Germans who possibly do not understand the term “*alemannen*,” or at least where it comes from. They seem to want to show their discontent with the way they are misjudged and underestimated in their social surroundings. The *Kanaken* make clear that they are part of Germany, but not in the sense of being assimilated: they define themselves by rejecting *Lieb-Alileins*, *Alemannen* and *Deutschländer*. This urge to find an exclusive space away from assimilation might also be the result of a general exclusion from Turkey where “Germanized” Turks are often referred to as *alamancı*, *Deutschländer*, a pejorative term for Turkish people who live in Germany and who, in the eyes of their family and friends in Turkey, have “Germanized” over the years and thus do not belong to Turkey any more.

Zaimoğlu’s *Kanaken/Kanaka* constantly challenge “socially established ways of being” a “foreigner” or *Kanake* (cf. Culler 513):

Ein bastard ist ein bündel aus irrationalismen, er hat eine abseitige mystik, die ihn zutiefst beunruhigt, er sieht zeichen und wunder, wo keine sind, weil er sich stets auf fremden terrain bewegt. Man sagt dem bastard, er fühle sich unwohl, weil zwei seelen bzw. zwei kulturen in ihm wohnen. Das ist eine lüge. [...] Der bastard braucht keine politur, er verpaßt sich schon selbst mehrere schichten lack, damit er nicht auffällt wie ein gescheckter hund. Der kanake ist so etwas wie ein synthetisches produkt, das sich und die fabrik haßt, in dem es gefertigt wurde. ... er hat den blick für das, was sich hinter den kulissen abspielt. [...] Er ist darauf dressiert, zum kern vorzustoßen, deshalb verschmäht er die hülle. Also der kanake ist zugleich ein fundamentalist. (Memet, 29, Dichter; *Kanake Sprak* 110-1)

Memet’s attitude implies a notion of choice, a play with gaps left behind by socially accepted roles and the reality of being a “foreigner.” His use of the term “bastard” refers to *Kanaken* as in-between subjects and defines their marginality, which can be both a creative and restrictive position. It involves a constant struggle with identity. Yet this kind of identity-negotiation creates possibilities for resistance and change (Culler 514). As “social outsiders (in response to the significant growth of the Turkish middle class),” (Cheesman 184) the *Kanaken* react against assimilation. However, there often is an element of living up to exotic images involved in the interaction with the mainstream which can be

seen as a different kind of assimilation: “das gastarbeiterkind macht halt auf kulturkreissymptomatischen ethnoquark [...]: etwas nigger etwas harlem etwas oriental magic” (Zaimoğlu, “KümmelContra” 175). This “pick-and-mix” attitude of the child of the former *Gastarbeiter* is the initial reaction to the problematic of defining an identity under the pressure of the mainstream. It is only after a process of gaining self-consciousness that s/he becomes a *Kanake/Kanaka*. In whatever way they choose to represent themselves, they prove that their – in Butler’s words – “reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (*Excitable Speech* 411).¹⁶

Part of the demonstration of opposition is the young German Turks’ conscious living of their gang culture. Gangs or posses are a significant aspect in the process of defining identity for Zaimoğlu’s male protagonists. Groups provide a sense of belonging, a sense of strength within the group, strength against others, and security in a hostile environment.

Gangs are part of a masculine world, a “gangsta culture.”¹⁷ As Zaimoğlu indicates in his preface: “Am öffentlichen Leben in den Szenen der *Kanaken*-Ghettos nimmt hauptsächlich der Mann teil, der Frau dagegen wird bedeutet, sie habe sich aus der männlichen Welt herauszuhalten” (*Kanak Sprak* 15). Male exclusivity is expressed in terms of forming gender-specific groups and at the expense of women. Women, particularly Western women as well as prostitutes, are only regarded as “fair game,” as an exchangeable trophy (Mennel 150), and are only passively part of the men’s activities.¹⁸

This represents a return to gender stereotypes and the idea that (physical) fighting is exclusively masculine behavior, an attitude which is also represented by the constant reference to drugs, crime and violence: gangs operate in an “Unterwelt” (Kadir, 32, Soziologe; *Kanak Sprak* 100) where the struggle between power and law plays out (Foucault 87). Many of the *Kanaken* deliberately break any law as an expression of their identity and of a fight against “klein-ali-träume” (Faruk, 26, arbeitslos; *Kanak Sprak* 74), namely the dream of “making it in Germany” (which automatically means observing the law). However, this form of assimilation would mean submitting to the German mainstream – and ultimately becoming weak: “Die erste devise heißt: der hahn kräht nur nach dem starken” (Cem, 25, Zuhälter; *Kanak Sprak* 54). Living in the city demands the survival of the fittest which is personified by the *Kanakster* “as a new and effective strategy of survival” (Hestermann 364). However, bell hooks points out that the “role” of the aggressive, ethnically “different” young man is less a choice than is usually thought,

but rather a product of white male patriarchy (204). The question is whether the *Kanaken* follow the media image of the radical young Turk subconsciously or consciously recognize the street as the only place where they can become visible. The street is the place of struggle for Zaimoğlu's male characters, yet that does not mean that the image of the radical young Turk holds true for all German Turks.

The apparent instability of such an image leads to a perception as well as questioning of authenticity regarding what a *Kanake* or German person is: as the title of my article, which is derived from a title of a talk show on notions of Germanness, says, "Was deutsch ist, bestimmen wir" (39). The *Kanaken* do not allow themselves to be put into certain categories and have their own view on authenticity. They think that an "authentic" identity can only be acquired, or even earned, and it is based on a conscious and ultimately political decision to fight for it. Ulku, for example, maintains: "Ich kann dir man auflisten, was'n kanake echt sein läßt [...]" (Ulku, 28, arbeitslos; *Kanake Sprach* 136). "Echt" is based on non-acceptance of anything German that comes across as exclusive or assimilated. It is a social and political category. This authenticity is also connected to a codex, a certain kind of behavior and way of speaking as a separating device. It is also possibly connected to religious ideas of "good behavior," but certainly to culturally developed notions of honor. Honor is a concept frequently associated with Turkish, or more generally Muslim people: one's own and one's family's honor, which is often represented by the idea of (sexual) purity, needs to be protected, possibly also by means of violence. It becomes a defining and separating device re-appropriated by the *Kanaken* as a codex they all have to follow in order to remain part of the gang.

However, these acts of performance seem to be exhausting, and some of the characters develop a desire for peace: "[I]ch frag mich, wann ich das olle zähnefleischen endlich lassen kann, weil ich doch nicht aus'm tierreich bin, und meine ruhe haben will im menschenreich" (Faruk, 26, arbeitslos; *Koppstoff* 77). Faruk seems to suggest that he aims for a place among the mainstream: he wants to move up from being perceived as an animal to being respected as a human being.¹⁹ The *Kanaken/Kanaka* hope to achieve peace by finding out and defining who they are.

The notion of the margins of society also plays a vital role for these German Turkish men and women in the process of identity examination, particularly for the *Kanaka*. Some *Kanaka* are deliberately different, others try to superficially fit in by, for example, taking on "normal" jobs or speaking standard German, but almost all of them

“think marginally.” This seems to be the result of their initial exclusion by the German mainstream.²⁰ The *Kanaka* largely perceive their diverse forms of “attack” as a countermovement and resistance to widely known pictures of Muslim women as oppressed and weak partners to men. They aim to rectify the picture of the crying, enduring and suffering Muslim woman, and express a new self-confidence and strength. The *Kanaka* seem to want to prove that they are as tough as men, which I see as one way of performing the role of a *Kanaka*. Their decision to “fight” seems, therefore, to be an even stronger and more conscious (and more necessary) one than that of the men.

The notion of toughness particularly comes to the fore in linguistic subversion: Zaimoğlu’s *Kanaken* create their own linguistic spaces based on a mixture of German, slang, colloquialisms and other languages that results in a kind of *Rotwelsch* or code, and thus deliberately excludes those who do not understand it.²¹

For the *Kanaka*, language is *the* tool of fight. As the women’s potential of resistance cannot be the group, verbal resistance seems to be their main weapon. For men, language serves as an additional tool of power, not a primary one. Language is also prominently part of the act of performing one’s identity. Butler points out that “*speaking is itself a bodily act*”²² (*Excitable Speech* 10). Language is used to reach a particular aim: in the case of the *Kanaka* it clearly articulates anger and frustration, and provokes.

One of the most prominent features of the *Kanaka*’s language is the use of words that emphasize their toughness. The examples of “Starkfrau” (Nesrin, 24, Rapperin und Street-Fighterin; *Koppstoff* 13) and “Kanak-Weib” (Aynur, 34, Künstlerin; *Koppstoff* 34) show strong women and suggest an opposition to (at least linguistically) “weak” German Turkish men. However, I question whether this kind of use of strong words implies a form of weakness, a rebellion of the “voiceless.” Do people (the German mainstream whom they address) actually listen? As I pointed out earlier, women are doubly marginalized. It seems, therefore, that, for many *Kanaka*, the high volume of their voices is the only effective way of speaking as a “Spivakian subaltern” as they cannot be ignored by raising their voices loud and clearly (Spivak 271-313).

Linguistic “toughness” is also expressed by the inventive use of language such as the creation of nouns. As a prominent feature of the German language (which also includes ignoring the capitalization of nouns in *Kanak Sprache*), this technique suggests a strong sense of fighting against the German mainstream by linguistically using German “weapons:” primarily pejorative words such as “Alemangeschichtsfuck,”

“Insgesichtspucker,” “Radieschenvonuntenreicher,” “Alemanweitewelt” (Aynur, 34, Künstlerin; *Koppstoff* 32-4) reveal a conscious parody of the German use of compounds. This is the postcolonial technique of subverting one characteristic of the dominant group (the frequent use of compounds in the German language). By being overly creative with their invention of compounds and thus by re-appropriating a prominent feature of the German language, the *Kanaka* have found an effective tool of linguistic struggle: they can reclaim their pride and power, at least in linguistic terms.

The reclaiming of their linguistic power is also part of the *Kanaka*'s opposition to *Kanak*-men whom they often perceive as “zu soft” (introduction to Nesrin, 24, Rapperin und Street-Fighterin; *Koppstoff* 11). This is also symbolized by their use of Turkish. The use of their “mother tongue” demonstrates their linguistic power over men (12) as well as their discontent with the German mainstream. Turkish serves as a means of intentionally excluding men. The *Kanaka*'s origin is part and parcel of their expression of their discontent with the country they were born and live in (Germany), which points towards another creative interaction with their (here linguistic) origins and present. They demonstrate an “easy” (linguistic) transition from one culture to another (Dirim/Auer 22)²³, and show their cultural flexibility. In that respect, language also allows ambiguities: “Ich hielt sie zuerst für eine Deutsche und fluchte auf Türkisch über ihre mich anbellenden Hunde. In einem sehr gebrochenen Türkisch versuchte sie mich zu beruhigen” (introduction to Gül, 21, Anarchistin; *Koppstoff* 29). Despite cultural transformation processes among young German Turks, the interviewer Zaimoğlu, a native speaker of Turkish himself, seems to expect German Turks to speak perfect Turkish and is confused by Gül's broken Turkish. Yet being German Turkish does not automatically mean still being fluent in one's parents' native tongue. German is often much more part of their identity than Turkish is, to the extent that origins are lost or absorbed into an identity that gradually has become more German than Turkish.

Can these newly defined and created (literal and linguistic) spaces serve as a means of effective resistance to the mainstream? Zaimoğlu's *Kanaken/Kanaka* point out that they no longer can be perceived as *one* group such as children of former immigrants or “foreigners:” by differentiating themselves from the mainstream as well as within this group, they create spaces of belonging determined by a variety of factors. These processes appear as performative acts which lead to a deliberate construction of Turkish-Germanness.

 Conclusion – Defining (Turkish-) Germanness

The regaining and proud emphasizing of German Turkishness/Turkish Germanness appear as a way of answering “a question of knowing who we are” (Foucault 78). The *Kanaken/Kanaka* negotiate ways of escaping from a fixed identity as “foreigner,” and do not accept – in Edward Said’s words – being “*first* an Oriental [or foreigner for that matter; F.M.], *second* a human being, and *last* again an Oriental”²⁴ (102).

Zaimoğlu clarifies: “ich will keine parallelwelt zum mainstream” (“KümmerlContra” 176), and ultimately his characters contribute to a new understanding of (Turkish-)Germanness. The *Kanaken/Kanaka* aim for some sort of personal stability beyond notions of cultural in-betweenness. Yet as this security is not provided by the country in which they are “at home,” they need to define their own spaces of belonging, which are often based on the recognition of the fluidity and ever-changing construction of identity.

This endeavor is often embarked upon by reclaiming what they were denied by imperial practices of suppression. (Re-)Constructions of Turkish-Germanness primarily take place, therefore, via subversion processes. The *Kanaken/Kanaka* use the gaps in previously imposed identities as “foreigners” or children of *Gastarbeiter* as a form of resistance and change: they fight against the “Märchen von der Multikulturalität” and their “Opferrolle” (*Kanak Sprak* 11, 12). The result will be an alternative to “pure” ethnicities: Zaimoğlu wishes “[d]aß diese Kanaksterbewegung eine richtige Alternative wird zu all diesen Entgleisungen wie der Reethnisierung” (“Eure Coolness ist Gigaout” 30).

Overall, Zaimoğlu’s protagonists break the silence and resist oppression in multiple ways; they produce “Mißtöne” through their self-perceptions as Turkish Germans or German Turks, and thus articulate attitudes and opinions that the mainstream often does not want to hear. Their “disobedience,” which becomes part of the performative side of their Turkish-German identity, redefines power and demystifies ethnicity²⁵ away from repression and – on a wider level – possibly towards creativity. In this sense, the writer Zaimoğlu seems to know exactly how to “exploit” his own experiences of his (and his parents’) marginality that he has successfully shifted to the attention of the “center:” *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff* were written about ten years ago, at a time when Zaimoğlu himself shook up the literary mainstream with the

creation of his “Kanak Sprak.” Nowadays, his impulse to “fight” has calmed down tremendously, or rather he “fights” in commercial terms by serving the public’s taste and the book industry: his latest novel *Leyla* (2006) portrays the history of Turkish immigration to Germany very traditionally and does not challenge stereotypes of *Gastarbeiter*. Zaimoğlu called his book “die Geschichte einer einfachen Frau aus dem Volke” in an interview with *Kulturzeit* in March 2006; his publisher Kiepenheuer & Witsch promotes his book in newspapers and magazines with the slogan “Eine Familiensaga aus dem Herzen des Orients.”²⁶ He effectively wrote a traditional narrative and left his previously favored innovative short prose and ‘protocols’ behind. Now we are reading about, for example, a violent father and his submissive daughter who marries an equally abusive husband and passively follows him to the “land of milk and honey,” Germany.

Zaimoğlu’s “Mißtöne” seem to be out of fashion. Or are they not necessary anymore? The latter is unlikely but the margins have largely been silenced again or have silenced themselves. One explanation could be that Zaimoğlu, the most prominent young German Turkish writers of the 1990s, has simply developed further: the *Kanaken*-generation, of which Zaimoğlu is part, has grown older and more settled, and seems to have become more interested in their origins. This is also reflected in Zaimoğlu’s public appearance: he transformed from a *Kanake* to an “intellectual” and has realized that the “grand monsieur” he is now performing, or the post-migrant intellectual, is a marketable figure, who catches the public’s attention in a less radical and thus possibly more serious manner. Zaimoğlu has grown out of being the representative of the *Kanaken*, the inventor of *Kanak Sprak*, and his personal battle cry “Kanak Attak und Basta!”²⁷ has made way for a monument to “die wahren Heldinnen der Einwanderung”²⁸ as portrayed in *Leyla*.

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Notes

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- ¹ “Was deutsch ist, bestimmen wir’: Dokumentation der Talkshow ‘III nach neun’ (N3) mit Feridun Zaimoğlu, Heide Simonis, Wolf Biermann, Norbert Blüm und Harald Junke.” *iz3w* (Februar-März 2000): 39.
- ² This article was written as part of my PhD research, which is kindly supported by The Arts and Humanities Research Council. I am grateful to the Council for its support. Furthermore, I would like to thank Professor Sarah Colvin (University of Edinburgh) for her insightful reading of an earlier version of this article.
- ³ Cf. Zaimoğlu’s organization *Kanak Attack* which was founded in 1998 as a “national network of anti-racist cultural political activists, accepting members of all backgrounds but dominated by migrants” (Cheesman 191).
- ⁴ See Ashcroft et al. The authors point out numerous subversion processes, primarily in terms of linguistics and literature. See also: “[I]t is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (original emphasis) (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185).
- ⁵ Cf. the public debate on German “Leitkultur” triggered by Friedrich Merz’s (then chairman of the CDU in the *Bundestag*) comment on rules for immigration and integration in the newspaper *Die Welt* on 25 October 2000.
- ⁶ The exaggerated use of “ü,” which is also a sound/letter in Turkish, appears as another linguistic subversion process that immediately draws attention to the (culturally) Turkish component of *Kanak Sprak*.
- ⁷ See Zaimoğlu, “sıcarım süppkültürünüze, züppeler!” 86 (original emphasis): “Wenn es um Migranten geht, dann redet man gerne von *den* Türken oder *den* Schwarzen. Wenn es um einen selbst geht, dann erwartet man allerdings feine Differenzierungen. Und ganz besonders dann, wenn es sich um Subkulturen dreht. [...] *Dem* Türken geht der Sinn für die feinen Unterschiede ab. Subkultur sieht aus wie ein Bestandteil einer geschlossenen Gesellschaft. [...] *Der* Türke zeigt mit dem Finger und sagt: *die* Subkultur.” – I often use the term “fight” in this article. In English, “struggle” would refer to what the *Kanaken/Kanaka* are doing, yet it is the word “fight” they themselves are using.
- ⁸ Cf. the entry “kanaka” in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*
- ⁹ Cf. the entry “Kanake” in *Wikipedia*.
- ¹⁰ The following discussion of the differences in meaning and connotation of the term “*Kanake*” is based on Güngör and Loh 27-40.
- ¹¹ For a details analysis of authenticity in *Kanak Sprak* and Zaimoğlu’s role as “editor” and fellow-*Kanake*, see Adelson 95-100.
- ¹² Again, by using this term, I mean Zaimoğlu’s female interviewees as a group, despite the fact that some of them strongly object to the term.
- ¹³ Butler also refers to the historicity of naming, “the movement of a history that it [the name] arrests” (*Excitable Speech* 36).
- ¹⁴ Cf. Butler, *Excitable Speech* 32: “power is understood on the model of the divine power of naming, where to utter is to create the effect uttered.”
- ¹⁵ My translation of: “wir repuzzeln die geschichte” and “[Aber nur die Beschäftigung mit diesem Wissen] erzeugt Sicherheit und führt zu neuem Selbstbewusstsein.”
- ¹⁶ Butler refers to “gender reality” here, but, as previously shown, for Zaimoğlu’s characters this reality includes more than gender negotiation.
- ¹⁷ See hooks’ examination of “gangsta culture” (15-32).
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- ¹⁸ See the way Cem, 25, Zuhälter talks about “his” prostitutes in *Kanak Sprak* 49-54. See also the written conversations Serdar (on holiday in Turkey) and Hakan (in Germany) have in Zaimoğlu’s *Liebesmale*. They tend to speak about women in a disparaging way. The number of their trophies, namely the number of the (German) women they have been able to seduce, is proof of their masculinity.
- ¹⁹ Interestingly, he applies old imperial vocabulary by referring to his animal-likeness, and so possibly suggests that he cannot completely escape from the influence of the mainstream. The latter becomes a projection area for his effective performance as *Kanake*.
- ²⁰ In the preface to *Koppstoff*, Zaimoğlu connects the content of his interviews to the racist attacks of the 1990s in Germany.
- ²¹ Standard Turkish does not play a significant role in the creation of the male “Kanak Sprak.” Its words such as *alman* (“German” in Turkish) are Germanized into *alemanne* rather than directly quoted from Turkish. For a linguistic analysis of *Kanak Sprak* see Yıldız 319-40. Yıldız focuses on the use of English, Turkish, German, North German vernacular, rap, *Rotwelsch* and Jewish languages. She claims that Zaimoğlu “has created a distinctive style and language that is neither found on the streets, nor elsewhere in language” (320). She also draws attention to “fraternal relationships” and the “emphasis on masculinity” that is inherent in *Kanak Sprak* (325). See also, for example, Cheesman 183 on the untranslatability of *Kanak Sprak* (183), and on the inventive use of language in *Kanak Sprak* (184). Kein Nghi Ha takes a postcolonial standpoint and regards *Kanak Sprak* as a “*unreine, kreolisierte Sprache*” and points out the “*Karnevalisierung und Dezentrierung der herrschenden Herrensprache*” (original emphasis) (165).
- ²² Original emphasis.
- ²³ “der Übergang vom Deutschen ins Türkische und umgekehrt erfolgt ohne großes Aufheben, ohne Markierungen, Pausen oder Verzögerungen. [...] Das Wechseln zwischen den Sprachen ist kein besonderes Ereignis in ihrem Leben; eher wäre dies schon monolinguales Sprechen.”
- ²⁴ Original emphasis.
- ²⁵ See Ha 166: “*Entstehung einer neuen entmystifizierten Ethnizität unter ‘türkischen’ MigrantInnen*” (original emphasis).
- ²⁶ Advertisements for *Leyla* in various German newspapers.
- ²⁷ Kanak Attak’s title of their *manifesto*.
- ²⁸ Zaimoğlu has mentioned this phrase in various interviews when talking about his novel *Leyla*, for example in an interview with *Kulturzeit* (March 2006).

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