

A Sense of Self: Questions of
Identity in Contemporary
Novels by Second-Generation
Turkish-German Women
Writers

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Introduction

Since the arrival of the first Turkish guest workers in Germany in the 1960's, Turks living in Germany have used writing as a way to express their experiences and to search for their identity. In the beginning, this literature mainly dealt with missing the homeland and trying to start a new life in a somewhat hostile country. The literature of second generation Turkish-German writers, however, moved its focus from the loss and displacement to a search for an identity specific to a people whose ethnic heritage is different than that which would be provided by the country in which they live. The search for self is the most prevalent and important issue addressed in the works of second generation Turkish-German writers, as is common in the many immigration novels in American literature which confront the divide between heritage and patriotism.

I will examine three novels written by female Turkish-German authors of the second generation: *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies* by Alev Tekinay, *Selam Berlin* by Yade Kara, and *Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter* by Dilek Güngör. I chose to focus on novels written by women writers because of my interest in the depiction of women, and the role gender plays in their novels and in the construction of an identity comprised of a mix of Turkish heritage and German culture.

Of the numerous elements which comprise sense of self, I chose to focus on the feelings of belonging, ties to family, and gender issues which the authors portray in the novels. A sense of belonging is one facet of the sense of self with which second generation Turkish-Germans must grapple. The members of the second generation certainly feel a pull toward family and Turkish traditions; however, they self identify as German because that is where they were born and raised. Gender also plays an important role in the stories of the three female authors

discussed here. The confrontation of gender is remarkable because the Turkish woman in Germany is often depicted as helpless, voiceless, and oppressed, an idea these women opposed by being educated, accomplished, and worldly. The novels depict both women who fit the stereotype of the oppressed and silent Turkish wife and those women who break from the mold. Issues of gender play out in all of the novels, whether the protagonist is a woman, such as in Güngör's book, or with regard to other key female characters that depict the oppression of both Turkish-German and German women.

In the search for identity represented in the novels, many aspects of characters and situations seem to reflect the experiences of the authors themselves. There are two main reasons that these migrants become authors: first, to express their own feelings as a way to search within themselves for identity and negotiate inner struggles between cultures and countries, and second, as a mode of reflection to educate others about their experiences. The question arises in this context: how and for what purpose do the authors incorporate autobiographical information into the novels? In order to put a little piece of themselves in the novels, the authors often ascribe certain personal attributes to the characters, such as the same city of origin, being the same age, sharing similar family circumstances, etc.. Also, the setting and other plot factors in the novels may mimic the life of the author. The authors integrate autobiographical information to provide a more authentic picture of second generation Turkish-Germans, as they themselves are a part of that generation; they understand the pulls and essences of the Turkish-German experience. Another reason the authors incorporate autobiographical information is to explore their own identity and sense of self through authoring the novels. Therefore it is important to look at the way the authors portray the characters' sense of self as a window into their own views on identity.

Nur der Hauch vom Paradies

Alev Tekinay was born in 1953 in Izmir, Turkey. After graduating from German high school in Turkey, Tekinay moved to Germany, where she attended university, studying German. Since 1983 she has worked at the University of Augsburg as a Linguistics professor, where she has taught Turkish and German as a second language. Tekinay has written numerous poems and short stories, as well as a few novels, including *Engin im Englischen Garten* and *Der weinende Granatapfel*, both in 1990. Alev Tekinay's *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*, published in 1993, is a novel which can be perceived as loosely based on Tekinay's life.

The story follows an author named Engin Ertürk, who was born and raised in Germany and a child of *Gastarbeiter* parents. The reader meets Engin as the successful author of several works of literature about his experience as a second generation Turkish-German. In this novel Engin recovers from the breakup with his former girlfriend, the German Sabine, who left him and moved to America because of his tyrannical behavior. This heartache affects his relationship with his overprotective parents and his sister Emel, who shares a forbidden love with Martin, a childhood friend of Engin and Emel. Another important relationship in Engin's life is with the "Fa," Dr. Faida Sander, a Linguistics professor who came to Germany from Turkey at the age of eighteen, just like Tekinay. While on a train to a reading, Engin reads sections of his novel *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*. At the reading they quiz him on his identity as a second generation Turkish-German. The death of his former Turkish-German classmate, interest in making his novel into a movie, and the reappearance of Sabine all affect Engin toward the end of the book.

The novel addresses issues in the life of second generation Turkish-Germans through the main character, Engin, as well as his sister Emel. The sense of self that Engin and Emel have is

influenced both by their German upbringing and by their Turkish heritage. A sense of self is more than just an upbringing or a heritage, however. One's sense of self is influenced by everything encountered which is determined to be a part of one's self, or separate. Also, Engin's personal identity through the novel is skewed because of his tendencies to retreat into a fantasy where he is either a "normal" German or Turk. Throughout the novel Engin's relationships with other characters defines, and sometimes confuses, his sense of self as a second generation Turkish-German.

The relationship Engin shares with his family is an important part of his sense of self in Germany. His parents were *Gastarbeiter*, migrant workers who came from Izmir, a city on the Aegean Sea in Turkey. Like many first-generation Turks, Engin says that his "parents lived in a Turkish world in the middle of Germany. Their acquaintances were Turkish, the stores where they shopped were Turkish, and even the doctors they went to."¹ Engin's father, Halil Ertürk, worked for years in a German factory, until his brother helped him open a fruit and vegetable stand in Munich. Halil is a tyrant in his household, especially to Engin, whom he beats as a child even for slight offenses. Halil Ertürk's tyranny becomes one of the main themes of Engin's novel *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*. A foil to her husband, Engin's mother serves as a typical Turkish housewife in Germany – subservient to the male head of the household and clinging to traditions while also quietly supporting and fighting for her children. Engin also shares a unique bond with his younger sister Emel, whom he protects from their father's wrath and with whom he explores life as second generation Turkish-Germans.

Another set of relationships which affect Engin's sense of self is with Germans his age as well as with other second-generation immigrants in Germany. The reader only gets to see mere

¹ Tekinay, P. 63 „Meine Eltern lebten in einer türkischen Welt mitten in der Bundesrepublik. Die Bekannten waren Türken, die Läden, in denen sie einkauften, waren türkisch, auch die Ärzte, zu denen sie gingen.“

glimpses of the most important relationship Engin shares with a German, through the glimpses of Sabine in Eigen's *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*. Sabine means more than anything to Engin, and the loss of their relationship causes him constant ache in his life. A good portion of the novel deals with his reactions to a life without Sabine. Another important relationship in Engin's life is with Martin, a childhood friend who becomes a well-known journalist. In addition to being Engin's best friend, Martin is also sister Emel's love. The two share a romantic love that Emel's parents stop, as they forbid Emel from marrying anyone who is not Turkish. Engin also has a group of friends he meets while attending the university, many of whom are second generation immigrants.

Often, the second generation of Turkish-Germans is portrayed as belonging nowhere: neither in Germany, where they are treated as *Kanacke* – a derogatory word used by Germans for Turks, which simply means “human –” nor in Turkey, where they are called *Almanci* – a slang word for Turks living in Germany. Tekinay sometimes presents Engin's sense of belonging as simple, such as when Engin says “Never have I felt myself *between* the two cultures and countries. I have always felt like a German.”² At a reading he gives in Kiel, Engin responds to a question about what home means to him and where he feels at home. “I also don't know that. So I looked it up in an encyclopedia. According to the encyclopedia ‘home’ is the place, where one first saw the light of day and/or has his standing place of residence. In both cases Germany is my home. And where I feel at home... in me.”³

At other times, however, Engin's sense of self is confused, such as when he calls himself Richard Rennert, Engin's chosen German-sounding name. He uses Richard when he wishes to

² Tekinay, Page 18 “Niemals habe ich mich *zwischen* den beiden Kulturen und Ländern gefühlt. Immer schon habe ich mich eher wie ein Deutscher gefühlt.“

³ Tekinay, P. 111 “...das weiß ich auch nicht. Deshalb habe ich im Lexikon nachgeschlagen. Laut Lexikon ist ‚Heimat‘ der Ort, an dem man das Licht der Welt erblickt hat und/oder seinen ständigen Wohnsitz hat. In beiden Fällen ist Deutschland meine Heimat. Und wo ich mich zu Hause fühle... in mir.“

avoid the racism he encounters in Germany, such as when he meets an older lady on the train to his book reading in Kiel. The alias he assumes often seems like a game for Engin as he is able to fool people with his accent and “German name” and pretend that he is in fact a German rather than a foreigner. Engin denies that the racism he encounters in Germany has any personal relation to him. However, when he sees graffiti on a wall saying “Foreigners out...” Engin notes that “a heavy, sad feeling” rises in him.⁴ Racism is a constant part of Engin’s life that he refuses to deal with, similarly to how he refuses to deal with the breakup with Sabine.

Engin writes his story in order to try to come to terms with the different aspects of his life which often do not coincide, including the conflict he feels not only between being Turkish and German, but also the confliction he feels about Sabine and even his own writing. At the end of the novel there is a quote which has often been used to describe the sense of self of this generation. Engin says, “I am a tree, that bends almost 3,000 Kilometers. The roots grow in the Anatolian earth, the flowers in Germany. And although I bend 3,000 Kilometers, I feel no pain.”⁵ Engin feels that his Turkish heritage nourishes the success and good fortune he and his entire family have experienced in Germany, while the time he has spent in Germany has allowed him to blossom into an important and respected writer. Engin does not want to alter either of these aspects, as both are integral parts of him, both as an author and as a person.

The sense of self which Engin is searching for reflects the search for identity of many second generation Turkish-Germans. In this, it seems apparent that Tekinay uses the novel to explore her own identity. In order to mirror a true Turkish-German experience, Tekinay calls on her own life and incorporates many autobiographical details into the novel. The works of literature mentioned in the text mirror Tekinay’s own works. Engin’s first success is entitled

⁴ Tekinay, P. 53 “Da sehe ich es, ganz plötzlich and der Mauer: „Ausländer raus...“ Ein schweres, trauriges Gefühl steigt in mir hoch.“

⁵ Tekinay, P. 190 “Ich bin ein Baum, der sich fast 3.000 Kilometer biegt. Die Wurzeln wachsen in der anatolischen Erde, die Blüten in Deutschland. Und obwohl ich mich 3.00 Kilometer biege, spüre ich keine Schmerzen.“

Dazwischen, the title of a poem which first garnered Tekinay a reputation as an author. Neither Tekinay nor Engin take any particular pride in this poem, as it portrays them as being in between Turkey and Germany, but never belonging to either, which to Tekinay is an oversimplification of the actual state of the second generation. The novel, *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*, is not only the name of Tekinay's book, but also the name of the autobiographical novel written by her literary counterpart Engin that propelled him to success in the literary world of Germany. The novel within a novel concept comes from the life of Engin as portrayed by Tekinay and portrayed by himself, which differ in that Tekinay appears to be more removed from the self-crisis of Turkish-Germans.

The final piece of autobiography in *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies* is another person in the novel displaying characteristics of Tekinay: Dr. Faida Sander, a Turkish-German who came to Germany from Turkey at the age of seventeen, just like Tekinay, and who now has an impeccable accent because she studied German and Linguistics at the university, also like Tekinay. This character serves as a mentor to Engin, encouraging him to turn away from the stereotypical minority literature which he was writing and instead write a true novel about his experience. In this character, Tekinay places herself in the novel and shows that her opinion of Engin as an author and character is a statement about successful Turkish-Germans and the compromises they make with themselves and their art in order to achieve fame. Tekinay integrates many different autobiographical elements into the novel in order to explore her own identity and to show one perspective of second generation Turkish-German identity.

Selam Berlin

Yade Kara, the author of *Selam Berlin*, is another second generation female Turkish-

German writer. Born in 1965 in Cayirli, located in East Turkey, Kara immigrated at age six to Germany where she received a German education. She studied English and German at the university, and afterwards went to the Berlin *Schillertheater*, where she worked as an actress, an assistant director, and a writer. Kara has also worked in London, Istanbul, and Hong Kong. *Selam Berlin* is Kara's only book, but in 2004, the year after it was published, the novel gained acclaim by earning Kara the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize as well as the German Book prize. *Selam Berlin* is unique in that it is the first *Wenderoman* – a novel about the fall of the Berlin Wall – written by a Turkish-German, and therefore the identity of the characters is shaped significantly by the changes occurring in Europe at the time.

Selam Berlin details the coming of age of a second generation Turkish-German in the late 1980s. When Hasan hears on the radio that the Berlin Wall has fallen, he returns to Berlin from Istanbul, his other place of residence. The Berlin he returns to is hectic, marked by the influx of East Germans coming to the West to get goods to which they earlier had no access. While in Berlin, Hasan helps out at the travel agency owned by his father and his father's friend Halim, who is married to the German Ingrid. Halim and Ingrid's daughter Leyla, who is studying for university exams, is one of Hasan's closest friends. Hasan's supposed purpose for returning to Germany is to study archaeology, but he goes quickly through several menial jobs, until he gets a job through his best friend Kazim working on the set of a film about the Turkish world in Kreuzberg, where Hasan's family lives. The movie, directed by the famous director Wolf, becomes an integral part of the book as Hasan gets an on-screen part and has an affair with Cora, Wolf's girlfriend. Concurrently, Hasan's family is torn apart when his father's affair with an East German woman, which resulted in a child, comes to light after the fall of the Wall. Kara's novel is about a Turkish-German finding himself within the context of the rapid transformation

of Germany around the time of the reunification.

In *Selam Berlin*, finding one's sense of self is an important topic for all characters as their parameters change within the context of a unified Germany. Finding one's self is especially important to Hasan, who, at nineteen, is discovering himself and what he wants to do with the rest of his life. Familial expectations to study at the university or work in the travel agency lead Hasan to push away and return to Berlin, where he becomes involved in the film business, which his family considers scandalous. The film on which Hasan works serves to perpetuate Turkish stereotypes: his character kills the man who had extramarital sex with his sister. The so called 'honor killing' represents the 'backwardness' of Turkish immigrants.

The fall of the Berlin Wall signifies a major factor in Hasan's search for identity. The turmoil of Germany during that time reflects Hasan's turmoil in finding what he wants to do with his life, as well as finding his place in the new, free Germany. In the beginning Hasan does not encounter any racism because of the group's inherent diversity. Hasan's brother Ediz, however, predicts that "there [he] will always be a *Kanacke*," which turns out to be true as Neo-Nazi groups emerge after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Hasan experiences confrontations with them as reunification is occurring.⁶ The identity crisis of Berlin mirrors and impacts Hasan's personal identity crisis and sense of self as the turmoil which opens up new possibilities for the East Germans also opens up possibilities of being more than a *Kanacke* for Hasan.

Family has a large influence on Hasan as he comes of age in the novel. Spending half of his life in Germany and half in Turkey, Hasan must rely on his family for companionship. Hasan's brother Ediz does not want to return to Berlin to seek a new life, but instead "wants to go to the USA and study business."⁷ This same brother rejects Hasan's desire to return to

⁶ Kara, Page 19 „Dort bist du immer Kanacke...“

⁷ Kara, Page 19 „...nämlich in die USA gehen und Wirtschaft studieren.“

Germany after the fall of the Wall because he believes the racism will still continue there.

Hasan's father is also a main character in the novel, and when Hasan discovers that his father has an East German mistress and a son from the affair, it tears apart the family. This double-life and destruction of Hasan's family deeply affects him, dismantling the pedestal on which Hasan had placed his father and leaving mistrust and resentment in its place. The affair effectively destroys Hasan's family; his mother divorces his father and the family separates. This destruction alters Hasan's attitude and makes him determined to find his own personal place in a foreign Berlin after the fall of the Wall.

The female characters in Kara's novel all serve in non-traditional roles and challenge the assertion that women are marginalized by men. Gender issues are therefore less prominent, except in the case of Hasan's sexualization of his surroundings, such as the women who find him attractive because he looks exotic. Hasan's mother is a very strong figure who acts as head of her household in Istanbul. Part of the reason she dominates Hasan's father is her higher social standing: she comes from a wealthy family in Istanbul while her husband comes from rural Anatolia. Cora, the girlfriend of director Wolf, holds a strong power over Hasan and leads him through a twisted affair, which ends when the film is complete. The ways in which women use men in this novel shows a somewhat modern and feminist view of gender.

The fact that both Kara and Tekinay chose to have male protagonists in their novels is interesting, as this seems to go against their assertion of dominant female characters as well as the autobiographical elements in the novels. One theory states that the female authors do not include female main characters because males have more freedom in both society at large and within the Turkish-German community. Tekinay's Engin, for example, is allowed by his family to date and even marry a German girl, whereas his sister is forbidden from dating a German man.

The authors might have also felt these limitations and therefore chose to use male protagonists. Another reason the authors may have made the protagonists male is to show gender from the male perspective, in that the male protagonists would perceive female characters in a way that a female protagonist would not. One example would be Cora in Kara's novel, seen by Hasan as purely a sexually dominant force. For a lead female character this sexual portrayal would not occur, and therefore Cora might have lost her appeal. Despite any conjectures, the placement of male protagonists in Tekinay and Kara's novels presents a different perspective on the world as second generation Turkish-Germans than that of a female protagonist would.

Much like in Tekinay's novel, some aspects of *Selam Berlin* mirror Yade Kara's life. Both Hasan and Kara are from Kreuzberg, the iconic Turkish neighborhood in Germany. Kreuzberg is often described as a little Turkey within Berlin, and in many ways, especially to the German population, it represents Turkish refusal to assimilate into the German culture. Hasan, however, is determined to become a part of German culture. He therefore moves out of Kreuzberg and encounters a great deal of racism upon his arrival when he later tries to rent a room. Also, Hasan gets involved in movies, mirroring Kara's involvement in film and theater. This involvement in theater, which represents a kind of different life before the camera, seems to mirror Hasan's search for personal identity. The timing of the book also reflects Kara's own experiences, as she also came of age during the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Finally, Hasan wants to move around, as he says "The nomad in me pushed me toward new places [...]. I wanted to go further west to London, New York, San Francisco, or east? To Tokyo, Tehran, Tashkent."⁸ Kara has also moved around while working as an actress, having lived in places such as London and Hong Kong as well as Germany and Turkey. The ways in which Kara reflects

⁸ Kara, Page 382 "Der Nomade in mir trieb mich zu neuen Orten [...]. Ich wollte weiter nach Westen, nach London, New York, San Francisco oder nach Osten? Nach Tokio, Teheran, Taschkent."

her own experiences create a truer picture of Hasan and how it felt to come of age as a Turkish-German at the fall of the Wall.

Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter

Born in 1973 Dilek Güngör grew up and lived with her family in Swabia, Germany. Güngör attended a Catholic high school and the University of Mainz, where she studied both Translation Studies and Journalism. From 1998 to 2003 Güngör worked for the *Berliner Zeitung* as a journalist writing a weekly column in which she mused about her family life and experiences growing up as a daughter of Turkish immigrants. In 2004 she went to England and earned a master's degree in Race and Ethnic Studies from Warwick University in the UK. Güngör now resides in Berlin, and her column currently appears in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*.

Güngör's second book and first novel, *Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter*, tells the story of a young woman who travels to a small village in Turkey preceding the imminent death of her grandmother, whom she gets to know while also discovering a dark family secret. This novel is different from the two previously discussed in that the action takes place in an Anatolian village rather than in Germany. This sets the stage for a different perspective from the character, who is considered more "German" than those around her as opposed to the more "Turkish" characters in Tekinay's and Kara's novels. In many ways the novel reflects Güngör's life. Her protagonist Zeynep is, like Güngör, a Turkish-German journalist in Berlin originally hailing from a small town in Turkey. Despite some similarities, however, Güngör insists that she did not base the novel on her own life, especially with regards to the archaic family feud that her grandmother reveals to Zeynep during her stay. A good portion of the novel centers around conversations Zeynep has with her family; the novel presents Zeynep mainly in this light, as

opposed to her professional persona as a journalist in Berlin in a relationship with a German man, Stefan.

The young woman, Zeynep, learns to push aside many of the misconceptions she has about her family and their limited worldliness in a small provincial Turkish village. She also discovers that the women in her family, especially her grandmother, yearn for the kind of freedom Zeynep has enjoyed living in Germany. Throughout the novel, Zeynep associates herself both with her very European upbringing in Germany as well as with her family's homeland and traditions in Turkey. And while the repression of women in Turkey and her tyrannical uncle seem to bother her, Güngör depicts her protagonist as accepting of the choices the various women of the family, including her mother, have made. Her sense of identity is shaken much more by the crime which haunts the lives of Zeynep's family and a broken-off relationship with her German boyfriend than by the cultural or national issues connected to her social identity, though the one cannot be separated entirely from the other.

Because of the Anatolian setting, Güngör's portrayal of Zeynep and her visit to Turkey brings up many intriguing aspects of the second generation Turkish-German experience not raised by the other authors. Here, the question of sense of self transitions to a sense of place and home, with Zeynep searching for her own identity while exploring her Turkish and German heritage. The lack of equality for women in Turkey serves as a significant factor in Güngör's novel, although Güngör tries to avoid taking an overt stance on the subject in her writings. Family lies at the center of Güngör's novel, making the familial unit one of the foci of the novel, as it is also the center of a Turkish village dweller's universe.

Placing Zeynep out of her element, where, according to German society, she should feel at home, serves to show Zeynep's confused sense of place and home. Discovering the

similarities she shares with her family, Zeynep begins to feel more at home in Turkey while spending time with her grandmother. This new feeling of comfort shatters, however, when Zeynep learns of the feud and traditional honor killings in which her family has been engaged. As Zeynep says, “I said nothing and mulled over where my home is. It was not in Berlin, I had a small apartment there, but nevertheless that was not my home... In my grandmother’s house I had just begun to feel at home, but not much of that was left after my trip to Döndü.”⁹ Zeynep eventually learns to accept her grandmother and subsequently her family. By the end of the novel Zeynep’s sense of home shifts from a completely German perspective to one where she embraces her home as both Germany and her parents’ native land Turkey. This acceptance creates in Zeynep a duality in which she can accept the traditions of both nations as hers. On several occasions Güngör herself has said that her real home is Germany,

... because it's true. I was born here, I've got a German passport, I've spent all my life in Germany, I went to a German university, I've got a German boyfriend. I'm going to stay here, I'm not going to go anywhere else. This is where I live and this is my life. So I say I'm German and if someone asks more I can tell them more.¹⁰

Güngör’s perspective is reflected in her novel through Zeynep, who speaks as someone who feels like a German with Turkish ancestry. This denotation is perfectly acceptable in countries such as the United States where immigration is the norm, but is not so in countries that have not typically been countries of immigration as Germany has been.

Family lies at the center of Güngör’s novel, as during her trip to Turkey Zeynep becomes more intimately acquainted with the nuances of her family. At the beginning of the novel Zeynep does not feel connected to her Turkish family and perceives the trek to visit her dying

⁹ Güngör, Dilek. *Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter*. Page 156-157. Ich sagte nichts und überlegte, wo mein Zuhause sei. In Berlin war es nicht, ich hatte dort eine kleine Wohnung, aber deshalb war es nicht mein Zuhause... Im Haus meiner Großmutter hatte ich gerade angefangen, mich zu Hause zu fühlen, aber davon war nach meinem Besuch bei Döndü nicht mehr viel übrig.

¹⁰ "I don't see myself as integrated": an interview with Dilek Gungor; 21 February 2006
http://www.expatica.com/de/life_in/leisure/i-dont-see-myself-as-integrated-an-interview-with-dilek-gungor-27805.html

grandmother as more of a chore and diversion from the monotony of living at home without a job than as an opportunity to create close family ties. When Zeynep arrives in Turkey, her feelings of alienation seem to be legitimate: her uncle Mehmet is a “traditional” Turkish tyrannical patriarch, her grandmother is difficult to talk to because of the gap in age and experience, and her cousin’s wife Özlem serves the men of the household like a servant. As she spends more time there, Zeynep begins to understand her family more. Özlem is more than just a housemaid; she is a woman waiting to move to the city where she and Fevzi can begin their own life unrestrained by the binds of the village. Zeynep’s grandmother is not just a silly village woman; she is a woman who knows about men and sex in a way Zeynep has not yet discovered. Although Zeynep cannot believe that “she came from a family, in which they believed in family honor and honor killings,”¹¹ by the end of the novel Zeynep learns to accept her family the way they are and encourage their move toward modernization with moving the family to Istanbul from the country. Family in Güngör’s novel is the centerpiece for what happens to an individual; therefore knowing and accepting one’s family is analogous to knowing and accepting oneself.

Gender is another important issue which repeatedly arises in Güngör’s novel. As a woman, Zeynep’s travel to Turkey is especially shocking. The women in her home village do not have the social right to do the things she has done in Germany, such as attend a university and become a journalist living in the city without a husband. Özlem, who is the wife of Zeynep’s cousin Fevzi, is treated like a servant in the household as Zeynep’s grandmother was treated and as Zeynep’s mother was treated before she moved to Germany. How Güngör addresses the inequality based on gender in her novel is extraordinarily compelling, as she turns it from merely an issue that Turkish women must deal with to an issue that women in Germany

¹¹ Güngör, Dilek. *Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter*. Page 147 “[sie] kam aus einer Familie, in der man an Familienehre und Rachenmorde glaubte.“

must deal with as well. Repeatedly throughout the novel Zeynep equates the treatment of Özlem with how her former boyfriend Stefan treated her through their three years of on-and-off uncommitted dating. When she sees Fevzi act dumb and make Özlem salt his food, Zeynep says “When I observed him, how he waited with wet hands until either Özlem or one of the kids brought him a clean hand towel, I had to think of Stefan, who, when he spent the night, did not seem to know, how to iron a shirt.”¹² Güngör emphasizes how men take advantage of their female partners. Güngör avoids casting judgments on the gender inequalities women experience in Turkey, such as the women in the village not being allowed to go anywhere unaccompanied by male relatives. Zeynep herself sees that in Germany she was just as much put down by Stefan as Özlem is by Fevzi in Turkey. This way, the oppression of women is a phenomenon not just experienced by Turkish women in a more traditional society but also by German women in modern Western settings.

The sense of home which Zeynep realizes as being based on her heritage and the family she has both within Turkey and Germany as well as the gender issues discussed in the text, make *Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter* a compelling novel. The autobiographical elements in the novel are apparent to readers familiar with Güngör’s articles in the *Berliner Zeitung*, reflecting her experience as a second-generation Turkish-German. Of course, it is not an actual autobiography, and many of the elements are not centered on Güngör’s life, including the scenario of the honor killing and family feud that horrify Zeynep. Despite this, one can see that the autobiographical elements make Güngör’s portrayal of Zeynep raw and authentic, as opposed to a mere reflection of the second generation Turkish-German experience.

¹² Güngör, Dilek. *Das Geheimnis meiner türkischen Grossmutter*. Page 92 „Wenn ich ihm so beobachtete, wie er mit nassen Händen darauf wartete, dass ihm özlem oder eines der Kinder ein sauberes Handtuch brachte, musste ich and Stefan denken, der, wenn wir bei mir übernachtet hatten, morgens auch nicht mehr zu wissen schien, wie man ein Hemd bügelte. Er hatte sich auch darauf verlassen, dass ich mich darum kümmern würde, genau so wie Fevzi.”

Conclusion

The three novels which I have examined above, by authors Alev Tekinay, Yade Kara, and Dilek Güngör, all tell the story of second generation Turkish-Germans and the way in which they interact both with their own families and with their German community. Although the three authors have differences in the way they treat the Turkish-German experience and sense of self, they share characteristics, including the expression of their own identity through authorship.

The three novels all address the sense of self that the main character (as well as other characters to lesser degrees) develops within the context of being a second generation Turkish-German. The characters' relationship to both Germany and Turkey is a recurring theme throughout the novels. They wish to maintain their Turkish heritage while also embracing the German way of living. The sense of belonging is heavily influenced by their families, which figure prominently in the lives of all three main characters. In *Selam Berlin*, the separation of Hasan's parents holds a great deal of influence over Hasan, who must deal with his father's adultery in the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Family is at the center of Güngör's novel, where Zeynep learns to accept her family in Turkey as well as her parents in Germany. Family is also important in Tekinay's *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*, where Engin feels pressure from his parents to follow more traditional paths with regard to profession and marriage. In these contexts family seems to bridge the gap between East and West for the main characters, for whom it is a mix of traditions connected with the homeland and the transition to modernity associated with their move to Germany.

Gender issues also run through the three novels. Güngör, reluctant to admit that gender issues exist at all, seems to simply accept the treatment of women in Turkey, stating that women in Western countries are not as free as they think they might be. Kara presents strong women

who defy stereotypes and dominate male characters in the novel. Gender issues are important in these novels because the women who write them wish to explore and present their position as female Turkish-Germans who fit outside the stereotype of the abused woman.

All three novels share aspects of the story with the experiences of the authors. For instance, in Güngör's novel the main character Zeynep is a female journalist in Berlin whose parents came from Anatolia, much like Güngör herself. In *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*, Engin's family is from Izmir, Turkey, where Tekinay grew up. Hasan, the main character in Yade Kara's *Selam Berlin*, is a young man who spends time in Istanbul and Germany and becomes involved with the film business, similar to Kara. The similarities between the three novels and the lives of their authors reveal how the authors want to convey the second generation Turkish-German experience; each story is, in part, an autobiographical reflection. They pull elements from their own lives to illustrate the way in which the members of the second generation interact with the world around them and in turn discover themselves.

All three of these Turkish-German female authors of the second generation are truly remarkable in that they have written books about the experience of their generation in a Germany which is still struggling to accept the Turkish minority presence. Through literature we can view the struggles they face as well as the joys they experience in their life situation, and how they portray their own experiences and the experiences of those similar in the novels which they write. Also, novels allow the author to idealize a situation, such as in *Nur der Hauch vom Paradies*, where Engin rewrites the ending of his love story of the same title so that Sabine comes back to him in the end. What these female authors put into their novels is a genuine depiction of reality as a second generation Turkish-German, particularly the troubles that females encounter both within Turkish-German culture and within the larger German society as a whole.