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'Kanak Sprak' and Union Suspecte: Scandals Around Hybrid and Multilingual Literature in Germany and Belgium

Although media discourses suggest Europe to be 'flooded' by poor and alien migrants from the South and the East, the 'fortress Europe' of our days defends its borders against most of the global movements of migration. "Enormous movements of migration took place", Klaus J. Bade notes, however "not to Europe but rather in the eastern and especially the southern parts of the world, where partly even the poorest states had to incorporate indeed 'floods' of migrants from neighbouring countries".¹ Even though Europe overestimates its importance in the global discourse of migration, since the late 1980s it has become, with its about 56 million migrants, a "continent of immigration" ("Der Einwanderungskontinent Europa am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts", Bade 2002: 378), and all European nations have to deal with the politics of migration and identity.

Assuming that European nations construct their 'national identities' by various features – language being an important one of them – it seems useful to compare different European nations and their specific connections of nation and migration, identity and language. At the latest, since computers and the internet have been established, we have been living in an age after the end of the 'Gutenberg Galaxy', but literature can nevertheless act as the medium reflecting these connections. There are contemporary attempts by so-called 'migrant authors' to play with the power of hegemonic standard languages of different European nations and, in doing so, to undermine ideas of what is called 'national identity'. The main issue of this article is to illustrate how authors from different European countries are doing this, how the public reacts to their aesthetic constructions and how these authors become stigmatized in the public sphere.

For a start, I will present different concepts of literary theory which will help to describe literary texts as dialogical, polyphonous or hybrid. Then I

¹ "Gewaltige Wanderungsbewegungen fanden zwar statt, aber nicht nach Europa, sondern im Osten und besonders im Süden der Welt, wo zum Teil gerade die ärmsten Nachbarländer in der Tat 'Fluten' von Flüchtlingen aufzunehmen hatten" (Bade 2002: 385).

will discuss two examples of 'migrant literature' from central Europe which deal with the hegemonic language(s) of their cultures in different ways: firstly, Feridun Zaimoğlu's hybrid concept of 'Kanak Sprak', developed in Germany, where German is the only official language and constitutes a central factor in all discourses of national identity; secondly, the Flemish theatre group Union Suspecte and the language mix in their play *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaanderen* (Our Lady of Flanders). The group works in the multilingual neighbouring country Belgium where Dutch, French and German (spoken by a small minority) are the three official languages. I will ask in which way literature and especially hybrid or multilingual texts – here prose or plays – are perceived by the societies in which they circulate today. It can be shown that the more these aesthetic concepts receive public attention, the higher the risk for authors to become victims of media campaigns which focus less on their literary aesthetics than on other aspects as a process of stigmatization and exclusion from public discourse. In the conclusion, I will show that the stage offers possibilities to perform hybrid identities even beyond language.²

Mono- and Multilinguality, Dialogicality and Hybridity: On Literature and Language

Literary studies, especially in a country like Germany, are primarily interested in *the* standard language being analyzed. This main interest of research results from what Enlightenment once needed literary studies for: to construct and support strong 'national identities'. But this monolingual and national view of literature has a blind spot: processes of migration and globalization have generated literary texts that deal with different languages and slang as well, 'national identities' in the present are more hybrid than coherent. Monika Schmitz-Emans, a scholar of Comparative Literature, underlines the central idea of her discipline – which stands in contrast to the traditional concepts of national-oriented literary studies: "It is the exception rather than the rule that the literature of a region, a country, a territory exclusively is written in one language, if it is not even just a pragmatic fiction to speak of monolingual national literatures."³ According

² I would like to thank my Belgian friends and colleagues Inge Arteel, Valeria Beccara, Marnit Van Coillie, Els Degreyse, Simon Güntner, Daniëlle Houbrechts, Silke Moschitz, Sarah De Mul, Maarten Soete, Nathalie Van der Perre, and the Vlaams Theater Instituut, without whom this text would not have been written.

³ "Daß die Literatur einer Region, eines Landes, eines Staatsgebildes ausschließlich in einer einzigen Sprache verfasst wird, dürfte eher die Ausnahme als den Regelfall dar-

to Schmitz-Emans then, it would be much more interesting to analyze how different literary languages intersect in a specific context than to defend one standard language as *the* aesthetic foundation of writing.

Although many contemporary texts are still monolingual and refer to a national tradition, we will follow Schmitz-Emans' argument, that different languages, reproducing the plurality of voices, could be confronted with each other in multilingual literary texts. Mikhail Bakhtin described the polyphony of voices and language as the main characteristic of the novel:

These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization – this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (Bakhtin 1981: 263)

In Bakhtin's theory the different languages do not merge with one another but produce a confrontational tension. He writes that "the novelistic hybrid is an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another" (Bakhtin 1981: 361). In this sense, Herbert Uerlings declares that literary texts "can use dialogicality, multiplicity of voices among others to confront the discourse about others with different voices and to realize a postcolonial potential."⁴

Apart from this concept and concerning the fact that multilingual and dialogical literary texts create narrative spaces in which different (coherent) languages, cultures or subjects clash, some postcolonial theorists use the more radical concept of hybridity, which condemns the idea of coherent languages, cultures or subjects in general. They start with the fundamental "instability and plurality of identities"⁵, and use the poststructural credo

stellen, wenn es denn nicht überhaupt eine allenfalls pragmatisch zu rechtfertigende Fiktion darstellt, von monolingualen Nationalliteraturen zu reden" (Schmitz-Emans 2004: 11).

⁴ "Literatur kann, über Verfahren der Intertextualität, Interlingualität, Intermedialität, durch Dialogizität, Stimmenvielfalt u. a. m. die Rede ‚über‘ andere mit anderen Stimmen konfrontieren und so ein postkoloniales Potential realisieren" (Uerlings 2006: 16). The dialogical structure of prose Bakhtin and Uerlings are looking at, can be realized in dramatical texts, too, and even in an aesthetically radicalized way: Hans-Thies Lehmann described a "postdramatic theatre of voices" ("Formen eines postdramatischen Theaters der Stimmen", Lehmann 2004: 33); wherein the classical characters are disintegrated in rhythmic and conflictual stretches of text.

⁵ "Ihr Plädoyer für die Instabilität und Pluralität von Identitäten dient postkolonialen AutorInnen, ob wissenschaftlich oder literarisch tätig, auch als politische Intervention,

that all identities are constructed by repeated performances. In *The Location of Culture* Homi K. Bhabha analyzes the "'in-between' spaces" (Bhabha 1994: 1) between the poles of 'the own' and 'the other' in which mixtures create culture. Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius define this kind of hybridity as everything "that comes into being through a mixture of traditions or chains of signifiers, that connects different discourses and technologies, that is realized by techniques like collage or sampling".⁶ Hybridity in this sense fights all imaginations of homogeneity and coherence and understands identity always as a product of mixing conflicting elements.

Hybrid and Multilingual Literature in Belgium and Germany

Although central Europe has a long history of migration and fusion of cultures, many analyses of contemporary literature still try to reconstruct a difference between a 'national literature' and a 'postcolonial (im)migrant literature' – or in Dutch an 'allochtone literatuur'. In Germany, different categories such as 'Gastarbeiterliteratur', 'Emigrantenliteratur', 'Migrantenliteratur', 'Minoritätenliteratur' or 'interkulturelle Literatur' (Keiner 1999: 3f.)⁷ have been used since the 1980s "to demarcate and regulate the boundaries between it [such literature, T.E.] and a body of literature considered by implication to be inherently German" (Adelson 1990: 382).⁸

In Germany, where German is the standard language and all migrants are expected to assimilate by learning German, there is still a strong connection between 'German identity' and knowledge of 'standard German'. Against this fiction of ethnic homogeneity, which is based on "surprisingly

die Herrschaftsstrukturen nicht nur aufdecken, sondern verändern will" (Hamann & Sieber 2002: 7).

⁶ "(W)as sich einer Vermischung von Traditionslinien oder von Signifikantenketten verdankt, was unterschiedliche Diskurse und Technologien verknüpft, was durch Techniken der *collage*, des *samplings*, des Bastelns zustande gekommen ist" (Bronfen & Marius 1997: 14).

⁷ One could translate these terms as 'guest workers literature', 'literature of immigrants', 'literature of migrants', 'literature of minorities' and 'intercultural literature'.

⁸ Sabine Keiner wrote a short history of all these terms which were used in this process, from 'guest workers literature' (1981) to 'intercultural literature' (1995), and asks "whether the search for adequate terms to describe this corpus of literature got stuck in a fundamental dilemma" ("Es stellt sich die Frage, ob die Suche nach adäquaten Begriffen für Texte dieses Literaturkorpus in einem grundsätzlichen Dilemma steckt", Keiner 1999: 4).

precise ideas of what a German looks like and how he behaves",⁹ the activists of the 'Kanak Attak'-movement¹⁰ defined themselves as hybrids beyond the binary pattern of 'Germans' versus 'migrants'. As they wrote 1998 in their manifesto, "Kanak Attak does not ask for a passport or someone's descent, but opposes the question of passport or descent. [...] Kanak Attak [...] rejects all identity politics as they are derived from ethnic attributions".¹¹ Anthologies with titles such as *Kanaksta* (1999, edited by Jürgen Lottmann), *Morgenland* (2000, Jamal Tuschnik) or *Döner in Walhalla* (2000, Ilija Trojanow) try to make the difference between 'German literature' and 'migrant literature' disappear.

In Belgium, the relation between language and identity is much more complex as the population speaks three different languages: the Flemish majority (6 million) speaks Dutch, the Walloons speak French (3.4 million), the multicultural capital Brussels is officially bilingual although most inhabitants speak French (1.1 million) and a small minority in the eastern part is German-speaking (70.000). The linguistic and political struggles between Flemish and Walloons and the increasing political federalization between the two major language groups have led to a situation which is different from the German one: 'National identity' in Belgium is not strongly connected to *one* language and does not focus on unity but on the coexistence of different cultures and languages (with parts of the different groups striving for linguistic homogeneity in their own territories).

Nevertheless, although Flemish theatre with artists like Jan Fabre, Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker or Wim Vandekeybus is famous all over the world since the 1980s, debates about 'migrant literature' or 'intercultural writing' have started only recently. The debuts of Chika Unigwe (*De feniks* 2005) and Yamilia Idrissi (*Kif-kif* 2005) or the anthology *Kif Kif. Nieuwe stemmen uit Vlaanderen* (2006) calmed down the public debate on 'why is

⁹ "Da in der Bundesrepublik bis heute die Fiktion der ethnischen Homogenität aufrechterhalten wird, existieren hierzulande auch immer noch erstaunlich konkrete Vorstellungen darüber, wie ein Deutscher aussieht und sich verhält" (Terkessidis 2000: 74).

¹⁰ 'Kanak Attak' is a group of people who try to deconstruct national and homogenous concepts of identity by reflecting them in a theoretical way and by art happenings, the project 'Kanak TV' for instance is part of the group's activities.

¹¹ "Kanak Attak fragt nicht nach dem Paß oder der Herkunft, sondern wendet sich gegen die Frage nach dem Paß und der Herkunft. [...] Kanak Attak [...] lehnt jede Form von Identitätspolitik ab, wie sie sich etwa aus ethnologischen Zuschreibungen speisen" (Kanak Attak 1999).

there no Flemish migrant literature?', in particular compared to the richer body of 'migrant literature' coming from the Netherlands.

I will analyze prose by Feridun Zaimoğlu from Germany and a play by the theatre group Union Suspecte from Belgium. Although they use different genres, and the history of German 'migrant literature' is much older than the Belgian one, the texts are comparable because both create a plurality of voices and have been performed on stage. I will show in which way these literary texts from Belgium and Germany deal with identity and language and how Zaimoğlu and Union Suspecte – although their aesthetical approach to language and hybridity is slightly different – both caused public scandals in their societies where their positioning as 'the other' in 'the own cultural field' was radically questioned.

Feridun Zaimoğlu from Germany: 'Kanak Sprak' as a Hybrid Language and the Scandal Around his Later 'Plagiarism'

Feridun Zaimoğlu was born in Turkey in 1964 and moved to Germany as a child. In 1995 and 1998, this 'son of Turkish migrants' published his so-called 'protocols' with male and female migrants from the outskirts of society, *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff* (Zaimoğlu 1995; Zaimoğlu 1998a). Many German philologists took his fake protocols to be documentary reports, assigned them to the tradition of the authentic 'Gastarbeiterliteratur' of the 1980s and failed to see Zaimoğlu's deconstruction of various characteristics of 'migrant literature'. Heidi Rösch, for instance, called the 'Kanak Sprak' an "ethnic dialect" ("Ethnolekt", Rösch 2006: 230), Dirk Skiba described it as a part of the tradition of "documentary [...] protocol-literature" ("quasi-dokumentarische[r] Ansatz"; "Tradition der Protokoll-Literatur", Skiba 2004: 186f.) of the 1970s, and the *Frankfurter Rundschau* described these books as a "field research" ("Feldforschung", Peters 1998).

Meanwhile however, it has become widely accepted that Zaimoğlu's 'Kanak Sprak' constitutes an artificial hybrid of different languages and dialects and only fakes its documentary style in a theatrical way.¹² 'Kanak Sprak' reproduces restricted codes of speaking (like ellipses, inversions or mixing up grammatical cases). At the same time, it enriches standard German with words originating from Turkish, English, Jiddish, French and German dialects. Finally, it creates new composites and mixes slang-codes

¹² Although *Kanak Sprak* and *Koppstoff* are written as prose, the many-voiced structure of the texts perfectly allows them to be put on stage as for instance *Kampnagel Hamburg* and *Junges Theater Bremen* did.

with quotes and words from 'high culture' and academic discourse into a hip-hop-like rhythm.

To give some examples: In the 'protocols' you can find words like "talab", "schlamassel", "big cities", "fassong" or "fanatica" (Zaimoğlu 1995: 84, 122; Zaimoğlu 1998a: 24, 87, 119) as well as intertextual references to – for instance – Martin Luther King, Bertolt Brecht, Emanuel Geibel or even Paul Celan, reflections on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and a full bound of new compounds like "Ghettogümgüm" (Zaimoğlu 1998a: 28) or "klimperklumperochsenaug" (Zaimoğlu 1995: 57) – qualities of a reflexive and poetic language one would not encounter in the documentary protocol-literature of the 1970s or 80s. Tom Cheesman praised the poetical quality of 'Kanak Sprak' and its "virtuoso handling of rhythm, assonance and alliteration" (Cheesman 2002: 186).

Manuela Günter commented that the 'Kanak Sprak' even succeeds in resignifying the racist swearword 'Kanake'¹³ by establishing a hybrid language beyond all standard forms of language and by reassigning a discriminatory term to a poetical and even utopian concept. Building on Judith Butler's concept of 'Excitable Speech', Günter shows how Zaimoğlu's artificial language could be described as a strategy of reproducing hegemonic concepts while shifting their signification. The 'Kanake' and his language are "the result of a culture that has been hybrid all along, mixed from Turkish, German, local, religious, age- and gender-specific elements which construct identity only as constantly changing acts." Zaimoğlu's artificial and hybrid language could be a reason for Germans to "understand themselves as the result of a hybrid culture and to say goodbye to their image of Germany as a homogeneous culture – which has always been danger for the minorities of the country."¹⁴

After having started his literary career as a rebel and a controversial author, Zaimoğlu has meanwhile established himself as part of the German literary scene, even winning prizes he once contested, such as the *Adelbert-*

¹³ Historically, 'Kanake' is a term for 'human being', used by the people from New Caledonia. In Germany, it became a discriminatory connotation since the 1970s when it became used to categorize 'guest workers'.

¹⁴ "Nicht Kulturen treffen im 'Kanaken' aufeinander, sondern er ist selbst das Resultat einer bereits hybriden Kultur aus türkischen, deutschen, regionalen, religiösen, alters- und geschlechtsspezifischen Elementen, die Identität nur als stets wechselnde Posen denken läßt [...]. Zaimoglus 'Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft' könnten ein Anlaß sein, daß sich auch die 'Alemannen' endlich als das Resultat einer hybriden Kultur begreifen und sich von der für die Minderheiten in diesem Land immer schon sehr gefährlichen Vorstellung einer homogenen Gesellschaft verabschieden" (Günter 1999: 27).

von-Chamisso-Award in 2005.¹⁵ His recent books like *German Amok* (2002) or *Zwölf Gramm Glück* (2004) are reviewed in all of the important German journals. Although he was once called the "Malcolm X of the German Turks" by *Die Zeit*,¹⁶ he has now become part of central cultural institutions like the German Conference of Islam, initiated 2006 by the German Minister of the Interior, and writes leading articles for major German newspapers and journals such as *Die Zeit*.

This double process of assimilation into the literary field as a recognized writer and into the cultural institutions as a representative of 'the Other', forced Zaimoğlu to deal with the old German conceptions of authorship as well as with symbolic exclusions. Although his first texts proved him to be an ironical and intertextual writer, he was even accused of plagiarism in 2006. A German scholar compared Zaimoğlu's novel *Leyla* (2006) to Emine Sevgi Özdamar's book *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei, hat zwei Türen, aus einer kam ich rein, aus der anderen ging ich raus* (1992). In this analysis, the scholar asserted that Zaimoğlu's story of a female youth in the Turkey of the 1950s and 1960s copied some of Özdamar's motives – and suddenly a media discourse stigmatized Zaimoğlu as a liar.¹⁷ Even the serious *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* asked him to prove his innocence: "It will help", Volker Weidemann wrote, "if he shows us the original recordings of his mother's voice."¹⁸

An author, who started his career by playing intertextual games with German standard language, was finally forced to prove the authenticity of his books in order to prevent his exclusion from the literary market. The famous Foucauldian question: 'What matter who's speaking' seems no longer important to critics if a 'foreign author' (who came to Germany when he was one year old) questions the whole construction of German identity.

¹⁵ In 1998 Zaimoğlu published an essay in which he laughed about the "adelbert-von-chamisso-dingsbums" (Zaimoğlu 1998b: 91) which was appointed by 'philistines of multiculturalism' and "motherfuckers" (Zaimoğlu 1998b: 97). In 2005 he won the Adelbert-von-Chamisso-award himself (like among others Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Yoko Tawada, and Ilija Trojanow).

¹⁶ "Ein Wochenende in Kiel mit Feridun Zaimoğlu, dem Malcolm X der deutschen Türken" (Lottmann 1997).

¹⁷ A good example of the different positions of this scandal are the articles by Tom Cheesman and Norbert Mecklenburg at *literaturkritik.de* (Cheesman 2008; Mecklenburg 2006; Mecklenburg 2008).

¹⁸ "Es wird schon helfen, wenn Zaimoğlu die Bänder mit den Gesprächen mit seiner Mutter vorlegt" (Weidemann 2006).

The Theatre Company *Union Suspecte* from Belgium: *Onze-lieve-vrouw van Vlaanderen* (2005) as a Multilingual Play and the Scandal Around its Poster

Union Suspecte is a theatre group from Ghent and Brussels in Belgium, founded in 2003 and subsidized by the Flemish Community. The members of *Union Suspecte* have different cultural backgrounds and develop their ideas under Belgian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Iraqi and other influences. In their trilogy on the Ben Chikha family, director Chokri Ben Chikha deals with the story of migrants from Tunisia who started a new life in the small and conservative town of Blankenberge in Westflanders.

Whilst the first part of the trilogy, from 2003, called *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (The Lion of Flanders) presents a mix of three languages – Dutch, French and Arab – with the Tunisian-Belgian father speaking Westflemish (a native dialect originating from a conservative part of the country),¹⁹ the second part *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaanderen* (Our Lady of Flanders) from 2005 is even more complex. The three protagonists of this play, the 'biological' muslim mother Fatima (from Tunisia), the 'social' catholic mother Maria (from Poland) and their son Chokri, use the Flemish standard language Dutch – so, although all three of them have a migrant background from Tunisia or Poland, they occupy the linguistic centre of Flemish society. Besides these main protagonists, three more characters appear, who use other languages: the aggressive and ridiculous oldest brother Mourade speaks French ("A partir de maintenant, il y a des règles ici et c'est moi qui les donne", *Union Suspecte* 2005: 18), the social worker Georgina who has the lowest position in the family but the strength to defend herself sometimes speaks Spanish ("Mi nombre es Georgina!", *Union Suspecte* 2005: 12), and the mentally disabled but wise Haider switches between languages and uses a childish way of speaking ("Mourade kaka! Mama, Mama", *Union Suspecte* 2005: 15).

According to the anthropological perspective of Pierre Legendre, the history of mankind is to be read as a family history wherein the motive of 'the father' is inevitable for the humanization of mankind and the foundation of every legal system. "To fabricate a human being", Legendre writes, "you have to clearly indicate the border. The production of this border

¹⁹ Director Chokri Ben Chikha directly connects this nativeness with the law of the father: "Not so long ago in Belgium the father's will was law, too. To remind of this fact, the father in 'De Leeuw van Vlaanderen' spoke Westflemish" ("Maar natuurlijk was nog niet zo lang geleden ook in België vaders wil wet. Om daaraan te herinneren sprak de vader in 'De Leeuw van Vlaanderen' West-Vlaams", de Jonge 2005).

means to bring the image of the father to the scene".²⁰ In the beginning of *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaanderen*, the father is buried and the whole play develops around the question of how to establish a new order without a father figure. The aggressive – and French-speaking – oldest son Mourade tries to reestablish the violent and conservative order of the father by becoming the father himself. The wise – and Dutch-speaking – mothers reflect their oppressed role under the regime of the father and go for a new system.

Although the play mixes different cultures, their symbols, lifestyles and beliefs, in its use of multi-linguality it reproduces the Flemish discourse of 'progressive Dutch in the center' and 'aggressive and conservative Romanic languages on the outskirts of the Flemish consciousness' (in a play which was subsidized by the Flemish community and mainly presented on Flemish stages). The subversive power of *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaanderen* arises from its choice of content, dance and presentation but not in the area of spoken language. "The people of Flanders", director and actor Chokri Ben Chikha says, "are not yet able to accept the wealth of languages. And they are even further away from the idea of mixing them".²¹

Much more than the play itself, the poster of the play caused a serious scandal which was widely discussed in the Flemish media. On the poster, a bare-breasted mother figure holds a child, like a pieta, sitting in front of a desert landscape. The Flemish lion, symbol of the region and sometimes even used as a nationalistic symbol of the Flemish self-consciousness in Belgium, is also a part of the poster. This mixture of Flemish and Christian symbols with an Arab or African landscape and the 'usurpation' of the Holy Mother's breast through a migrant theatre group evoked the protest of a Christian-Flemish coalition. Francis Van den Eynde, a member of the radical right and racist party *Vlaams Belang* (formerly known as *Vlaams Blok*), published an open letter against the play, which he described as "a provocation against the adoration of the Holy Mary in Flanders" ("De provocatie betrof nu de Mariaverering in Vlaanderen", Van den Eynde 2005). The Christian organisation *België en Christenheid* also fought the play and especially the poster, which they called "blasphemous" („Haar

²⁰ "Den Menschen zu fabrizieren, heißt ihm die Grenze anzugeben. Das Herstellen der Grenze heißt die Vorstellung des Vaters in Szene setzen, den Söhnen des einen und des anderen Geschlechts das Verbot aufzuerlegen" (Legendre 1999: 27).

²¹ Chokri Ben Chikha said this during an unpublished interview. The original Dutch words are: "Men is nog niet in staat in Vlaanderen om de rijkdom van de talen apart te accepteren. Laat staan ze te vermengen" (Ernst 2007; authorized by Ben Chikha).

godslasterlijke affiche", *België en Christenheid* 2005). And even the Secretary-General of the Catholic church of Belgium, Etienne Quintiens, took part in the campaign and wrote an open letter asking the theatre group to publicly explain "why they chose this poster and that they did not intend to shock Catholic believers".²² As an effect of this campaign, director Chokri Ben Chikha received many threatening letters, in the French city of Roubaix their poster was not allowed, and in many towns, demonstrations of Flemish nationalists and Christian organizations took place in front of theaters.²³

In a letter, producer Gie Baguet, director Chokri Ben Chikha and the leader of the Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg in Brussels, Jan Goossens, answered to Etienne Quintiens that the campaign was directed merely against their poster and did not deal with their complex aesthetics. Instead a simple and dichotomic struggle of cultures and religion took place with the Western-Christian party behaving as aggressive as Western media suggests the 'Arabic-Muslim party' would. The theatre makers declared that in the whole debate "respect is ranged with the 'orthodox' use of symbols. But symbols do not only belong to the group they come from."²⁴ At least we have seen what happens if the sons and daughters of migrants who spent all their lives in Belgium dare to usurp and to hybridize Flemish-Christian symbols like the Holy Mary or the Western images of maternity in general.

More Than Words Can Say: A Conclusion

To sum up: the early texts of Feridun Zaimoğlu create a hybrid 'Kanak-German' which subverts both the myth of a naïve documentary and thus authentic 'migrant literature' as well as the construction of a homogeneous and invulnerable German standard language as the fundament of German identity. Once Zaimoğlu had become a successful German author, he was publicly judged by the media to violate a concept of authorship, identity and authenticity he never intended to defend.

²² "Het minste dat wij van u verwachten is dat u publiek zou verklaren waarom u uitgerekend voor die affiche koos en dat u bij die gelegenheid ook duidelijk zou maken dat het niet de bedoeling was de katholieke gelovigen nodeloos te choqueren" (Quintiens 2005).

²³ See also Laveyne 2005 for an overview of the entire debate.

²⁴ "De fout die o.i. steeds weer in het tot nu toe gevoerde debat gemaakt werd, is dat men respect hier gelijkstelt met het 'orthodoxe' gebruik van symbolen. Symbolen zijn niet alleen het bezit van de groep waaruit ze zijn voortgekomen" (Baguet & Ben Chikha & Goossens 2005).

The plays of *Union Suspecte*, by contrast, do not create a hybrid language, but confront different languages while showing the disputes of a migrant family surrounded by different concepts of identity. Although they use Dutch as the central language of their play and thus copy hegemonic Flemish language politics, they have become an enemy for the right-winged and Christian political movement. The public scandal targeted less their complex and ambiguous theatre aesthetics but more at a simple poster which is devaluated as 'blasphemous' and an attack on the 'Flemish-Christian identity'.

But what would the utopia of their aesthetics, apart from the public debates, be? The play *Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaanderen* by *Union Suspecte* ends with an impressive dance scene: the three mothers dancing with the three sons, bemoaning the death of the father. The sons sink to the ground and their mothers seem to awake them again from death. First, the sons cannot stand up without the help of their mothers sustaining them. They even breastfeed them and, by doing so, repeat the pieta-picture of the widely discussed poster on stage. And even more: one of the mothers is played by director Chokri Ben Chikha so a male with Tunisian background substitutes the Holy Mary. In the background, the choir *Houryat*, consisting of three Moroccan women, sings religious songs in Arab which are combined with traditional Christian songs like the *Stabat Mater* of Pergolesi.

We follow the rest of the scene: the sons do not find their way to autonomy. Their mothers perform a ritual Islamic ablution and cross it with a gesture of western pop culture: they are head-banging. As a final point of self-abasement, the mothers even crawl on the backs of their sons by pressing their heads against their son's behinds. But the mothers have other duties as well, they have to clean the floor and in a final inversion, they use their sons as cleaning rags. Christian symbols, Islamic rituals and western pop culture are used to deconstruct stereotypes of motherhood and maleness – what a spectacle in a hybrid dance language without words!

Geert Sels classified this final scene as: "An image that is as hybrid as the culture we are coming to be" ("Een beeld dat zo hybride is als de maatschappij waar we naartoe gaan", Sels 2005), and perhaps even as the culture we are already living in. So if we talk about migration and literature in contemporary Europe, on the one hand, there are many examples of how categories of 'national identities' or 'the other' are dismissed in literature or on stage. On the other hand, there are media and political discourses, which fight such attempts and stigmatize them by neglecting their complex aesthetic structures and submitting them to obsolete or non-aesthetic

categories like 'authenticity' or 'religious belief'. So how will the humanities find a new language of theory which will say goodbye to all these quotation marked-terms like 'national identity', 'migrant-authors', 'western cultures' or 'son of Turkish migrants' I had to use in my article? Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must dance, *Union Suspecte* would say!

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