
Kebab in London: Transnational Experiences and the Role of Food in Yadé Kara's *Cafe Cyprus*

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There's Nothing More German Than a Big, Fat Juicy Döner Kebab. This headline from a 2012 article in the *Wall Street Journal* (Angelos) succinctly captures a sentiment shared by many Germans and international visitors alike. It marks a sharp departure from the 1980s, when döner kebab was seen as the quintessential Turkish food. The döner kebab is a "sandwich" made with meat (lamb, beef, or chicken) that is stacked on a large vertical skewer, cooked by a gas grill behind the spit, and served on pita bread with salad and sauce. The assumption of the döner's impeccable authenticity has of course always been incorrect. While the roasted meat is popular in its country of origin, it is commonly served on a plate, not on bread as it is in Germany. Turkish migrants in Germany, specifically in Berlin-Kreuzberg, invented the sandwich version of döner kebab in the early 1970s. At least in the form in which döner has been offered in Germany, it has thus always been a new and hybrid product, created by Turks in Germany for the German market.¹ While it was initially available only in big cities, it soon became popular throughout Germany and has become the most ubiquitous form of street food. The story of döner has therefore been a story of culinary change, economic success, and widespread acceptance.²

Taking my cue from the opening statement equating döner kebab and Germanness, I intend to examine the role of food in the context of transnational experiences in Yadé Kara's 2008 novel *Cafe Cyprus*. Food, I submit, may be used as a lens for understanding global processes. Maren Möhring, in her article "Transnational Food Migration and the Internalization of Food Consumption," describes the relevance of food in regard to struggles over place and identity as follows: "Eating is about boundaries being transgressed, about something from the outside taken inside, and maybe it is this corporeal dimension that makes food such a powerful symbol in struggles over places and territories, over social and personal identities" (141). The food metaphors in *Cafe Cyprus* clearly show these corporeal, transgressive, and transcultural dimensions. They are employed

to describe cultural changes, and to assess the protagonist's experiences in an unfamiliar environment.

As the ascent of döner as the most popular German fast food attests, culinary habits have changed immensely and continue to change due to transnational movements of people and goods. They are indicators of cultural, social, and economic developments within communities. They have far-reaching transnational implications; yet there is always a local component to food, i.e., to be consumed, food has to be local. The inspiration for a dish might come from a different culture, the ingredients might be non-local, even the food itself might have been produced in a far-away place, but because food's material nature, if it is to be eaten, it has to be within the consumer's physical reach. Literary texts that center on food try to make sense of these spatial movements, whether real or imagined. *Cafe Cyprus* engages the reader in its exploration of space, time, and culinary connections. It thus provides an ideal base for a cultural enquiry centered on transnational experiences. Discussions of transnationalism—both its positive aspects and its problematic side—will provide a theoretical framework for my analysis of Kara's novel.³

Cafe Cyprus relates the transcultural adventures of its protagonist and narrator, Hasan, a young Turkish-German man who recently moved from Berlin to London and is trying to make a living in an exciting and, at times, overwhelming city with a high cost of living. Both the publishing house and reviewers have called Hasan a modern nomad (Roy, "Yadé Kara" 208). As Roy has pointed out, to a large extent this characterization was inspired by the following statement found in the last page of *Selam Berlin*,⁴ Yadé Kara's popular and critically acclaimed 2003 debut novel, which functions as a prequel to *Cafe Cyprus*: "I did not want to settle down. The nomad within me propelled me to new places, spaces, cities and streets" (382).⁵

In *Cafe Cyprus*, Hasan has moved on to one of the new spaces to which he alluded at the end of *Selam Berlin*—both literally and figuratively. He works multiple jobs, three of which are especially relevant with regard to my topic, namely the nexus of food, place, and identity. In the first job, which he held since arriving in London, he helps his friend Kazim sell döner kebabs and introduce the British public to the "authentic version" of the Turkish-German dish. In his second job, he sells food in a Cypriot supermarket. Finally, in the eponymous Cafe Cyprus, he waits on old Cypriots who are still bitterly debating the Cyprus conflict. The protagonist also makes friends, falls in love, studies English, and shows the city to visiting family members—all the while ruminating over his perception of cultural differences between Berlin, London, and Istanbul.

Published in German for a German-speaking audience in 2008, *Cafe Cyprus*

unfolds in London in the early 1990s. Although Kara herself termed the novel a classic *Bildungsroman*,⁶ Kate Roy rightly points out that “it is in fact Hasan’s observations of London that drive the narration of *Cafe Cyprus*, and not the plot or character development” (Roy, “Yadé Kara” 196). The London we encounter in Kara’s text is a bustling, multicultural city, predominantly composed of “others” who have “infiltrated and thus transformed its historical center” (Roy, “Yadé Kara” 201); Hasan revels in London’s ethnic diversity. Britain’s history of colonialism and immigration are intertwined within Hasan’s narrative. As Kate Roy states, “London functions not so much as a setting, but rather as a tool for the discussion of identities within it” (201). This is most obvious in Kara’s description of the culinary preferences of the city’s inhabitants.

As in *Selam Berlin*, *Cafe Cyprus*’s story is told from Hasan’s perspective and in a language clearly coded as young and male. Some critics have questioned Kara’s use of a narrator who is so different from the author but, in an interview, the author describes how this voice was the actual impetus for her novel: “I had the sound of this young man in my ear and I also never doubted for a moment that it was a young man who was telling the story. That’s why I never considered changing the perspective” (Károlyi).⁷ The first-person narrator frequently alternates between describing and commenting on his experiences. Interspersed with more personal descriptions of his adventures in love, work, and friendships are discussions of food, place and identity as well as comparisons between Berlin, London, and Istanbul.

Food plays an important role throughout the novel, both literally and metaphorically. The main protagonist likes to eat and to cook (he fashions himself as somewhat of a gourmet); three of his jobs are food-related; and food is frequently used to draw comparisons between cultural practices. Food metaphors are also used to describe the protagonist’s state of mind. In an early scene of the novel, the tears caused while cutting onions lead Hasan to compare his thoughts to onion rings: “During this time my thoughts were round, sharp, and clear like the onion rings that I cut into the bowls every weekend” (17).⁸ Later, after a fight with his girlfriend Hannah, he compares his mental state to a bag of dried bulgur: “Hours and minutes passed, during which I felt like a bag of dry bulgur that, pre-cooked, dried and chafed into coarse grains, was now lying there, lifeless and dry” (205).⁹ Food thus functions on multiple levels: it moves the plot along (Hasan’s ultimate goal is to become rich and, like many new immigrants, he starts out working multiple jobs in the food sector), and it is used metaphorically to elucidate thoughts and feelings—while waiting for Hannah to call, he feels as lifeless as a bag of bulgur.

As mentioned, immediately after arriving in London, Hasan starts his first job helping his friend Kazim sell döner kebabs. Readers of *Selam Berlin* already know Kazim—like Hasan, Kazim lived in Berlin before he followed his eventual wife Sukjeet to London. My discussion of Hasan’s experiences selling döner in London will point to the cultural adaptations of food in a transnational context—cultural adaptations caused by economic considerations and by culinary preferences. Kazim and Hasan’s mission, in Hasan’s words, is to create Berlin standards for döner in London: “For the döner in this country, one had to create Berlin standards. . . . In London, döner was offered in dry, pale pieces of pita bread with big onion rings and cabbage. Nooo, that didn’t work, it really didn’t! How was it possible to mess up döner like this? . . . That was an insult to all döner creators from Adana, Antep, and Berlin” (18).¹⁰ Hasan then gives the recipe for a real Berlin döner kebab. The meat on the skewer should consist of pure lamb plus beef, and the crispy crust needs to be cut into long, thin, tender strips. The warm soft bread has to be lightly coated with garlic sauce, topped with tender döner strips, lettuce and onions, and wrapped with a napkin (18-19). He also instructs his readers on the “right way” to eat a döner: “Korrekt aß man einen Kebab wie ein Baguette von links nach rechts.” (“The right way to eat a kebab is like eating a baguette, from left to right.” 19). Unfortunately for Hasan and Kazim, their main customers, hungry British rugby and soccer fans who stop by late at night after watching a match, neither know nor care about how to properly eat a döner. Even in Germany, this “right” way to eat a kebab would be disputed because it is certainly not the only way to eat a döner. Nonetheless, Hasan and Kazim’s British customers gulp their kebabs, ignoring kebab-eating etiquette, and wash them down with canned beer. This act is followed by loud belches as some of the drunken fans go to urinate in dark corners. Despite Hasan’s disgust with their customers’ behavior, they realize that these are, after all, the people willing to spend three or four pounds on this fare—economic considerations, at this stage of his life, certainly trump cultural sensitivities. While Hasan wants to be a herald of cultural distinction, he is forced to ‘sell out’ and market his food to whoever is willing to pay for it, even if he is unable to educate his customers about the finer points of döner etiquette.¹¹

At least at the beginning, Kazim shares Hasan’s enthusiastic drive for improvement and innovation. He compares his mission to those of musicians who invent popular songs and proclaims: “Do it like good musicians: they invent new melodies that become hits. Invent new kebabs, new sauces, new taste mixtures that are addictive” (16).¹² Nevertheless, despite their initial enthusiasm for introducing London to a better version of döner, Kazim and Hasan are soon forced to change their offerings by adapting them to British standards. For condiments, they

choose more economic options like cabbage and onions instead of the traditional tomatoes, lettuce, and sauces (283). Those Berlin standards, which Hasan at first tries to maintain in London, are set aside when economic considerations are taken into account. As it happened when it was first invented in Berlin, in London the döner now goes through cultural adaptations, albeit adaptations induced by economics as much as by culinary preferences.

From the novel's beginning, food is presented as more than just nourishment. Moreover, Hasan also discusses döner kebab in the context of imperialism and colonization—arguably the more problematic side of transnationalism. He compares the döner sandwich positively to those of McDonald's and other fast food restaurants:

In Berlin, döner was *streetfood number one* and an answer to McDonald's imperialization and fat burgers and whoopers (sic)! "Döner makes you more beautiful."¹³ In comparison to McDonald's burgers and whoopers, the Berlin döner had more individuality. After all it was common knowledge that all McDonald's burgers worldwide had the same look, weight, ingredients, even the exact same height and width. No surprise that many McDonald's customers worldwide were equally wide, big and fat.¹⁴ (19)

While clearly pointing out the importance of döner within the Berlin culinary scene, this paragraph also shows the problematic relationship between culinary changes and transnational developments. Hasan posits döner kebab as an answer to imperialism by large companies such as McDonald's.¹⁵ Despite the international roots of the dish, döner is presented as the local answer to the forces of globalization.¹⁶ While this rationale worked in Berlin, the scenario in London is different and, as Kazim and Hasan are forced to discover, Berlin's local answer to culinary imperialism by food giants like McDonald's is not as easily transferable. It is also notable that Hasan's stated dislike of culinary imperialism does not stop him from supporting Kazim's attempt to "colonize" London with his döner kebab shops: "Like McDonald's had done before him, Kazim wanted to colonialize this grey city from his kebab van. He wanted to advance into every shopping street, every corner, every pedestrian area and every intersection, and besiege them with kebab shops" (16).¹⁷ With regard to colonialization, McDonald's thus serves more like a model than a competitor. In their attempt to corner the market, Kazim and Hasan try to learn from and emulate McDonald's strategies. They adapt their food to fit local tastes and economic circumstances, and they adapt corporate transnational business strategies to fit their needs as transnational migrants.

However, this adaptation of transnational business models is not easily accomplished. While Kazim seems impervious to the challenges ahead, Hasan

recognizes that they are fighting against a world player and an economic giant. He tries to pit the courage of youth (“Mut, der versteckt in jeder Zelle auf Einsatz lauerte” “the courage, that was hidden in every cell, waiting to be employed” 16) against Anglo-American rationality and pragmatism. Speaking about his friend Kazim, he states: “But he forgot that he was fighting against a giant like McDonald’s, against a world company, a global player, against a network of Anglo-American rationality and pragmatism” (16).¹⁸ Without delving further into the common blend of American mentality and business practices that defines gigantic companies like McDonald’s, I must stress that food equals big business and, as this short episode illustrates, it has become the playing field for social, cultural, and economic battles in a transnational arena.¹⁹

Hasan’s second job consists of selling food in Ali Bey’s Turkish-Greek supermarket. It is while holding his first job that Hasan finds this job through Ali, an old acquaintance of Kazim. Again the focus of the store’s initial description is the food. Hasan comments on the wide variety of colorful, fresh produce; on the smell of freshly baked pita bread, hummus, and garlic; on the appealing array of pastries, appetizers, and sausages (28-29). The descriptions of these food items, all commonly associated with Mediterranean cuisine, are very vivid and involve a wide variety of senses: vision (emphasis on colors), smell, and touch. These descriptions are obviously employed to capture the imagination, to invoke a longing for faraway places, and to pique the appetite for culinary delights. On Hasan, they have a similar effect. He not only imagines himself transported through time and place towards the warm Mediterranean sun, but he also immediately starts shopping and planning dinner. It is ultimately the food, and specifically his desire to learn how to prepare these delicacies, which leads him to accept temporary employment in Ali Bey’s store (31).

These descriptions of appealing food items, along with their connections to memory and longing, are common literary devices in food novels. The sensuality of food causes it to be a particularly compelling medium for memory.²⁰ Writers of food-centric novels use these descriptions to further the plot as well as to evoke similar memories among their readers. Comparable to the way that shared food provides the framework for social interaction, shared memories, even when not experienced together but only mentioned, allow readers to participate in the protagonist’s attempts to come to terms with his transnational experiences. Readers are drawn into the scene by these passages and are prompted to reflect on their own relationship to food, on their own memories, desires, and longings. Invoking the sense of smell, in addition to praising the colorfulness and freshness of produce, helps readers assess their own arsenal of food references and connect

them to those described in the novel. The author also introduces readers to food items like *sucuk* (a type of garlic sausage) and *pastirma* (air-dried cured beef) with which they might not be familiar, thus invoking curiosity and a desire to learn more about Turkish and Greek cuisine. The text therefore conjures up transnational connections that extend through space and time and that include the readers' world alongside the literary worlds described.

In his third food-related job, Hasan serves coffee, tea, and appetizers (hummus, olives, and feta cheese) to Cypriot immigrants in Cafe Cyprus. Once more, national distinctions are drawn and explained with the help of food items—in this instance, Italian espresso and Turkish coffee. While espresso is associated with the unhealthy need to do everything fast, Turkish coffee is praised for evoking the pleasures of life: “Espresso? *Everything pronto, pronto?* . . . that’s Italy. But a Turkish coffee demands a feeling for time and boundaries. . . . A small Turkish coffee is always for the better moments in life” (50).¹⁷ With the help of Turkish coffee, the old men, Cafe Cyprus’s main customers, become animated and engage in lively discussions. For Hasan, this equates to enjoyment of life: “The coffee and conversations gave them the feeling of enjoying the full power and bliss of life” (50).¹⁸ Shared food and drink provide the framework for social interaction, and for shared attempts to make meaning out of life’s experiences.

The customers of this London cafe, Turkish and Greek Cypriots, passionately discuss politics while drinking tea or coffee and eating Mediterranean delicacies. They literally replay the Cypriot conflict with the help of tea glasses, teaspoons, matches, and ashtrays (50-51). The food utensils are used to draw a map of the conflict and serve to visualize the positions and battle lines. They also point to the connection between global conflict and daily lives. They are reminders of the impact that national and transnational developments have on the lives of average citizens, and of the continued relevance of history on future generations. Many years later, the conflict still influences the lives of people now living far away from the original battle lines.¹⁹ Like any communal trauma, the conflict has become part of the personal and social makeup of Cypriots, whether they live on the island or abroad.²⁰ Through their discussions and food-utensil-based visualizations, the cafe’s patrons try to derive meaning out of their communal experience.²¹

Hasan’s experiences in Cafe Cyprus, along with my earlier discussion of döner and McDonald’s, point to how present and past, personal and communal, and global and local are intertwined. Of course, none of these concepts is as binary as they may at first appear. Roland Robertson, a founder of the cultural globalization theory and the one who has coined the term ‘glocalization,’ reminds us that globalization always involves a process of localization. He argues that global and

local are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, the local must be understood as one aspect of the global: “globalization . . . involves the linking of localities” (35). Food is a perfect example of local manifestations of global influences.²² Food like döner kebab is an amalgam between different cultural backgrounds and, because of its transient nature (it is eaten, after all!), it always has to be recreated anew, which opens up new possibilities for modification and change. Unlike other works of art, food has no permanence; Kara’s text thus uses food references to show the impermanence and modifiability of ascribed identities. Similar to food, identities are influenced by national/cultural heritage and local specificities. None are stable; they are always in flux, and always in need of recreation.

No place exposes the new transnational subjectivities more clearly than the modern city, which also offers its inhabitants the most immediate exposure to new food trends and changes in culinary habits. A city like London is a microcosm of local and global interests, stages, and connections. Both the positive and negative effects of globalization are most visible in the city. In “From Istanbul to Berlin: Stations on the Road to a Transcultural/Translational Literature,” Azade Seyhan contends that the “cosmopolitan city, by its very nature, is not bound by allegiance to the myth of nation, to its imagined unities of language, ethnicity or creed” (154). This observation, I would contend, also applies to food. It is in cities that most new food trends (like döner) are born. The city encourages experimentation and culinary change, as evidenced by both the Turkish-German creation of the Berlin döner and Hasan’s adaptations in London. Culinary traditions mingle and evolve, and new trends, born out of necessity and playfulness, transcend cultural confines.

Through the movements of its protagonist Hasan, *Cafe Cyprus* explores the city and the city’s exposure to new foods. In London, he enjoys his role as a slightly detached observer, traveling through different parts of the city and commenting on what he sees. Different subway stations and his travel on the tube frame the narrative.²³ Ottmar Ette, in *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben (WritingBetweenWorlds)*, invites us to pay special attention to these “translocal movements in which, like in a concave mirror, one can bundle transnational and transcontinental relations (200).²⁴ Hasan’s travel, within London and among different cultural groups, exemplifies this idea of transcultural movement within a local arena. Different groups of people experience different sectors of the city differently and food, like the one customers enjoy in Ali Bey’s Turkish-Greek market and in Cafe Cyprus, is an indicator of these differences. Hasan experiences the city through food, and participates in creating food-based transnational relations. I see these spatial movements across London, and across different cultural groups within the city, as

being of equal importance to his moves between Berlin, Istanbul, and London.

While Hasan is portrayed as an observer of city life, he is also seen as a legitimate representative of Germany—a role quite different from the one he occupied in Berlin, where he was perceived as a Turk. He talks to his new friend Hannah extensively about different neighborhoods in East and West Berlin, and about the search of West German youth for a fleeting East German authenticity: “a kind of Eldorado made in Germany with an East sandman, backyards, attic apartments, a little guy in the traffic light, and red riding hood champagne” (192).²⁵ While these symbols might be unfamiliar to readers outside of Germany, all are icons of life in East Germany. Not surprisingly, a specific brand of champagne functions as a marker of East German identity—in addition to architectural specifics and a character in a popular television show for children. As in *Selam Berlin*, cultural differences between East and West Berlin figure prominently and are used to disrupt the dichotomy between East (as in the Orient) and West that is commonly used to describe Turkish-German agendas. One wonders whether Hasan, despite his repeated insistence in *Selam Berlin* on his being part of Berlin culture, had to leave Germany to be perceived as “German,” to be considered a legitimate and knowledgeable representative of this country. In London, he is certainly seen as the new face of Germany. He is called upon to explain Germany to the British, and it is cultural knowledge, not ethnic heritage, that allows him to do so. In spite of the novel’s setting in London, *Cafe Cyprus* thus engages with a variety of contemporary debates about German culture and politics.²⁶

In *Cafe Cyprus*, Hasan adopts a transnational subjectivity that comprises many different facets, including his Turkish-German background and his new experiences in London. This adoption further develops a foundation that had been laid in Kara’s preceding novel. In reference to *Selam Berlin*, Lyn Marven points out how Hasan’s “German side” can be turned on and off at will. She describes this as “both a strategic move and a stance that allows him to recognize the constructed, willed nature—‘a la turca’—of the other side” (153). According to Marven, Hasan defines his ethnic identity not “by his external appearance or behaviour, but rather through cultural signifiers of food and drink; his oft-expressed love of cooking further undermines received gender norms” (153). She concludes that the text undermines “expectations of ‘authenticity’ of ethnic or gender identity, while at the same time emphasising that these concerns are central to post-*Wende* German-language literature” (167).

While agreeing with Marven that Hasan’s turning on and off his “German side” shows the constructed nature of ethnic identity, I argue that the food references take this playful approach to ethnicity even further. For Marven, the “cultural signifiers

of food and drink” seem to occupy a much more stable role than the one I ascribe to them. I see these cultural signifiers more as an expression of Hasan’s changing and fluctuating identity. Food per se demonstrates the changing, “constructed” nature of identities. As the multiple transformations of the concept and significance of döner kebab in Germany and its migration to London have shown, food is not a stable cultural signifier. The type of food that Hasan cooks frees up notions of fixed cuisines and fixed identities. Similar to the transformations of döner that I have discussed previously, Hasan changes traditional Turkish cuisine according to the requirements of time and place. In one poignant scene, Hasan uses food, and his culinary skills, to seduce Hannah, his new acquaintance and love interest: “Ich wollte sie mit meinen Speisen erobern” (“I wanted to conquer her with my dishes” 196-97).²⁷ In order to do so, he is even willing (and able) to adapt his style of cooking: “Ich musste die türkische Küche dem westlichen Gaumen anpassen” (“I had to adapt Turkish cuisine to the Western palate” 197).²⁸ He uses spicy chili peppers, but modifies the hotness with lemon. Mint is used to tantalize her sense of smell, and Turkish delight because it is soft and sweet (197).

Hasan’s adaptations of Turkish cuisine illuminate his take on food and identities as simultaneously culturally anchored and in flux. This approach exemplifies the concept of “rooted cosmopolitanism,” a term first used by Mitchell Cohen in 1992. Cohen called for “the fashioning of a dialectical concept of *rooted* cosmopolitanism, which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and that rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground” (483).²⁹ This concept of rooted cosmopolitans allows for a continued link to place(s) and the social networks that inhabit that space, and it calls for a sense of historic responsibility. A place provides experiences, resources, and opportunities; cosmopolitan identities, like any other identities, are the product of social relations. Hasan exemplifies this concept of rooted cosmopolitanism, both with regard to his work experiences (all of his opportunities come through interpersonal relationships) and food choices—he adapts recipes, which are informed by a variety of cultural traditions, to local preferences and conditions. While these adaptations could be criticized as a (negative) compromise to the Western palate and/or economic considerations, I do not attach any value judgment to them, but rather regard them as evidence of, and a response to, transnational experiences.

Stuart Hall, a founder of cultural studies, saw cosmopolitanism as “the ability to stand outside of having one’s life written and scripted by any one community” (26). This refusal to have his life determined by allegiance to any cultural group is a defining characteristic of Hasan’s cultural identity and concept of self. In *Café Cyprus*, Hasan embraces his multiple experiences and backgrounds that, for him,

translate into greater flexibility and adaptability. In a conversation with his cousin Leyla, whom he calls Lala, he again uses food metaphors to describe his flexible approach to life's challenges. Comparing himself to an egg, he states:

You know, Lala, I am like this egg. . . . A multi-talent that can do a lot. You can cook with it, fry it, poach it, bake it, mix it, pickle it—it's flexible, and many people don't know how to deal with this. They look for explanations without contradictions. With these they can set up rules, calculate distances, build skyscrapers, but they can't understand human beings. I'm not logical, not one-dimensional, understood? (166)³⁰

Like an egg, Hasan sees himself as flexible, adaptable, and open to new solutions. Later in the novel, he applies this idea of flexibility and adaptability to his whole generation of transnational migrants, whom he credits with changing and advancing society: "wir waren die neuen Berliner, Pariser und Londoner, die . . . alles vorantrieben" ("we were the new Berliners, Parisians, and Londoners who . . . advanced everything" 317). For Hasan, diversity and change have become the new cultural norms, and *Cafe Cyprus* celebrates their potential.

B. Venkat Mani and Elke Segelcke, in "Cosmopolitical and Transnational Interventions in German Studies," point to cosmopolitanism's potential to intervene in social structures and bring about change. They define cosmopolitanism as "a mode of conversations with, a set of obligations to, and a strategy of intervention in a world beyond one's immediate individual and communitarian affiliations" (13). In *Cafe Cyprus*, this strategy of intervention is understood as a generational imperative. Hasan and his friends defy societal expectations and limiting cultural norms: "We were a challenge for these boneheads, because we blew up the borders in their heads. . . . Yes, we were pioneers and border crossers in Europe, and we erased the difference between *placed* and *displaced*" (318).³¹ This challenge to a previous generation of local citizens who, according to Hasan and his friends, are stuck in traditional structures, is clearly coded as positive and worthy of celebration. Even if it necessitates a certain degree of adaptation, as in adapting Turkish food to a Western palate, cultural transformation is seen and presented as a positive notion. It is a challenge posed by a new generation of world citizens that has grown up with widespread transnational migrations of people, goods, and ideas. The reason for their border crossings might not have always been of their own choosing, as the word *displaced* implies, but the implications of their cultural transformations transcend narrow definitions of place and space.

Kara's text visualizes movement and invites readers to reimagine the city as a nexus of transnational relationships. It is a literary rendition of the type of 'ZwischenWeltenSchreiben' (WritingBetweenWorlds) advocated by Ette.³²

According to him, “Literatur ohne festen Wohnsitz” (“literature of no fixed abode” 15) moves between different worlds in a mobile and dynamic space-time configuration.³³ It also opens new spaces, both real and imaginary: “WritingBetweenWorlds . . . opens new transcultural, translingual and transareal movement-rooms, like in transit” (199).³⁴ In Kara’s text, food plays a crucial role in defining these movements and in adding tangible evidence of past, present, and future manifestations of these new transcultural spaces. Today’s migrants do not leave one distinct country (and culture) in order to arrive in a completely different one. The countries of departure and arrival are connected through many nets, and food constitutes one of these nets. The food references in *Cafe Cyprus* elucidate the point that the local and the global are not contradictions: they can indeed coexist and develop in one space.

In Kara’s text, food thus plays a crucial role not only in structuring the text, but also in showing concrete manifestations of transcultural experiences. As the adaptations of döner in London, food memories evoked by Ali Bey’s Mediterranean supermarket, Hasan’s experiences in *Cafe Cyprus*, and his cooking for Hannah have shown, food plays an important role in engaging multiple perspectives and making visible the connections between different parts of society and different cultural backgrounds. It is unsurprising that food occupies such a prominent role because the food we eat takes up residence in, and ultimately forms, our bodies and minds. Changes in food and in eating behavior therefore not only depict, but cause and influence cultural, social, and economic changes in our communities as well. *Cafe Cyprus* elucidates these transcultural changes and experiences.

As shown in my analysis, the food metaphors in *Cafe Cyprus* shed light on the transnational connections within the modern city, and are also employed to describe cultural changes. While many of these changes, especially those connected to the younger generation of transcultural migrants and Hasan’s own experiences, are coded positively, evidence exists of transnationalism’s more negative side. Ali Bey, for example, complains that the West has infiltrated the East via food: “The West has infiltrated our lives and has penetrated our bouillon cubes, wrinkle-free shirts and toffees. They’ve put pig bone marrow in the form of gelatin into marmalade, capsules, yogurts, and even into our kids’ candy” (183).³⁵ This example again shows how food exemplifies transnational changes. One does not need to cross borders to be confronted with different culinary customs and products; as Ali Bey indicates, much food today is sold transnationally. In *Cafe Cyprus*, this type of corporate transnationalism is largely coded negatively. For Muslims, not eating pork constitutes a most fundamental food rule—and though in a transnational world, it is easy to shun eating pork chops or similar fare, the pig bone marrow

from this example stands for all the invisible changes that, at times, are hard to notice and to avoid.³⁶

This essay must conclude with both an end and a beginning. Ali Bey concludes his lament with a call to resistance: “But we will end this. Yes, yes, we will chase them from our food and pull them out of our souls, and leave our traces behind” (183).³⁷ However, in *Cafe Cyprus* this form of resistance to Western customs, lifestyles, and culinary habits appears to be more typical for members of the older generation, while the younger generation is more adept at transforming and adapting culinary and cultural practices. Hasan would agree with Ali Bey, however, when the latter demands that Western traces be replaced by Eastern marks on food and souls. After all, it is not so much the change itself that Kara’s protagonists are resisting, but the one-sidedness of market-driven change (from West to East) that is often miscoded as simply transnational. Even Hasan’s mother seems to champion this call for a more mutually reciprocal change upon remarking: “Now it’s high time that we leave traces here in the West. Döner is just the beginning!” (231).³⁸

Notes

¹ See Çağlar, Möhring (“*Döner Kebab*”), and Seidel-Pielen for a history of döner in Germany.

² The Turkish-German version of döner, with its variety of sauces (including some previously unknown in Turkey), even (re)migrated to Turkey. Another interesting phenomenon is that Turks in Germany can be overheard ordering döner using the Turkish language, adding “mit scharfer Soße” (with spicy sauce) in German.

³ Instead of relying on an overarching theory of transnationalism, I have decided to draw on several different theories (the interplay of the global and the local, the poetics of movement, and rooted cosmopolitanism) to address various aspects of transnational experience in Kara’s novel.

⁴ *Selam Berlin*, for which Kara received the German “Bücherpreis für das beste Debüt” and the “Adelbert-von-Chamisso Förderpreis,” is set in Berlin between the fall of the Wall and unification. It introduces readers to Hasan, the protagonist who spent his childhood in Kreuzberg and his teen years in Istanbul, only to return to Berlin once the Wall opens. There he discovers that his father had a second family in East Berlin. Hasan comments on immediate post-Wall developments from his unique perspectives and, in *Cafe Cyprus*, he similarly makes observations about historical events from, at times, unexpected vantage points.

⁵ “Denn ich wollte nicht seßhaft sein. Der Nomade in mir trieb mich zu neuen Orten, Plätzen, Städten und Straßen.” All translations are mine.

⁶ See Petra Pluwatsch’s interview with Yadé Kara: “Cafe Cyprus” sei ein klassischer Bildungsroman, sagt Yadé Kara. “Ein junger Mensch geht hinaus in die weite Welt, lernt etwas, schafft etwas, entwickelt sich weiter.” (*Cafe Cyprus* is a classic *Bildungsroman*, says Yadé Kara. “A young person goes out into the wide world, learns something, creates something, develops himself?”)

⁷ “Ich hatte den Ton von diesem jungen Mann im Ohr und habe auch keinen Augenblick daran gezweifelt, dass es sich um einen jungen Mann handelt, der die Geschichte erzählt. Deshalb habe ich auch nie daran gedacht, die Perspektive zu ändern.”

⁸ “In dieser Zeit waren meine Gedanken rund, scharf und übersichtlich wie die Zwiebelringe, die ich jedes Wochenende in die Schüsseln schnitt.”

⁹ “Stunden und Minuten vergingen, in denen ich mich wie ein Sack trockener Bulgur fühlte, der, vorgegart, getrocknet und zu grobem Granulat gerieben, jetzt leblos und trocken dalag.”

¹⁰ “Für den Döner hierzulande mussten Berliner Maßstäbe geschaffen werden. . . . In London gab es den Döner in trockenen, blassen Fladen mit großen Zwiebelringen und Weißkohl. Nee, das ging nicht, echt nicht! Wie konnte man den Döner nur so verhunzen? . . . Das war eine Beleidigung für alle Dönerhersteller aus Adana, Antep und Berlin.”

¹¹ It could be argued that the main point of culinary education is not pushing rules and regulations, but rather introducing people to new foods and experiences.

¹² “Mach es wie gute Musiker, die erfinden neue Melodien, die zu Ohrwürmern werden. Erfinde neue Kebabs, neue Soßen, neue Geschmacksmixturen, die süchtig machen.”

¹³ This statement is more poignant in German, because it rhymes: “Döner macht schöner.”

¹⁴ “In Berlin war er *streetfood number one* und eine Antwort auf McDonald’s Imperialisierung und fette Burger und Whooper! “Döner macht schöner.” Im Vergleich zu McDonald’s Burger und Whooper hatte der Berliner Döner mehr Individualität. Schließlich war es allgemein bekannt, dass alle McDonald’s Burger weltweit das gleiche Aussehen, Gewicht, die Zutaten, ja sogar die exakte Höhe und Breite hatten. Kein Wunder, dass viele McDonald’s-Kunden weltweit gleich breit, gleich dick und gleich fett waren.”

¹⁵ For an older text that plays with the concept of döner kebab versus McDonald’s, see Rafik Schami’s short story “Kebab ist Kultur: pro Mahmud contra McDonald’s”. Henderson discusses Schami’s text in “Beyond Currywurst and Döner.” For a more theoretical discussion of the effects and implications of McDonaldization, see Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, as well as Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*.

¹⁶ One of the contradictions of Hasan’s worldview is his complaint about the standardization of McDonald’s, even as he himself attempts to implement Berlin standards for döner kebab in London. However, it would be out of character for a young, impressionable person such as Hasan, if he showed thoroughly grounded and well-formed opinions.

¹⁷ “Kazim wollte, wie McDonald’s es zuvor gemacht hatte, diese trübe Stadt von seinem Kebap Van aus kolonialisieren, also in jede Einkaufsstraße, an jede Ecke, in jede Fußgängerzone und an jede Kreuzung vorstoßen und sie mit Kebab-Shops belagern.”

¹⁸ “Doch er vergaß, daß er gegen einen Giganten wie McDonald’s ankämpfte, gegen ein Weltunternehmen, einen *global player*, gegen ein Netzwerk von angloamerikanischer Rationalität und Pragmatik.”

¹⁹ These aspects have been discussed elsewhere. For a good introduction to this topic, see Ritzer and Barber.

²⁰ See Holtzman’s excellent review of works on food and memory. He specifically discusses nostalgia, the relationship of food to identities, food and sensory memory, and the use of food to stimulate memory.

²¹ The customers also draw parallels between Berlin and Nicosia, both divided cities. The author thus uses the German context, undoubtedly more familiar to German readers, to explain the situation in Cyprus and point to similarities and differences.

²² In her study *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany*, Ruth Mandel shows that, although food is only one aspect in the process of adaptation and transformation, culinary choices also reveal the “multilayered diversity of Turkish German lives” (312) and confront limiting, stereotypical representations.

²³ For a focused reading of *Café Cyprus* that emphasizes the role of the tube, see Roy, “Die U-Bahn als ‘unterirdisches Babel.’”

²⁴ Ette refers to translocal movement within Berlin, but I would argue this also applies to London.

²⁵ “Einer Art Eldorado *made in Germany* mit Ostsandmann, Hinterhöfen, Dachwohnungen, Ampelmännchen, Rotkäppchen Sekt.”

²⁶ Roy’s discussion of the novel (“Yadé Kara”) also focuses on this point.

²⁷ While I agree with Marven on the importance of food and drink to Hasan’s definition of self, I do not think that an expressed love of cooking solely undermines perceived gender norms.

²⁸ For a thorough discussion of ethnic cuisines and adaptation, see Heldke, especially part one (“Let’s Eat Chinese”), which focuses on diners’ experiences in restaurants, and part three (“Let’s Cook Thai”), which examines colonialism through the lens of cookbook writing.

²⁹ See also Rosi Braidotti’s definition of a nomadic subject position, which resembles this concept of rooted cosmopolitanism: “Being a nomadic European subject means being in transit within different identity formations, but, at the same time, being sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility for it” (253).

³⁰ “Weißt du, Lala, ich bin wie dieses Ei. . . . Ein Multitalent, das vieles kann. Zum Kochen, Braten, Pochieren, Überbacken, Untermischen, Einlegen—flexibel einsetzbar, und damit kommen viele nicht zurecht. Sie suchen Erklärungen, die frei von Widersprüchen sind. Damit können sie Regeln aufstellen, Entfernungen berechnen, Wolkenkratzer hochziehen, aber keine Menschen verstehen. Ich bin nicht logisch, nicht eindimensional, kapiert?”

³¹ “Wir waren eine Herausforderung für diese Holzköpfe, denn wir sprengten die Grenzen in ihren Köpfen. . . . Ja, wir waren Pioniere und Grenzgänger in Europa und hoben den Unterschied zwischen *placed* und *displaced* auf.”

³² In *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben*, Ette argues for a poetics of movement and a spatial mode of thinking. He differentiates between a multicultural “Nebeneinander” (next to each other), an intercultural “Miteinander” (with each other), and a transcultural “Springen zwischen den Kulturen, ohne daß sich eine stabile und fixierbare Beziehung zu einer einzigen Kultur oder kulturellen Gruppe ausmachen ließe” (jumping between cultures, without being able to determine a stable and focusable relationship to a single culture or cultural group, 20-21).

³³ I am adopting the English translation of “ohne festen Wohnsitz,” ‘of no fixed abode,’ from Mirjam Gebauer and Pia Schwarz Lausten, who describe today’s authors of “migration literature” as “primarily children of migrants who—utilizing ‘network’ and ‘movement’ as tropes—inscribe themselves in an aesthetics ‘of no fixed abode’ and thus cancel the distinction between a local migration literature and a globalized transnational literature” (6-7).

³⁴ “Zwischen Welten Schreiben . . . eröffnet neue transkulturelle, translinguale und transareale Bewegungs-Räume gleichsam im Transit.”

³⁵ “Aber wir werden dem Ganzen ein Ende machen. Ja ja vertreiben werden wir sie aus unserem Essen und aus unseren Seelen herauszerren und unsere Spuren hinterlassen.”

³⁶ This example also points to the cultural insensitivity and callousness of many large corporations that value profit above all.

³⁷ “Aber wir werden dem Ganzen ein Ende machen. Ja ja vertreiben werden wir sie aus unserem Essen und aus unseren Seelen herauszerren und unsere Spuren hinterlassen.”

³⁸ “Jetzt wird es höchste Zeit, dass wir hier im Westen Spuren hinterlassen. Döner ist nur der Anfang!”

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