Beyond Boundaries?
Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *MutterZunge* and V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* as Creative Processes of Arrival

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As two migrant writers living in 'foreign' environments, Germany and Britain, Emine Sevgi Özdamar and V.S. Naipaul demonstrate a more differentiated self-perception as writers than authors whose cultural and linguistic background is less diverse. The way they deal with the interaction between their old and their new home, between their past and their present, can be described as a constant arrival in a new culture. This article compares notions of arrival in the stories 'Mutter Zunge' and 'Großvater Zunge', of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *MutterZunge* (1990), and in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, particularly in its chapter 'The Journey' (1987). The emphasis lies on their narrators' self-reflection and self-definition as migrant and/or hybrid writers who are trying to establish a voice in a new environment.

The creation of a migrant writer's voice is primarily based on his/her crossing of borders between countries, cultures and languages. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the 'Third Space' provides a theoretical basis for a reading of migrant writers' texts. According to Bhabha (1994b, pp.113-14), hybridity 'is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures […] in a dialectical play of "recognition"'. Hybridity serves as a strategy of overcoming the exclusivity of the dominant discourse whereby migrants are 'free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities' (Bhabha, 1994a, p.38). Bhabha regards hybridity as a form of constant identification rather than identity as such (cf. Bhabha in Rutherford, 1990, p.211). These processes of negotiating and interpreting identities take place in the 'Third Space' of the 'in-between'. This space is a temporal construction which, due to the mingling of the migrant's ethnic background

and cultural presence, is characterized by cultural and linguistic heterogeneity (cf. Bhabha, 1994c, p.148). This heterogeneity enables the migrant writer to develop his/her 'double vision' whereby the migrant's experiences of his/her past and present interact and contribute towards a new kind of creativity (cf. Bhabha, 1994c, pp.152-57; Kreutzer, 2001, p.60). Bhabha derives these ideas from Mikhail Bakhtin's perception of the written work as an open and dynamic dialogue (1981). Each linguistic expression depends on the contexts and positions of the linguistic participants, and the interaction of their varied cultural backgrounds evokes plurality of meaning – of any discourse and thus also of the migrant individual him/herself (cf. Volkmann, 2001, p.41). Bakhtin (1981, p.360) relates this idea to the person of the hybrid who 'is not only double-voiced and double-accented […] but is also double-languaged'. The result is heteroglossia which, on the basis of the migrant's literal as well as metaphorical movements, brings languages together to create the migrant writer's 'double-voice' (Young, 1995, p.23). As Özdamar's and Naipaul's works demonstrate, the 'double-voice', which mediates between cultures, can prevent the 'desolate silences of the wandering people' (Bhabha, 1994c, p.165).

However, there are a number of ways in which writers deal with their situation and their heteroglossia in a 'Third Space'. In the following, I will demonstrate how Özdamar and Naipaul deal with their positions as writers between cultures. I will suggest that, as a German writer of Turkish origin, Özdamar feels more comfortable with her hybrid existence than Naipaul, whose colonial background urges him to conform to a supposed standard of English literature. It prevents him from freely experiencing his hybridity and from writing from within a creative 'Third Space'. I will also trace the different means of how, as part of their arrival process, Özdamar and Naipaul negotiate their identities in relation to their old and new homes, and how they grow into the existence of the culturally diverse writer.

MutterZunge and *The Enigma of Arrival* are two semi-fictitious accounts of a writer's development in a culture that is familiar as well as

foreign. In their texts, both Özdamar and Naipaul create dialogues between their cultural heritage and their new environment as a means of self-exploration. Yet, as I shall demonstrate, Özdamar and Naipaul find themselves as writers in different ways.

Emine Sevgi Özdamar (born in 1946 in Malatya, Kurdistan) has lived in Germany since 1965. In her writing, she undermines the idea of a homogenous German culture and literature by combining 'Western' with 'Oriental' traditions while acknowledging the fact that both traditions cannot exist as something 'pure' (cf. Ahrends, 2000, p.15). By questioning set definitions of what it means to be German, Turkish or a foreigner, she explores her linguistic and cultural roots and 'routes' (cf. Hall, 1996, p.4), and offers linguistic alternatives such as 'Third Spaces' where German and Turkish voices intermingle. In *MutterZunge*, Özdamar tends to create this linguistic exchange 'as a constant "being-on-the-move" […] [between] two cultures, as a "daily *journey*", between here and there' (Weigel, 1992, pp.217-18).[1]

V.S. Naipaul's (born in 1932 in Trinidad) mixed background – he is a Caribbean of Indian descent living in England – determines his approach to literature which is based on 'traditional' ideas about English literature and his eventual return to his Trinidadian roots as writing material. Having grown up in the Indian diaspora, he experienced difficulties regarding his sense of belonging. He recognized the 'drive and restlessness of immigrants' in Trinidadians of Indian descent such as himself (Naipaul, 2003, p.41). This 'drive' is mainly displayed by:

> 'colonized intellectuals' for whom becoming 'English' is the logical progression of their development. […] [Yet] [t]heir definitions [of Englishness] are dated, located in textbooks, poems and literature studied in their colonized 'homeland' (Bald, 1995, p.84).

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[1] My translation: 'als ständiges "Unterwegs-sein" […] [zwischen] zwei Kulturen, als "tägliche *Reise*", zwischen hier und dort' (emphasis in the original).

Naipaul gave up the 'security' of a colonial with fixed ideas about the mother country in order to become a writer, which he thought was only possible outside Trinidad (cf. Naipaul, 1971, p.397). His development into a writer, who turns out to be different from his initial image of what a writer is, is the theme of *The Enigma of Arrival*.

In *MutterZunge*, Özdamar's narrator describes her life as a Turkish woman and writer in Berlin in 1990. Her life has been shaped by frequent migrations; the most recent one, from Turkey to Germany, has completely altered her perception of her mother tongue. Her work is determined by the changing nature of the city – Özdamar lives and works in East Berlin, but frequently travels to West Berlin – as well as by the changing nature of her existence as a creative individual whose life and work depends on language. This flux is already alluded to in the title of her book: the narrator literally translates the Turkish word 'ana*dil'*, meaning 'mother *tongue*', into the non-existing German word 'Mutter*zunge*' rather than the 'correct' word, 'Mutter*sprache*'. She plays with the ambiguity of the word 'dil' ('tongue') which, used in this context in German, can only stand for language ('Sprache') and not, as the narrator suggests, for the part of her body. The narrator observes:

> In meiner Sprache heißt Zunge: Sprache.
> Zunge hat keine Knochen, wohin man sie dreht, dreht sie sich dorthin.
> Ich saß mit meiner gedrehten Zunge in dieser Stadt Berlin.
> ('Mutter Zunge' / MZ, p.9)[2]

By juxtaposing 'language' with 'tongue', Özdamar's narrator draws attention to the Bakhtinian notion of the open dialogue that here takes place between the languages and cultures which are available to her. She knows how to embrace the ambiguous nature of her linguistic environment by continuing to talk about her 'tongue' when meaning 'language', and thus by literally referring to her culturally and linguistically flexible 'tongue'. Yet

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[2] Trans.: 'In my language, "tongue" means "language".
  A tongue has no bones: twist it in any direction and it will turn that way.
  I sat with my twisted tongue in this city, Berlin.' ('Mother Tongue' / MT, p.9)

this flexibility comes at a price: on her journey from Turkey to Germany she seems to have lost her mother tongue, yet she does not know where. She wonders, 'Wenn ich nur wüßte, in welchem Moment ich meine Mutterzunge verloren habe'. ('Mutter Zunge' / MZ, p.11)[3] In order to regain her mother tongue, Turkish, which strongly influences the language of her writing, German, the narrator ventures to migrate back linguistically: she explores the part of her Turkish linguistic origin that she describes as her 'grandfather tongue', Arabic. She also hopes to make creative use of her linguistic journey in order to (re-)define herself as a German-Turkish writer.

The enforced development of the Turkish language in the 1920s gives explanations for Özdamar's narrator's interest in the Arabic language as a means of tracing her identity as a writer. After the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, its first president Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) initiated a number of Westernizing reforms on political, social, legal and cultural levels – such as the abolition of the Arabic script and the introduction of the Latin script in 1927/28 – in order to fulfil the new Turkey's Western ideal of modernization. Having lost this part of her Turkish heritage, the narrator starts to collect Turkish words that are still linked to Arabic – part of her past – and tries to give a renewed meaning to them based on her study of the Arabic language. She describes herself as a 'Wörtersammlerin' ('Mutter Zunge' / MZ, p.48)[4] who connects her 'mother tongue', Turkish, to her 'grandfather tongue', Arabic, in the German context of her working environment.

By deciding to find her roots, her mother tongue, in a foreign country, the narrator gives a specific meaning to her journey to Germany which paradoxically results in the separation from her mother and her 'tongue', as well as in the return to them. Özdamar's narrator gradually develops an understanding for her linguistic background and creates her identity by, for example, comparing Turkish to Arabic, by listening to

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[3] Trans: 'If I only knew when exactly I lost my mother tongue.' ('Mother Tongue' / MT, pp.11-12)
[4] Trans.: 'a word collector' ('Grandfather Tongue' / MT, p.57).

Arabic voices and tales told by her grandmother and by looking for the 'childhood' – the linguistic origin – of words in her mother tongue or bemoaning the lack of it in a foreign language. Her way of returning meaning to her lost identity is closely linked to the re-interpretation of her Turkish culture which she imported into an initially foreign environment and which she tries to trace back via its Arabic influences. It embraces as well as discusses aspects of different cultures and creates a hybrid form of existence:

> Ich habe zu Atatürk-Todestagen schreiend Gedichte gelesen und geweint, aber er hätte die arabische Schrift nicht verbieten müssen. Dieses Verbot ist so, wie wenn die Hälfte von meinem Kopf abgeschnitten ist. Alle Namen von meiner Familie sind arabisch: Fatma, Mustafa, Ali, Samra. Gottseidank [*sic*] ich gehöre noch zu einer Generation, die mit vielen arabischen Wörtern aufgewachsen ist. Ich suchte arabische Wörter, die es noch in türkischer Sprache gibt. ('Großvater Zunge' / MZ, p.29)[5]

Özdamar's narrator's grief at having lost the Arabic language – or rather its script – is a significant part of the (re-)creation of her identity. Arabic is still present as a language that she can listen to, yet she can only find complete access to Arabic as part of her heritage by learning to literally understand this language. This process of going beyond the narrator's immediate Turkish culture adds significance to her background. It also draws attention to the different layers of her identity whose constant re-negotiation emphasizes the open nature of her existence. Özdamar's narrator seems to be able to reveal these layers by dealing with yet another layer of her identity – her position in the culturally even more remote environment, Germany.

In *MutterZunge*, arrival is a creative process rather than something that passively occurs. By closely examining Arabic, the narrator discovers

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[5] Trans.: 'I screamed out poems on the anniversaries of Atatürk's death and wept, but he should not have forbidden the Arabic writing. This ban, it's as though half of my head had been cut off. All the names in [*sic*] my family are Arabic: Fatma, Mustafa, Ali, Samra. Thank God, I still belong to a generation that grew up with a good many Arabic words. I looked for Arabic words, [*sic*] that are still in the Turkish language.' ('Grandfather Tongue' / MT, pp.33-34)

the fluidity within and between languages and comes closer to the Turkish part of her hybrid identity again. She describes this phenomenon as 'migrating words' – words which change on their journey from one language to another and that cannot clearly be separated from their origin after their arrival in the new language.

> *Yetim* – Waise
> 'Ja', sagte: [*sic*] Ibni Abdullah, 'es hört sich ein klein bißchen anders an.'
> Ich sagte: 'Bis diese Wörter aus deinem Land aufgestanden und zu meinem Land gelaufen sind, haben sie sich unterwegs etwas geändert.' ('Großvater Zunge' / MZ, p.29)[6]

As the narrator discovers and describes the link between Turkish and Arabic, she creates a 'Third Space' where these languages meet and where she can grasp the changing nature of Turkish as a result of its contact with Arabic. This space enables her to emphasize the open and ambiguous nature of her existence as a migrant writer and of her writing by developing a 'Third Language' – a language that denies the idea of linguistic purity and incorporates the different roots and 'routes' of the narrator's heterogeneous identity instead. She knows that certain differences are persistent, if constantly changing, and she lives and works with them. This is her way of finding a new kind of creativity and of avoiding the silence of the migrant writer.

V.S. Naipaul's narrator's journey to England represents more than an escape from his home country, Trinidad, in order to become a writer; it is also a journey of education and subsequent self-interpretation. Like a *Bildungsroman*, *The Enigma of Arrival* uses the autobiographical form as a means of self-discovery. The narrator starts to trace himself by reflecting upon his journey from Trinidad to England. This 'route' incorporates the

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[6] Trans.: '*Yetim* – orphan
    "Yes," said Ibni Abdullah, "that sounds a bit like it."
    I said: "When these words rose and travelled from your country to my country, they were somewhat changed on the way."' ('Grandfather Tongue' / MT, p.34)

development of a young man wishing to become a writer. In 'The Journey', he describes how he became a writer:

> [W]riting had come to me slowly. [...] There had been a long preparation for the writing career! And then I discovered that to be a writer was not (as I had imagined) a state – of competence, or achievement, or fame, or content – at which one arrived and where one stayed. There was a special anguish attached to the career: whatever the labour of any piece of writing, whatever its creative challenges and satisfactions, time had always taken me away from it. And, with time passing, I felt mocked by what I had already done; it seemed to belong to a time of vigour, now past for good. ('The Journey' / EA, p.109)

Naipaul's narrator initially creates his reality out of the wish to settle as a writer in England. His version of England implies that the country and the profession of the writer are an ideal: according to him, a writing career is impossible in Trinidad. He blocks his 'double vision' as a migrant who can draw upon more than one tradition. His background and current situation do not interact in a dynamic way as Özdamar's narrator actively demonstrates. Yet Naipaul's narrator also soon feels that something is lacking and he describes this situation as the 'gap between man and writer' ('The Journey' / EA, p.119).

The examination and closing of the 'gap between man and writer' is the prerequisite for the arrival of Naipaul's narrator as a writer in England. The man is closely linked to the colonial education that focused on the mother country. Although strangely abstract, the colonial knowledge gained the status of the only knowledge worth accumulating. Upon his first arrival in England, Naipaul's narrator seems to be the archetypal colonial with the desire to become an English writer. Bhabha (1994a, p.102) points out that 'Naipaul turns his back on the hybrid half-made colonial world to fix his eye on the universal domain of English literature', of which he desperately wants to become part. The man is the one who is attached to this notion, but

in order to become a writer, he has to move away from it and acknowledge the hybrid component of his identity.

Naipaul's narrator initially believes that he arrives in England by learning to 'see', which, for the young writer, means finding 'metropolitan' writing material (cf. e.g. 'The Journey' / EA, pp.164-65). Yet he feels inferior in the face of London, as a metropolis with its 'imperial history and culture', which he contrasts with the 'ridiculous and disorderly existence of the "half-made places in the world"' (Gurnah, 1996, p.7) – the former colonies. The writer rejects the man's past in the 'half-made place' of Trinidad and regards his present place, England, as the only place where he can become a writer. However, 'The Journey' describes a process of disillusionment, which makes the closing of the 'gap between man and writer' possible:

> I witnessed this change in my personality; but, not even aware of it as a theme, wrote nothing of it in my diary. So that between the man writing the diary and the traveller there was already a gap, already a gap between the man and the writer.
>
> Man and writer were the same person. But that is a writer's greatest discovery. It took time – and how much writing! – to arrive at that synthesis.
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> On that day, the first of adventure and freedom and travel and discovery, man and writer were united in their eagerness for experience. But the nature of the experiences of the day encouraged a separation of the two elements in my personality. The writer, or the boy travelling to be a writer, was educated; he had had a formal school education; he had a high idea of the nobility of the calling to which he was travelling to dedicate himself. But the man, of whom the writer was just a part (if a major, impelling part), the man was in the profoundest way – as a social being – untutored. ('The Journey' / EA, pp.119-20)

It is from within this gap that Naipaul's narrator is learning to 'see', which paradoxically is the prerequisite for the closure of this gap and the writer's creativity. The narrator's conclusion that '[m]an and writer were the same person' ('The Journey' / EA, p.119), however, is not made on the same

grounds as when he first arrived in England in 1950. The discovery that the past is physically lost enables Naipaul's narrator to regain it imaginatively as a source of his inspiration. When the past is included in the present as a source of writing, the 'gap between man and writer' closes, and the writer can establish himself; yet the gap between past and present, Trinidad and England, is deliberately maintained in order to supply the writer with sufficient material. His self appears as the accumulation of provisional constructions, which cautiously enter into an open dialogue: the writer constantly arrives anew. He can even create a form of personal 'Third Space', which suggests plurality. Yet the narrator barely acknowledges the open nature of his identity – comprised of the interaction between his past and his present – and, consequently, of his writing. Although he sees constant change, he perceives it as a sequential development rather than as an accumulation of simultaneous phenomena.

Naipaul's narrator reaches a new understanding of himself (cf. Mustafa, 1995, p.168), which is based on his fragmented identity; yet he does not perceive himself as a hybrid individual or define the fragmented nature of his identity in different terms. He explores his abstract familiarity with the colonial image of Britain and his gradual distance from it and his former self. The result is a process of learning how 'to see the world through his eyes' (cf. 'Ivy' / EA, p.266) and the rediscovery of himself as a writer (cf. Hayward, 2002, pp.58-59). On the one hand, the narrator establishes himself as a writer in England, but, on the other hand, as Naipaul states, 'between that and [his] background there was a division, a dissonance' (cited by Hayward, 2002, p.66). This 'dissonance' opens a potential 'Third Space' for Naipaul's narrator; yet, although he is constantly learning and changing, he seems to be unwilling to recognize it as such. *The Enigma of Arrival* examines, yet hardly moves away from the 'division' between 'here' and 'there'. For Naipaul's narrator, the arrival as a writer is an ongoing learning and changing process that might even result in the ultimate creation of a 'Third Space' not yet discovered.

In conclusion, the writer's arrival in a new environment entails a number of complicated processes of self-definition that are based on the dynamic nature of discourse as it is described by Bakhtin. Both Naipaul's and Özdamar's narrators trace their roots in order to be able to find their positions in their new cultures. This self-encounter is determined by self-analysis and self-interpretation that tend to result in the recognition and creative realization of the different cultural influences that shape the self in a space – a possible 'Third Space' between home and foreign. However, the possibility and creation of a 'Third Space' depends on the writers' self-awareness related to their position in their surroundings: Özdamar seems to find a more impartial basis for her creation of a (number of) 'Third Space (s)' in Germany than Naipaul with his colonial background.

Özdamar, who literally lives her heteroglossia, arrives in an international and intercultural space that she, as a writer, constantly questions along with her multinationally and multiculturally constructed identity. In contrast, Naipaul's narrator does not seem to find the right means to create a 'Third Space'. He initially works towards a form of 'Englishness' in his writing that tries to conform to set ideas of what should be written about and of what established literary genres, such as the novel, should be composed. He is handicapped when it comes to inventing an innovative piece of writing at the beginning of his career. However, even if Naipaul tends to deny his position as an 'in-between' writer, his writing is situated between the English literary tradition and his material – his roots and migrant existence – which do not seem to agree with originally Western genres such as the novel. This realization is the beginning of the arrival process which opens new perspectives on the place left behind as well as on the place arrived in.

Naipaul's and Özdamar's narrators' arrivals are both a final destination at the roots of their existence as writers and a continuation of their re-definitions as culturally and linguistically diverse writers. In this sense, their 'routes', which involve the autobiographical analysis of past and

present, truth and fiction, 'here' and 'there', and the analysis of language and culture in a 'Third Space', are fundamentally different. However, the recognition of the dynamic nature of their hybrid existence as migrants and writers have equally shaped and will continue to shape their writing as an open dialogue with themselves.

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