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Literature of immigration as a literature of Europe

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Abstract

Any understanding of European literature that does not include immigrant literature results in an incomplete vision of literature created in Europe. As immigrant writers have sought to find a place for themselves and their writing, the labels attached to that writing have been crucial. While such debates certainly have to do with the writers themselves and how they seek to have their writing read, they also reflect an anxiety in Europe about what counts as European literature and, not incidentally, who counts as European. To examine these issues, this article takes the example of the work of Franco-Turkish writer Sema Kılıçkaya. In contrast to the usual French fear of *communautarisme*, which signals for many the fragmentation of society along ethnic and religious lines, the article argues that Kılıçkaya's writing provides another model for national and European belonging, one that depends, perhaps paradoxically, on sub-national and local belonging – in both the country of origin and the country of settlement.

Keywords

belonging, difference, European identity, European literature, immigration, immigration literature

This article will look at the example of Sema Kılıçkaya's novel *Quatre-vingt-dix-sept* (2015) to argue that despite her immigrant origins and the action of the novel being centred in Turkey, it should nonetheless be considered a French novel, and thus also European. Part of the difficulty in talking about European literature is that we are not quite sure what 'European' might be, let alone what 'literature' might be. The question of literature in general exceeds the scope of this article, but I will take up the idea of a specifically European literature by looking at French literature as a representative subset of

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European literature. If we can define French literature and the role that a literature of immigration plays within that national space, it will also say something about what place might be available for a literature of immigration within the larger European literary space, however that space is defined. Just as any vision of French literature that does not include literature of immigration is incomplete, so is a vision of European literature incomplete that does not include literature of immigration.

In France, literature by immigrants is often shelved on a separate section in bookshops, usually with 'Francophone literature', and as numerous scholars have pointed out, Francophone literature may include just about everything written in French except literature written in France itself (e.g. the contributors to Mudimbe-Boyi, 2009). This system of classification serves to mark out difference based on the biography and geographical location of the author. Work written in French by authors born to non-French parents or born outside France may or may not count as French literature. Not all non-French writers are equally foreign. Thus, for example, work by Belgian author Amélie Northomb is generally shelved along with works by French authors. Work by Algerian author Assia Djebar is generally shelved with Francophone literature, despite the fact that she was a member of the Académie Française, the institution meant to recognize the best of French letters. Works by authors of immigrant backgrounds suffer a similar division between insiders and outsiders. Work by Julian Green, an American born to American parents in France, who lived his entire life in France, is generally considered French literature; he too was a member of the Académie Française. In contrast, the work of Leila Sebbar, born to an Algerian father and a French mother, who has lived her entire adult life in France, is often considered 'Francophone'. At the risk of over-generalizing, it seems that an author born in the West has a better chance of being included in the category of French letters than an author born elsewhere. Arguably, what is behind this problem of classification is a question of belonging. Some origins allow work to be considered French and other origins only allow the work to be considered Francophone.

Thanks to the work of Edward Said, we are aware that Europe has been imagining itself in opposition to an exoticized other for a long time. As Said argues, as long as it is located in other geographies, this exoticized other provides a foil against which Europe can say, 'I'm not that.'

> Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans against all 'those' non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. (Said, 1979: 7)

Said bases his argument on texts of all sorts, ranging from the historical to the administrative to the literary; what links them in his argument is the way they work together to generate a particular understanding of one people by another and to emphasize the differences between them. A great deal of European literary output has taken such a division as its premise or contributed to reinforcing such a division.

In addition to those others 'out there', however, there is the question of a so-called internal other. Writing about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Roberto Dainotto

(2007) argues that Europe's internal other has historically been southern and Mediterranean Europe, understood to be tainted in some way by warmer temperatures or closer association with external others from Africa and the Middle East. Present-day European Union politics still seem to depend on a division between the more prosperous north and a poorer south, as evidenced by discussions concerning Spain and Greece. Apart from the economic difficulties of these southern countries, perception also plays a large role. To take Spain as an example, as Jose F. Colmeiro notes in an article looking at the figure of Carmen, Victor Hugo may have labelled Spain as part of the Orient more than a century ago, but such perceptions persist; in a 1996 survey of EU citizens, more than 20 per cent still perceived Spain as an 'oriental nation' (Colmeiro, 2002: 127).

In the last half-century, however, European countries, both north and south, have also had to cope with the presence of a new internal other – immigrants from the global south – now settled within Europe, which has become home to asylum seekers, refugees, former colonial subjects, immigrants and their descendants. Whatever the difficulties among EU countries, these people with external origins are the internal others that cause the most anxiety for European identity. A look at European newspapers on any given day makes this anxiety clear, as discussions of immigration inevitably include the dehumanizing language of invasion, threat, terrorism and so on. UK Prime Minister David Cameron, for example, spoke of a 'swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean' (Elgot and Taylor, 2015). And former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, currently head of the political party Les Républicains, was widely criticized when he compared the Syrian refugee crisis to a mismanaged plumbing problem (*Le Monde*, 2015). As immigration scholar Ayhan Kaya says regarding Syrian refugees:

> The problematic way we see these human beings is also evident in our everyday language. We tend to couple refugees and migrants with the words such as 'influx', 'occupation', 'invasion', 'flood' and 'flow', which all have similar resonances with natural disasters. By doing that we forget the fact they are human beings escaping tragedies, or trying to find a safer future for themselves and for their families. (Yinanç, 2015)

Lena Kainz puts it succinctly in the title of her blog post, when she writes that 'people can't flood, flow or stream' (2016). She argues that such metaphors inevitably limit a reader's ability to see an immigrant or refugee as a person.

The language of natural disasters is also common in the case of long-term immigrants, who have established themselves in European countries, because there is often little distinction made in public discourse between refugees and permanent residents, or even their citizen children. Academic and journalistic reports are filled with stories of the children and grandchildren of immigrants who are not accepted as full members of the societies in which they were born because their names or appearance mark them as different. Thus members of the so-called second and third generations complain that they are not allowed to live their sense of, for example, Germanness or Frenchness as they feel it, and instead are asked to be representatives of the country of origin of their parents or grandparents. Özlem Gezer, a native of Hamburg and a journalist for *Der Spiegel*, describes her experience of friends, classmates and colleagues expecting her to be a representative of Turkey, a country where she had never lived. As she reports her father once

saying, ‘The Germans have Turkified our children, not us’ (e.g. Gezer, 2013). Clearly, one does not belong to a place simply by feeling that one is a part of it. That sense of belonging must be accepted and reflected back by others in the same space; similarly, literature by a writer of immigrant origin does not become part of French or German literature simply because he or she wills it. It must also be accepted by French or German readers and the publishing industry that provides the books they read.

There is a strong link between this lived experience of exclusion and the literary exclusion with which this article opened. Literature is rarely ‘just’ literature. In this case, the treatment of immigrant literature reflects long-standing anxieties in Europe that not everyone who lives in Europe actually belongs in Europe. As immigrant writers have sought to find a place for themselves and their writing, the labels attached to that writing have been crucial. Is Emine Sevgi Özdamar a Turkish writer in Germany, a Turkish-German writer or a German writer? Is Azouz Begag a French writer, an Algerian writer or a French writer of Algerian origin? While such debates have to do with the writers themselves and how they seek to have their writing read, they also reflect an anxiety in Europe about what counts as European literature – and not incidentally, about who counts as European. Not surprisingly, literary works by immigrants and their descendants often underscore their feelings of rejection and lament the opposition to their claims of belonging in Europe, but this does not necessarily make their writing non-European any more than would be the case for literature written by the otherwise poor and disenfranchised of Europe. Just as an idea of European identity must include relative newcomers, immigrants and their descendants, so should any description of European literatures include immigrant literature.

I recognize that the idea of Europe is a contested one (Nielsen, 2010; Almond, 2014), as is the idea that there might be anything that could accurately be described as European literature, unless it is composed of the individual literatures of European nations. Pascale Casanova, reflecting on a conference on European literature sponsored by the European Science Foundation, rejects the definition of European literature as a ‘juxtaposition of already constituted national literatures’ (2009: 126) and argues instead that European literature should be seen as ‘the story of the rivalries, struggles and power relations between these national literatures’. I would suggest that a literature of immigration is one more voice in the struggles between different literary traditions within Europe. Casanova adds, ‘As a consequence, rather than a unity that remains if not problematic at least far from being achieved, it would no doubt be better to speak of an ongoing literary unification of Europe’ (2009: 121). I agree with her view that European literature is an ongoing process – as is the political project of Europe itself – and that this process is one filled with conflict, but I would argue that, in the present moment, that process is still at a point where European literature is made up of individual national literatures. Not wanting make a claim for a European literature that transcends national borders, I will argue that from the example of immigrant literature in France, we can extrapolate something about the place of immigrant literatures in other parts of Europe.

As noted above, the link between an author’s perceived otherness and her work affects how the work is read and classified, whether as French or Francophone. Reader responses to Sema Kılıçkaya’s work often identify her as a Turkish author. In a French regional television broadcast, *Alsace Matin*, the text that ran across the bottom of the screen read

'Turquie–France: une femme et un livre entre deux cultures' (Servent, 2015). Asked in the same broadcast about where she located her roots, however, Kılıçkaya responded, 'Elles sont partout. Elles sont beaucoup en France que c'est un pays auquel je suis très, très attachée; mais j'ai le cœur qui prend vers le Sud. Mais en tout cas je suis citoyenne du monde' (Servent, 2015). Rather than someone between cultures, her own words position her as someone firmly rooted in France, whatever other emotional pulls she may feel. Kılıçkaya is part of a generation whose parents immigrated to France from Turkey in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Like many others of her generation, she came to France as a small child and completed all of her education in France. While readers and literary critics may classify her writing as Francophone literature (in French, but not French), 'between two cultures', or even Turkish, French law views her individually as French.

Many French citizens with family origins in Turkey refer to themselves as 'Turcs de France' or as 'Franco-Turcs', notably in media outlets such as the newspaper *Zaman France* and the radio station Made in Turkey, as well as in individual Facebook accounts and posts to internet forums. Officially, French law does not recognize hyphenated identities such as Franco-Turk and makes no legal distinction between citizens based on their origins or whether or not someone is a naturalized citizen.[1] Ignoring ethnic and racial differences, however, does not make them disappear and even less so the discrimination based on them. Unofficially, as academic studies have shown (Adida et al., 2010; Beaman, 2012), French citizens who are perceived as having immigrant origins, because of their appearance or name, face greater difficulty in renting an apartment or finding a job than do equally qualified people who are not perceived as having immigrant origins. There is much to be said for recognizing, rather than repressing, difference. But in France, such differentiation, unfortunately, also plays into the hands of the far right, who are fond of talking about who really belongs in France, making arguments about who is more or less French and who more or less belongs – even as they are less fond of recognizing finer distinctions between refugees, undocumented immigrants, legal immigrants and the French-born descendants of immigrants. Importantly, in this context, the discourse of 'belonging' refers both to the sense of affective ties to France and to a moral or legal right to be there. I would argue that the literary discourse of *francophonie*, which creates uneven boundaries for 'French' literature, raises similar stakes when writing about authors from France who may have family origins in other places. In Kılıçkaya's case, it important to read her as a French writer who happens to have parents who emigrated from Turkey.

Kılıçkaya has published three novels to date. The first two follow the lives of one extended family, first in their home city of Antakya in south-eastern Turkey (Kılıçkaya, 2009) and later as they move to France and put down roots there (Kılıçkaya, 2013). Her third novel, *Quatre-vingt-dix-sept* (2015), like the first one, takes place entirely in and around a single Turkish city, in this case Erzincan, but unlike that earlier novel, eventual emigration to France plays no part. Whereas the first two novels take place over the course of several decades beginning in 1938 (Schneider, 2016), this most recent novel is set in recent times, during the Gezi Park protests in the spring of 2013 – although stories from the past do play an important role in the present day of the novel. The Turkish setting for her first and third novels may contribute to the perception of her and her work as Turkish or between cultures, but the theme of diverse societies living together in the first

two novels and the theme of opposition to oppression in the third are certainly not limited to one country.

When authors with family origins outside Europe write about the country of origin, they are often accused by those ‘back home’ of writing to please a Western audience, all the more so if they happen to be successful. Prominent examples include the Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, who received the Prix Goncourt in 1987 for *La Nuit sacrée*, and Turkish writer Elif Şafak, who has won numerous smaller literary awards. Both write about their home countries in experimental ways that critics have said play to European rather than local tastes in literature, emphasizing a stereotypical orientalizing view of the home country (Majid, 1998; Flood, 2014). In the background to these debates is a long tradition of unequal access to writing and publishing that left the disempowered and often colonized East with little opportunity to write its own story in a way that would be heard by the powerful West. Historically, those from the East who ‘made it’ and were successful in the marketplace were those who to some degree or another used Western models. But this also begs the question of who ‘owns’ these models in the current era of globalization where texts and theories circulate widely, at least as far as educational levels and technological infrastructure make possible.

When it comes to immigrants or their children writing about either the country of origin or the country of residence, however, the realities are different, since they are already part of the West, but the discourse about them can remain disturbingly similar. It is tempting therefore to ignore Kılıçkaya’s immigrant roots and to insist on her Frenchness, her French education and her career as a translator between French and English (and not between Turkish and French, which would privilege her family origins). Unlike Ben Jelloun and Şafak, Kılıçkaya is not writing about her home country, but rather about the country of her parents. All of this is certainly true, but in the face of contemporary anti-immigrant rhetoric, ignoring Kılıçkaya’s origins would mean repeating the mistakes of France’s officially colour-blind policy: ignoring it does not make it go away. It would in fact be overly simplistic to say that Kılıçkaya is just another French writer, who happens to write about Turkey. She speaks Turkish and has a more complex understanding of her parents’ culture than someone with no personal connections to the country. Her novels therefore implicitly ask the reader to consider how she can be an immigrant writer and a French writer, how her novels can be part of French letters.

The place of immigrant literature reflects the position of immigration within other discourses in France. As French historian Gérard Noiriel points out, French history has not typically acknowledged much of a role for immigration in creating modern France (Noiriel, 1996), despite the long history of immigration and the large numbers of French citizens whose parents or grandparents were immigrants. Indeed, according to a 2008 study, more than 13 per cent of the adult French population are immigrants themselves and another 13 per cent have at least one parent who is an immigrant (Bouvier, 2012: 19). Noting ‘historians’ silence’ on immigration (1996: xiii), Noiriel argued two decades ago that as well as creating a more accurate picture of French history, including immigration in that history would ‘provide millions of inhabitants of [France] with the *possibility* of legitimately locating their personal history, or that of their family, within the “master narrative” of French national history’ (1996: xxviii, emphasis in original). Work by writers of immigrant origin may resist easy classification, but I would argue that Kılıçkaya

writes the work she does, not in spite of the influence of French culture, but rather because of it. Her first two works, detailing one family's origins in Turkey and eventual settlement in France, present a fairly typical immigrant story, of making a home in a new place. In that sense, Kılıçkaya's first two novels present an eminently French story.

Kılıçkaya's third novel, however, on the surface has nothing to do with France and very little to do with immigration. It takes place entirely in Turkey; France is portrayed as an absence, the place where Alèv's immigrant father lives 11 months a year. The importance of his absence is underscored by his daughter's desire to marry someone who would be 'toujours présent pour ses enfants' (Kılıçkaya 2015: 11). In this novel, France is also a place where marriage with a 'Turc d'Europe' is risky, especially for women: 'C'était une domination exercée par le biais du plus ignominieux des chantages: courber l'échine ou se retrouver à la rue dans un pays dont on ignorait la langue et les coutumes' (Kılıçkaya, 2015: 124). France is thus not a desirable destination for Alèv and her sister, who see it as a place that absorbs family members and puts others in danger. Despite the lack of connection at the level of setting and plot, the novel nonetheless raises questions directly related to life in France: most importantly, the question of how diverse societies can live together, an argument I will return to later in this article.

Rather than an opposition between the country of origin and the country of immigration, as in many immigrant narratives, Kılıçkaya's novel is instead more preoccupied with relations between eastern Turkey and western Turkey. Initially, the novel emphasizes differences between the two places, between the provincial eastern city of Erzincan and the western metropolis of Istanbul. When filmmaker Dink arrives from Istanbul, he is described as an outsider, and he hires a young woman from Erzincan, Alèv, to serve as a guide and go-between with the locals, but when he proposes meeting in a café, she reminds him that customs are different in the east from those in the west: 'Les filles ne vont pas au café. On n'est pas à Istanbul' (Kılıçkaya, 2015: 37). The characters are thus first presented as belonging to the east or west of the country, but their interest in events in both places weakens these seeming initial divisions. While the novel takes place in Erzincan and its surroundings and Alèv and her family are understandably concerned with local events, they also passionately follow events in western Turkey, especially during the Gezi Park protests. Similarly, Dink is concerned as much with events in Erzincan as with those in Istanbul. He comes to Erzincan with the intention of filming a documentary about a massacre that had occurred decades earlier in which 97 Alevi men were killed (hence the title of the novel),[2] but in the middle of filming, he is also drawn back to Istanbul by the protests. In describing events and people in Turkey's west and east, Kılıçkaya does not present a binary opposition so much as a continuum, in which each of the different geographies is connected to the other, represented most notably by the developing love affair between Dink and Alèv.

Further 'east' along this continuum, members of Alèv's family spend part of each summer making the traditional trek to the high plateaux in order to take their flock of sheep to summer pastures: 'Ce départ pour les pâturages s'inscrivait dans la tradition ancestrale' (Kılıçkaya, 2015: 53). At first glance, this might seem to fall squarely within the orientalist logic that places the East permanently in the historic tradition in contrast to the ever advancing and modern West. The action of the novel, including this 'ancestral' tradition, however, is also subject to the passage of time. As the novel opens, Alèv's grandmother for the first

time is too frail to make the trek and Alèv must take her place – but not in the same way. Her participation in this annual event is not presented as a sharp contrast to her 'modern' life in the city of Erzincan with constant access to internet and social media. Instead Kılıçkaya portrays the ongoing connections between the supposedly traditional life of the mountains and the 'modern' life of the city. Alèv continues to be connected to events in Erzincan and Istanbul via her mobile phone, and, physically, she descends from the mountain once a week to take cheese and yogurt to the open-air market in the city. Emotionally and physically, she is connected to both the continuing but changing tradition of her ancestors and to the urban and digitally connected life of her own generation.

The supposed divide between East and West, understood as a divide between the traditional and the modern, is well entrenched in Turkey. Schoolbooks lovingly describe how Turkey's first president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk worked to 'raise' Turkey to the level of European civilization, an effort understood to be most successful in the western part of the country. It was also a project that involved attempts to forcibly assimilate internal others, specifically those who were not Sunni Muslim or who did not speak Turkish. Alèv's uncle recalls physical punishment in elementary school for speaking his native language of Zaza rather than Turkish, a common narrative in oral histories about the period. During the 1938 massacre of Zini Gedigi, the subject of Dink's documentary, 97 men were killed outright, and the surviving women and children were deported to Balıkesir, in the far west of Turkey, where one soldier describes the nation-building project:

> ils se fondront peut-être dans ces terres, et leur culture, et leurs racines et leur idiome qu'on ne veut pas entendre sous le drapeau de la République, tout cela s'anéantira peut-être, se dissoudra avec la pluie, rejoindra les rivières pour aller mourir dans les mers, la Marmara au nord, et l'Egée au sud. (Kılıçkaya, 2015: 49–50)

Discourses ranging from popular television series to government development programmes distinguish the urbanized and more secular western part of the country from the rural and more religiously conservative east, but given the historic cost of such divisions to minority communities in Turkey, it is not surprising that Kılıçkaya's novel does not leave these old divisions unquestioned and instead underlines how such binaries are false. When the novel does make reference to the opposition between tradition and modernity, in which one must be supposedly sacrificed for the other, it does so only to critique them, as when the narrator refers to the decline of the local art of copper engraving, 'repoussé qu'il était dans l'oubli au profit d'une course à la modernité jugée profitable au pays' (2015: 38). Challenging the rhetorical divide between east and west also involves challenging the divide between the modern and the traditional.

Without reducing the novel to a simple allegory, it is nonetheless worth noting the way it emphasizes Alèv's belonging to the eastern city of Erzincan and her lover's belonging to the western city of Istanbul. Novels of national belonging have long used the figure of the romantic couple to advocate a vision of national unity. In a very different context, Doris Sommer, for example, looks at nineteenth-century Latin American novels and notes how 'eroticism and nationalism became figures for each other' (1991: 31). Kılıçkaya's novel is not a novel of national foundation such as those analysed by Sommer, but implicit in Kılıçkaya's narrative is the question of how to join the different parts of a nation that in practice includes stark divisions, true as much in Turkey as in France. Kılıçkaya's work

also demonstrates concern with how the protagonists are, in Sommers' words, 'desiring one another across traditional lines' (1991: 32). Not only are Alèv and Dink from different parts of the country, but she is also Alevi and Kurdish, while he is apparently Sunni and ethnically Turkish,[3] these being important divisions within Turkey, as I will discuss in the following paragraph. The novel only hints at their eventual union and suggests that it, too, will be part of a process, and not a story of happily ever after; their relationship is far from the idealized national union typical of the books discussed by Sommer. An important difference is that, while these novels were part of an optimistic nation-building movement, Kılıçkaya's novel suggests a critique of a nation that, nearly a century after its establishment, still includes deep divides. Critical, but optimistic, it nonetheless maintains the possibility of unity, even if it is one that must be continually renegotiated.

The conflict between East and West runs throughout the narrative, but as in Kılıçkaya's first two books, the most difficult and persistent conflict within this third novel is the one between minority Alevi communities and the dominant Sunni majority within Turkey. When the Turkish Republic was first established in 1923, Alevi Muslims were viewed as outsiders within the borders of the new state. The Treaty of Lausanne guaranteed the protection and religious freedom of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, specifically, Armenians, Jews and Orthodox Greeks, but provided no such protection for members of non-Sunni Muslim minorities or for members of ethnic groups who were Muslim, such as Kurds. The homogenizing and nationalizing tendencies of the new Turkish state provided as little support as legally possible to recognized minorities. For others such as Kurds and Alevis (with much overlap among these groups) with no legal protection, the primary strategy was forced assimilation. The massacre of Zini Gedigi, the subject of Dink's documentary, was one of a few particularly violent episodes, in which the state used killing and deportation in an effort to weaken minority communities.

Kılıçkaya's third book, set in a completely different time and place from her first two, nonetheless repeats concerns of the earlier novels about how an assimilationist national identity can accommodate diverse communities – a concern relevant to France, as well. In her first novel, the author describes the multicultural society of early Republican Turkey, in which Alevis, Jews, Armenians and Greek Orthodox share the city of Antakya. In her second novel, she focuses on the multicultural space of France's high-rise apartment buildings inhabited by immigrant communities. In such novels, the immigrant writer marks out a space for herself as the descendant of people who contributed to their new home. Taken together with her earlier novels, this third novel of Kılıçkaya's suggests that her discussion of diversity and conflict in Turkey is also a discussion of diversity and conflict in France. In addition to providing a kind of mirror, a more distant and safer space outside France in order to examine conflicts between East and West, between insider and outsider, Kılıçkaya's novel also links Turkey and France, demonstrating that both nations, often seen as opposed to each other, have faced similar conflicts. The conflict in Kılıçkaya's novels is not simply one of conflict between East and West, but rather one of conflict between majority and minority communities and of shared rights and responsibilities. Despite, or perhaps because of its history of colonialism, France has had a difficult time incorporating citizens with family origins outside the Hexagon. As in much of Europe, the justification of colonialism and imperialism depended to a large degree on imagining fundamental differences between Europeans and non-Europeans.

If problems of national identity in Turkey invite the reader to reflect on similar problems in France, Kılıçkaya's novel also makes an argument for seeing Turkey, as a whole, as intimately connected to Europe, a connection reflected in family relations. Although Alèv has never been to France, her father has been working there since before her birth, returning each summer to Erzincan. He can abandon neither side of the endless back-and-forth, unable to settle permanently in France and unable to leave France and return permanently to Erzincan. Rather than a sign of instability or non-belonging, however, his movement represents ongoing physical and emotional attachment to and between both spaces. As noted earlier, neither Alèv nor her sister has any intention of moving to Europe; yet both are fully aware of it as a space connected to their own family and home. Second, just as the novel links the geographical and emotional spaces of Turkey and France, it also suggests how difficult it is for highly centralized states like France and Turkey to provide space for difference.

To return to the concerns of literary and civic belonging with which this article began, Kılıçkaya's work exemplifies how a literature of immigration is also a part of French literature, even when on the surface it seems to have little to do with France. What makes this novel and its author part of French letters, in addition to the author's citizenship, is the way in which her novels demonstrate the importance of including minority communities in a national whole without insisting on their total assimilation, whether talking about religious and ethnic minorities or about immigrants. French authors have been writing for centuries about the exotic East as a thinly disguised way of talking about France. That Kılıçkaya also writes about the East, but without exoticizing it, and instead paints a picture of a place that has much in common with France, does not make her work any less French – or less European. Her work indeed reminds us of how closely literary history and other kinds of history are related to each other.

Notes

1. A significant exception to this principle concerned proposals debated in the National Assembly between December 2015 and March 2016 to amend the constitution so that naturalized citizens or bi-nationals could have their citizenship annulled if convicted of a crime related to terrorism. The proposals created enormous polemic in France, and in the end the Assembly and the Senate were unable to agree on a single version of the proposal. President François Hollande closed the debate on 30 March (Vaudano, 2016).
2. The Alevi are members of a Shia sect in Islam, an often persecuted minority in Turkey, making up an estimated 20–25 per cent of the population, although their numbers in official censuses are absorbed within the larger category of 'Muslim'. The name Alevi derives from an adjectival form of the name Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed. It has no etymological connection to Alèv's name, which means 'flame' in Turkish.
3. Dink is an Armenian name but, as he tells Alèv, he is not Armenian. He chose Dink as a nickname in honour of the journalist Hrant Dink, who was assassinated in 2007.

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