‘THE BRIDGE OF THE GOLDEN HORN’:
ISTANBUL, EUROPE AND THE ‘FRACTURED GAZE FROM THE WEST’ IN TURKISH WRITING IN GERMANY

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At the end of Anne Applebaum’s journey Between East and West: Across the Borderlands of Europe (1994), from Kaliningrad on the Baltic through Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Bukovina, Moldova and Transdniestria to Odessa, she crosses the Black Sea, arriving in the Bosphorus at dawn, and is struck by the colour, energy and prosperity after months of ex-socialist brown and grey: ‘Ahead of us gleamed the minarets of Istanbul. I was back in the West.’¹ This exemplifies unusually clearly how meaning and identity are relative and constituted through oppositions. As terms within the discourse by which Europe defines and redefines itself, there are few more complex and revealing examples of these relativities and oppositions and the way in which they shift and are shifted, than those of Turkey and its most famous city. They evoke yet also call into question many of the simplistic (and mutually contradictory) polarities of this defining discourse: East/West,² Asia/Europe, Orient/Occident, Islamic/Christian, religious/secular, fundamentalist/pluralist, backward/developed.

¹ Anne Applebaum, Between East and West: Across the Borderlands of Europe, (London, 1995), 305.
² In the following I use upper-case to denote East and West as real or imputed value-systems, lower-case for the spatial direction of physical movement or of the narrative gaze; obviously the latter may be, perhaps necessarily is, ideologically pre-formed.
Istanbul is usually invoked in Western discourse either as a bridge between East and West or as a quintessentially Oriental city. But Applebaum, by viewing it as part of a bright, affluent capitalist West in contrast to a physically drab and psychologically depressed ex-communist East, locates it, surely with conscious irony, within another, familiar, but very different polarity, that of the Cold War. In Cold War terms, Turkey, NATO’s key south-eastern flank, belonged to ‘Europe’ as defined by the Western powers. Walter Hallstein had, as President of the European Commission at the time of Turkey’s Treaty of Association in 1964, declared emphatically that ‘Turkey is part of Europe’. This same Hallstein gave his name to the West German ‘Doctrine’ of 1955 which, in a microcosm of Western Cold War positions, sought to isolate the GDR by threatening to sever relations with any third state which recognised it. In certain circumstances, Turkey was more Western, more ‘European’, than East Germany.

More typically, though, Turkey has been discursively situated not within, part-within, adjacent or allied to Europe, but outside it and antagonistic to it, sometimes indeed as its defining Other. This can be traced back to the crusades and the Ottoman invasions of central Europe in the early modern period. It links, certainly, with the fantasies of decadent brutality and sensuality which, from the late eighteenth century, European culture projected onto the Orient. That the European Union finally agreed in December 1999 to let Turkey become a candidate for membership only reminds us that Turkey had been waiting since 1964 and had been rejected as recently as December 1997. In many Western minds, Turkey’s NATO membership and eagerness to join the EU are offset by its human rights record and its association – ironic, given twentieth-century Turkey’s secularist course – with an Islam itself crudely equated with fundamentalism. In 1991, for example, the Gulf War re-awoke the

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5 On the resultant strain on Turkish-German relations, and the ammunition it provided for Islamist fundamentalism within Turkey, see Mehmet Ali Birand, ‘Müssen wir ewig draußen bleiben? Wenn Helmut Kohl aus Europa einen Christenclub machen will, droht ein Kampf der Kulturen’, Die Zeit, 2.1.1998, 5.
6 Two important works by Norman Daniel set the West’s anti-Islamic prejudices in their historical contexts: Islam and the West. The Making of an Image (Edinburgh