

From Margins to the Center
Through the Film Lens:
Gender and Turkish-German Cinema

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To My Little Sparrow who left this earth all too untimely.

To My family and Friends.

To My Committee Members.

To all the Others.

Preface

The knowledge that isn't transformed into compassionate wisdom is useless thinking.

Hindu proverb.

I come from the East, the Middle East, from the oral tradition of story telling and record keeping in memory. And I have been living in the West, where most everything is written down, intended for posterity. East might have been East and West West for Kipling, but they have been meeting in continued fluidity in my life and in my work for the past twenty years by necessity of a life as an immigrant.

It was in the silent hiking with my grandmother, up and down the Caucasus Mountains. It was in the voice of my 110-year old great-grandmother, chiming her stories from the potato ditch where she was hiding from the Russians. It was in my mother's poetry. The flowers, the bees, and the honey she made. *Home*. When I think of *home*, I feel and smell her honeycomb. It takes me to the mountains of my foremothers; the shimmering voice of my great-grandmother in particular, whose name was Bedir. "Like the Moon above, I was so beautiful," she would say. The moon was home to many pagan women before Judeo-Christianity and Islam.

Cornfields replaced the pine trees of my mountains. I would go to see *Nutcracker* at the IU Auditorium just to see fake snow flaked pine trees and to pretend, to feel closer to home, through the sensibilities of the Russian music aesthetic. I was here to study art, and soon art would become my home. The immigrant's incipient

rootlessness accentuates his/her need to communicate; art becomes a vital outlet for the ineffable loneliness, the longing for the familiar, the sorrows and the joys of the host space in which one's now forever-mobile body becomes a home-on-foot.

Here in the cornfields, it was nature, the hills of Brown County and the Buddhist temples resting in the woods that were home to me. Parks and temples became my dwelling places, to travel back to the other side, into childhood memories. Memories for the immigrant are keys to the door to a motherland left behind. Memories embody facts and figures, the people we knew and events that occurred; they are about the experiences. Memories are mostly about how we felt then. They are potent with emotions. Emotions are deemed or supposed to be secondary to the rational human. Most often, the law of the rational-Western man collides that of nature, for nature has a law of its own, one that is not concerned with manmade, rational intellect; nature might be altered by humans, but ultimately it will always be humans who yield to nature, or else participate in their own destruction.

Art utilizes the human experience as a whole: the mind, the body, the spirit, the mysterious and the emotions. Emotional intelligence, has been lagging behind the intellect for many centuries, resulting in aggression, violence, war, and death. Art gives us an outlet to try out our emotions in a safe space. Alongside literature and music, it has been the cinematic form that Turkish migrants have most utilized, to render visible and audible their daily existence in Germany, a land and culture very different from the Middle East Mediterranean. And here lies a surprising irony: what

twist of fate that Turks, who had given Jews sanctuary after their expulsion by Christians from Spanish lands, *Al-Andaluse*, regained from Muslims half a millennium ago, would now be the Muslims filling the space left by the Jews after the Holocaust and thus become the new others in this German land.

Mystery, like emotion, is considered feminine, and is not always meant to be known intellectually. For men culturally structured as rational it is thus especially unknowable, its ineffability particularly potent, and those who meet its obscure essence with reason and science may be caused to wonder. Indeed, Albert Einstein expressed this most eloquently: "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science."¹

And emotions *are* at the heart of the matter. Without a healthy development and processing of our feeling, of our sense of life, of our desires and denials, we are forever at odds, in imbalance within ourselves, and thus with each other and in turn with our wider environment, which takes us to the point, even, of its destruction. And yet from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes, the emotions were attributed to women as a pejorative, the less than rational, pertaining to the second sex. This has taken a firm hold in the West after the defeat of the Anatolian Black Sea Amazons; this heralding the lead of the Greeks, and on to Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine,

¹ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, edited by Carl Seelig (New York: Bonzana Books, 1954), 8-11.

who further established the rules of masculinity and femininity in Medieval Europe before Protestantism ejected women from its Church altogether.

Love of woman of the mysterious women turned her both into a Mary the Holy Mother and Magdalene the Damned Whore, one stripped naked of her dignity and the other fully clothed with divine grace. While one is celebrated as a mother, the other is burned at the stake as a witch. Not that men or their culture were really the victors. The 1939 film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* constitutes a prime cinematic example of what emerged as a masculinity in crisis, when a priest in love with a gypsy woman sees her burning at the stake as his only salvation from the stirrings of lustful passion. Significantly, it takes a “lesser” man in love, the Hunchback other, to save her from death.

The three films I focus on here occupy the dichotomous feminine space of prostitutes and mothers, as defined especially through the feminine genre of melodrama. But by putting the drama and emotion at the center, my goal is not to help perpetuate the victim stereotype of women, who is only granted temporary agency and expected to conform to the patriarchal norms at the end of the film. Melodramas, after all, are one of the few genres, next to action heroine and horror films, that give agency to women, however temporarily. Rather, I aim to highlight gender in melodrama as a cinematic framing of the immigrant’s incipient rootlessness, the melodramatic art as a vital expression of and outlet for this

particular form of unbearable loneliness, desperate hope, and longing for the familiar.

From the sorrows and the joys of the host space in which the now forever-mobile body becomes a home-on-foot, to the tales of sex and love on this journey-place in the quest for self and identity, it is the power of the immigrant's existential emotions and the drama that this makes for which informs the cinematic works examined here. The dynamics of angst and loss and movement that accentuate the immigrant's need to communicate through art combined in the three films to produce a melodrama that challenges once again its negative stereotyping.

The structure of this document is that of a story-telling, modeled after a classical cinematic narrative. It is told in three sections via the three films studied as a beginning, middle, and end. The concepts and theories utilized reveal this story as it proceeds, sometimes subtly and sometimes in detail.

Conceptually, this work is informed by the poetry, literature, art, philosophy, and scholarship. Generally, I aim my words and my work to function as those of an activist, artist, scholar, feminist, and journalist. I do come, after all, from the land of the Amazons, the Eastern Black Sea of the Western Caucasus Mountains. I aim to take on the Aeschylus' *Oresteria* no less, which unjustly blamed Trojan war on women! Not just this work in particular, but in my life in general. Because

Aeschylus' blatant opposition to women of power has now become the norm for the practiced misogyny.

Such norms are hard to subvert and difficult to change, sometimes requiring revolutions. And as Goethe once pronounced to Eckermen,² he hated revolutions, for they destroy good as well as bad in order to create anew. From that point of view, the immigrant life itself is a revolution, indiscriminately ending all for a fresh start, and as such, a daily revolution of the emotions. Old is no more, home is left behind, and the Turk must make a new one in Goethe's Germany.

The language of this thesis is developed organically from the totality of my experiences rooted in the land and its medicine, art and its action, in higher education and its feminism. Paying homage, among others, to Rosa Luxemburg, this work references also Barbara Dossey's *Florence Nightingale: Mystic, Visionary, Healer*, Albert Einstein's *World As I see It*, Michael Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystic*, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Table*, Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Rumi's *Masnavi*, John Dewey's *Art as Aesthetic Experience*, James Joyce's *Portrait of a Young Man as an Artist*, David Lean's *Doctor. Jivago*, Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Wendy Behary's *Disarming the Narcissist*, Dogen Zenji's *Zen Buddhism*, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the poetry of Nazim Hikmet, and the life and work of Frida Kahlo, who is celebrated as a feminist artist and a role model for women in general.

² Johann Peter Eckermann, ed. *Words of Goethe: Being the Conversations of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1949), 52-53.

The films I have chosen here were not made by women. They have women at the center, but as within the parenthesis of the melodramatic genre and projecting onto screens men's visions. The works of women filmmakers tend to be sensitive to women's place in society and the dynamics of human relations. And yes, highlighting the female director's work—woman empowered as auteur—does provide needed visibility and celebratory support. Male directors as the “master” artists have a greater prominence and thus wider influence, however; and analyzing the popular, the most visible—here, Fatih Akin in particular, as transnational filmmaker—might be equally useful in outlining and deconstructing stereotypes and trumpeting the new and the subversive and its positive possible future.

Filiz Cicek

From Margins to the Center Through the Film Lens: Gender and Turkish-German
Cinema

This study explores gender roles in Turkish-German Migrant Cinema as created by two directors, Kutlug Ataman and Fatih Akin. Informed by its predecessors, Yilmaz Guney and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who were among the first to explore the marginalization of immigrants in post-War Germany, the current Turkish-German wave of Migrant Cinema explores issues of memory, border crossing, third space, masculinity in crisis, homosexuality, assimilation, integration, and women as the embodiment of the homeland. Utilizing mainly feminist and feminist film theory, along with Marxist and Marxist Feminist theories as well as elements from Queer Cinema, I analyze the depiction of male, female, gay, and lesbian gender roles in three films: *Lola and Billy the Kid* (Ataman), and *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven* (Akin). In contrast to Ataman, who tackles gender and racial stereotypes head-on and places his characters' futures firmly in Germany, Akin creates male and female characters whose quest-to-self journey takes them back to motherland Turkey. Both directors work in the Turkish-German Migrant Cinema context of melodrama, although Akin might be judged the more successful in pushing the boundaries while conforming to the classical conventions of popular movie-making. Taken together, these films provide increased visibility to underrepresented gender categories in the immigrant context while simultaneously catering to the heterosexual gaze and thereby appealing to mainstream audiences.

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Introduction

*What is saved in the cinema when it achieves art is a spontaneous continuity with all mankind. It is not an art of the princes or the bourgeoisie. It is popular and vagrant. In the sky of the cinema, people learn what they might have been and discover what belongs to them apart from their single lives.*³

John Berger

Immigrants from South Asian and Afro-Caribbean nations have been journeying to Britain for over a century now; since WWII, Germany alone has received some seven million non-German residents, the majority of them Turks; and France has become host to an estimated four and a half million immigrants, many from north Africa.⁴ This has been the changing face of mostly white, Christian Europe. As this immigrant and second-/third-generation population grows and becomes more vocal, European Cinema becomes increasingly characterized by multicultural and multi-ethnic themes, reflecting and reproducing the shifting identity of “Europe” and “Europeans.”

These developments have been expressed through many films in recent years made by and focusing on the lives of these immigrants and their descendents, films which have themselves been moving to a cultural center stage and capturing more mainstream audiences, not only in their host countries, but also across the world.

This trend signals an increased visibility, a louder voice, and more social capital for

³ John Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 24.

⁴ Claude Salhani, “Politics and Policies: France versus Immigration,” *UPI*, February 13, 2006, accessed June 10, 2011, http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2006/02/13/Politics-Policies-France-vs-immigration/UPI-58881139836604/#axzz2Cu8WFolo.

the immigrant communities. Indeed, cinema has become a window through which we can gain insight to the dynamics of these communities in Europe, as well as a platform through which the issues of discrimination, assimilation and integration can be tested and voiced.

Despite the manifest relevance of European immigrant films, however, they have received relatively little scholarly attention. In the case of the Turkish-German Cinema, there has been some work done, which is referred to in this thesis, but a closer look is needed. Moreover, taking on board the assessment that “art provides an outlet to portray identity in a manner that moves beyond stereotypes and beyond the label of ‘migrant,’ allowing instead for the portrayal of far more nuanced and realistic expressions of Turkish-German everyday experience,”⁵ this revisiting of Turkish-German Cinema aims not only to understand the way in which these films give visibility to immigrants as underrepresented and marginalized, but also to see how cinema as one of the most powerful transnational creative outlets may help them communicate and thus better the quality of their lives within a global community.

Project Description

This study examines issues around the depiction of gender roles in Turkish-German Migrant Cinema (or, as it is referred to in film theory, “Accented” Cinema). It begins

⁵ Anika Böttcher, Sarah Burford, and Allison Morris, “Beyond Stereotypes How Artists of Turkish Descent Deal with Identity in Germany,” *Humanity in Action*, accessed November 10th, 2012, <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/236-beyond-stereotypes-how-artists-of-turkish-descent-deal-with-identity-in-germany>.

with Yilmaz Guney, a Turkish-Kurdish director, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the German director, who were among the first to explore the lives of European immigrants on film. The human insight and cinematic excellence of these renowned auteurs in showing everyday oppression, as well as the random acts of love and kindness among everyday people in Turkey and in Germany, means that their combined oeuvre continues to be influential. Current Turkish-German Migrant Cinema has been substantially built on the works of Guney and Fassbinder and takes up the issues they raise.

The focus here is on three films: *Lola and Billy the Kid* by Kutlug Ataman, and *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven* by Fatih Akin. The central concern is to question the degree and way in which these films make the “mute” immigrant speak, in the Turkish-German context, with a particular focus on gender, including women and feminism, men and masculinity, and queer, third sex-gender categories of gays, lesbians, and *transse*.⁶

Accented Cinema

According to Hamid Naficy, “[A]ccented filmmakers are the products of ... postcolonial displacement and post modern or late modern scattering.”⁷The wealth

⁶ As such, conventional categories of “immigrant,” “migrant community,” etc., and “gender,” “gay,” etc. are not in themselves problematized. Concern is primarily with the relationships of these two domains within the specific context of the three films (within the general framework of Turkish-Germans and their Migrant Cinema) rather than theoretical challenges posted by the most recent analyses of e.g. population mobility and social space, or, e.g., preferential identities and intersex biologies.

⁷ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

and colonial and cinematic history of Western Europe makes it an obvious center for such artists. With the endings of colonialism and then socialism (communism), many people emigrated to Western Europe to improve their economic and political situations, increasingly boosted by the emerging globalist environment of mobile transnationalism. In the early 60s, these included citizens from Turkey, whose main destination was Germany.

Away from their native land, culture, and language, often little educated and generally required only for menial work, these Middle Eastern Muslims in the industrialized Christian West found themselves unable to integrate into the new culture, certainly not on their own terms, which made them unwilling even to try (from the German host perspective, they refused to be assimilated). And having left their native lands, this meant that they belonged neither to Turkey nor Germany. Betwixt and between, they came to exist in a migrant's "third space," somehow suspended, in flux, with their identities in constant negotiation. Inevitably, this was a defining experience for their art. And thus did their movies emerge from a space outside of the hegemonic cinema—mainstream or art—where they utilized the film aesthetics of their native country combined with the technology of the West to create a form of hybrid films with "accents."

In Germany, the Turkish migrants' German accent came to be known as "*Kanak*"—a derogatory term used to describe immigrants and foreigners. Originally applied to Italians, Greeks, and Spaniards, the term was projected onto and later willfully

embraced by Turks, both the growing second generation and the new arrivals to the increasingly self-confident and vibrant city communities. In so doing, they developed a social movement that came to be known as “*Kanak Attak*.”⁸

In the 1990s, *Kanaken* Turks began to respond from the margins to the mainstream German culture with their music, literature, and films. The films featured a soundtrack of multiple languages and cross-cultural music, moved through various geographies and social contexts, and combined several genres—particularly Turkish *Yeşilçam*, Bollywood, Hollywood, Film Noir and New German Cinema—reflecting the filmmakers “own travels of identity and those of their primary community.”⁹

History and Background: The Mute Immigrant

The Turkish guest workers in Germany prior to the *Kanak Attak* movement were often described by scholars as a mute men and women who were unable, or not permitted, to integrate into German society. In fact, the supposed muteness of these immigrants preceded their diasporic journey and became accentuated in the European context. Until recently, contemporary Turkish-German Cinema has perpetuated this inherent muteness, portraying a received imagination that had fallen behind the new reality—and indeed, the emerging European zeitgeist—and thus mythologizing the silence rather than allowing the immigrant voices to be

⁸ Jens Schneider, “From “Kanak Attack” to “GerKish” Generation: Second Generation Turkish Narratives in German Culture and Politics,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* (IJMS), 11, no.2 (2009): 212-229, accessed August 10, 2012, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001886/188648e.pdf>.

⁹ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 11.

heard.

This cinematic trope of muteness had its roots in the Kemalist heritage of the new republic, when the Turkish government had tried to force filmmakers to create films reflecting the “New Turk,” who was designed to eclipse the “backward Ottoman.”

Inevitably, perhaps, this conceit ignored the actual lives of the average citizen.

As Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy explain, the Western, modernizing direction established for Turkey after WWI by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founding father of the new nation, in fact created a distance between the average Turkish citizen and the state, by “the killing off the imperial past” and “the erasure of the multicultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire.”¹⁰ The new Turkish republic defined its new model man and woman, the New Turk, by his/her cultural distance from the failed and fallen empire. Modern Turks were to embody a social aesthetic defined by its difference from the Ottoman, which was regarded as non-Turkish and backward.

Yet most Turks, especially those who lived in the countryside—who comprised the majority of the population—continued to live according to their folk Islamic traditions as they had done for centuries. Indeed, in respect of the “folk” aspect of this, even the six centuries of Ottoman rule, heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic culture, had not changed things so very much. The Kemalist reforms did not

¹⁰ Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy, “Deep Nation, the National Question and Turkish Cinema Culture,” in *Cinema and Nation*, eds., Mette Hjort and Scott McKenzie (New York, London : Routledge, 2000), 206-7.

either. Thus began the “tradition of discontinuity with the past,”¹¹ according to Robins and Aksoy, which culminated a “state of amnesia imbued in the psyche of the New Turks.”¹²

The “achievement” of the Kemalist reforms in effectively creating a gap between the average citizen and the elitist state, involved the centralizing culture in the form of the state-run radio, television, and later cinema to all promote the ideal new Turkish citizen as (if) an already existing reality. An ongoing conflict between what this Turkish citizen should be and what she or he actually was wrote the subtext to the country’s cultural development. In a sense, the state forced the entire country to (try to) pretend to be more Western and silenced elements that did not go along with this modernizing project. It was thus this ideal(izing) image and the reality it denied that created a whole new “mute” population, the marginalized mass beneath the dominant elites.

The Beginnings of Migrant Cinema

In Germany, Turkish immigrants came face-to-face with the same silencing dilemma that they had grown up with in Turkey, but on a larger scale. If they were not able or willing to adapt to the new Turkish citizen image in their homeland, it was even more difficult to adapt to an even “newer” German one. As a people who had never

¹¹ Robins and Aksoy, “Deep Nation, the National Question and Turkish Cinema Culture,” 206-7.

¹² Ayşe Kadioglu, “The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 1996). Quoted in Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy, “Deep Nation, the National Question and Turkish Cinema Culture,” in *Cinema and Nation*, eds., Mette Hjort and Scott McKenzie, (Routledge, New York and London, 2000), 207.

been colonized, the Turks strongly resisted assimilation, aided and abetted by the German government's own refusal to admit that it had become a country of immigrants.

Germany's "affirmative action" policies during this period funded an "ethnic" theme-based cinema, but the films produced with this money from the German government also (over)emphasized the immigrants' victim status. They failed to go beyond the pre-existing stereotype of the "Muslim Turk from the East," complete with its assumed oppressive male and oppressed female constructions of the Orient, another mythology rooted in a previous century.

Lacking in the new German ethnic cinema, therefore, was any depiction of the immigrant as a modern worker adapting to the exigencies of a modern capitalist society and negotiating existence at the (lower) margins of the host economy and culture. The result, according to Deniz Gokturk, was that German policies like the affirmative action for ethnic cinema which sought to give voice to the "mute" immigrant, instead only produced "well-meaning projects encouraging multiculturalism that, however, often result[ed] in the construction of binary opposition between Turkish Culture and German Culture." ¹³

¹³ Deniz Gokturk, "Turkish Delight-German Fright: Unsettling Oppositions in Transnational Cinema," *Mapping the Margins: Identity Politics and Media*, eds., Deniz Derman and Karen Ross, (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2003), 182.

Gokturk supports this analysis by noting, for example, that “stories of Turkish women being repressed by patriarchal fathers and husbands, of their exclusion from public spaces, or of imprisonment in closed spaces” were common in films dealing with minorities in Germany well into the 1980s.¹⁴ And most Turkish-German films produced between 1970 and the mid-1990s did indeed follow a blueprint of “traditionalist” Turkish stereotypes, including a narrative emphasis on rape, violence, revenge, virtue, honor, honor killings, and women trapped in domestic space (along with the novel theme of immigrant masculinity in crisis, which is pertinent here).

While such issues certainly do exist in the realities of Turkish-German daily life, as in other cultures, the continual portrayal of pitiful, noble victims in these films did little to better the image of the mute Turkish immigrant. On the contrary, they cemented that image and in the process allowed their German audience to temporarily feel a sympathy for this new other, but which was structured around cliché, distortion, and patronage—“a false other,” as we may say, borrowing from Sartre.

Thus, this new version of muteness silenced Turkish immigrants in much the same way as had (and still did) Turkish modernism, and doubly so. Firstly, the new cinematic muteness involved the portrayal of traditional values as backwards, putting the immigrant (like the Ottoman) in an inescapably negative cultural box;

¹⁴ Gokturk, “Turkish Delight-German Fright,” 183.

and secondly, because it misrepresented immigrants with simplistic stereotypes, defining the poor Turkish victims and horrific Turkish perpetrators (like their Ottoman forefathers) in ways far removed from the gray areas of most cross-cultural experience that thus denied the real voices of the real people.

Contemporary Turkish-German Cinema

Two filmmakers have particularly influenced the recent Turkish-German Cinema, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Yilmaz Guney. One of the architects of New German Cinema, which sought to make socially sensitive films, Fassbinder expressed his discontent with postwar Germany through the 1970s in films like *Lola*, *Veronica Voss*, *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*, and *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. His protagonists, moreover, were always women, since whether as Fuhrer, soldier, scientist, intellectual, or politician, German men have failed them.¹⁵

In 1971, unable to substantially impact Western capitalist consumer culture in West Germany with his high art and political activism, Fassbinder had sought to combine his Film Noir New German Cinema aesthetic with Hollywood melodrama sensibilities to reach a wider audience. This he achieved in 1974 with *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*; lit. *Angst Consume Soul*), a bi-racial love story between an older German widow (a cleaning lady) and a young Moroccan man (a guest-worker). Perhaps the film first of its kind to tackle the immigration issue head-on, *Ali/Angst* shows the rejection, hatred, and discrimination the two

¹⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 129-147.

protagonists face, not only from their family and friends as well as total strangers, but also from each other. Yet they are able to overcome all the odds in the end and find a space of understanding and mutual co-existence.

It was similarly in order to reach a wider audience that Guney, Turkey's foremost film director, combined an artistically oriented New Turkish Cinema with a Hollywood oriented popular cinema to express his displeasure with the Turkish military, state and Kurdish Islamic feudal patriarchy. In the 1982 *Trek (Yol)*,¹⁶ Guney tells a realistic yet romantic tale of five Kurdish male prisoners on leave through their relationships with their women. Guney's female protagonists are victimized but his male characters are in turmoil as well, in constant crises with their privileged masculinity.

One of the prisoners, Seyyit, returns home only for his wife, Zine, to confess to adultery (she has taken to prostitution to survive). Seyyit reluctantly marches his wife to her death in a blizzard, as honor demands. His change of mind and desperate efforts to beat life back into her with his belt are futile, and the film ends in the train carriage on the rail journey back to prison, with him breaking down in tears. The woman is killed off, but the man, too, is condemned to live in a mental as well as physical prison. Thus does Guney illustrate the sad truth that the patriarchal power brings not only privilege, but also responsibility, and thus burden.

¹⁶ The film title "*Yol*" is more commonly translated as "The Road" or "The Way," "*Trek*" is my personal preference, admittedly somewhat liberal in translation terms.

Third generation Turkish-German filmmakers with their new “hyphenated” identity, are now successfully combining the cinematic aesthetics and cultural sensitivity of both Fassbinder and Guney and creating a new accented hybrid cinema as a result. Fatih Akin, whose melodramatic films mainly feature women and men of “ghetto aesthetics,”¹⁷ made an artistic and commercial breakthrough with his 2007 film *The Edge of Heaven*, which features a Kurdish-Turkish political activist and a German college student, both “active” female characters, as his main protagonists, albeit temporarily. Before that, the ground had been broken in 1999 by Kutlug Ataman’s *Lola and Billy the Kid*, which deconstructed stereotypes through some of the most marginalized bodies of all, Turkish transvestite sex workers in Berlin, having them stripped of all gender, race, ethnic, religious, and national identities, yet allowing themselves and therefore the viewer to find their humanity.

Sandwiched between these were, for example, Buket Alakus’ 2001 *My Mother* (*Anam*), which also complicates the stock victim/passive female and villain/active male character roles with its depiction of a journey of self-empowerment made by a migrant woman, in sisterhood with other migrant women from different races. Ayse Polat’s *En Garde* (2004) turns the audiences’ gaze away from migrants to a German girl, whose self-discovery and empowerment is largely dependent on a Kurdish-Turkish female asylum seeker.

¹⁷ See Christian Joppke’s discussion on emergence of ghetto aesthetics starting with rap music modelled after US based hip-hop. “Multicultural Integration: From Postnational Membership to Citizenship:Germany” in his *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186-222.

Like Fassbinder and Guney, the third generation migrant filmmakers sample different film genres and music, speak in multiple languages, and display fluid, ever changing identities of race, gender, religion, and nationality. In the light of the profusion of genre forms, Gokturk's recent advocacy of confining production just to situation comedies and Hollywood-type escapist films in order to avoid the immigrant's perpetual passive victim status becomes unnecessarily limited.¹⁸ Even though recent comedies such as *Kebab Connection* and *Supersex* provide much needed comic relief, a variety of genres are needed to express and address the diverse and complex experiences and issues immigrants face daily.

The current Migrant Cinema is multinational, multi-layered and multi-lingual and as such explores a range of issues around identity, belonging, and movement. Increasingly popular among international audiences, especially those to whom they talk most directly, Germans and Turks and the hyphenated, the films studied here focus on, among other issues, mobile bodies, shifting identities, masculinity in crisis, homosexuality, and women as the embodiment of homeland.

Utilizing feminist film theory in particular, as well as Marxist and queer approaches, my analysis here concentrates on the depiction of male/female and gay/lesbian gender roles in three films: Ataman's *Lola* and Akin's *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*. In contrast to *Lola and Billy the Kid*, Akin's films succeed in pushing the boundaries while conforming to the conventions of popular cinema. As such, these

¹⁸ Gokturk, "Turkish Delight-German Fright," 190.

films provide increased visibility to the underrepresented while catering to the heterosexual gaze, thereby appealing to mainstream audiences.

The recent wave of Turkish-German Migrant Cinema comprises independently funded films that increasingly speak from the margins to center. Their success at international film festivals and their small but growing popularity with international audiences signals the pioneering influence that they are now having on Transnational Cinema today, in which geographical borders are erased and replaced by virtual communities. In fact, we might go ahead and agree with Fatih Akin that with his films he is now speaking “from center to the margins.”¹⁹

Research Questions and Themes

This study treats film as an art form that at times functions as a social medium. The main focus of the study is to analyze the depiction of male, female, gay, and lesbian gender roles in three films by two directors: *Lola and Billy the Kid* directed by Kutlug Ataman, and *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*, directed by Fatih Akin. These films are selected as representative and key moments in the development of the Turkish-German Cinema.²⁰

¹⁹ Peter Keough, “Fatih Akin interview,” *Outside of the Frame*, August 19, 2010, Accessed June 12, 2012, <http://blog.thephoenix.com/BLOGS/outsidetheframe/archive/2010/08/19/fatih-akin-interview-part-2.aspx>.

²⁰ There is, therefore, no effort made to place them in the context of, e.g. Migrant Cinema generally, or the new German Cinema (in the case of Akin) in particular, other than by way of introduction.

The fundamental issue is that of how these “immigrant films” represent the Turkish-German experience, after four decades of residence, in relation to gender.

Specifically, the following main research question informs this work:

A. How do these films help perpetuate and/or deconstruct gender stereotypes that are identified with the immigrant community? In particular, how are the gay, lesbian, male-female, Madonna/whore complex and motherhood archetypes that flow from gender stereotypes invoked and utilized? Does this help to create or retard new gender identities?

I also will explore the following sub-questions which are informed by the above:

B.1. How are the incipient migrant themes/constructs of (geo-socio-cultural) place and movement invoked, utilized and developed? How are the similarities and differences between parallel cultures, Turks who live in Germany and the host population in Germany, depicted? How does that depiction reflect the everyday realities of the immigrants?

These “How?” questions operate at two levels. First, they are asked in the sense of content: what exactly is presented and perpetuated/deconstructed, in which historical contexts? Second, they refer to method: which cinematic histories are developed and genres employed for this?

Other concerns and themes are represented by the following questions:

B. 2 How do the various backgrounds of the filmmakers and actors contribute to the construction of gender roles and structure of the films and their reception?

B. 3. Do the films make immigrants more visible to the mainstream audience, and if so, how? Does that visibility translate into cultural and social acceptance, especially for women, gay men and lesbians?

B. 4. Do the directors utilize film as a social engineering device in re-defining and shaping their portrayal of migrant identities, spaces and mobile bodies, both in the “home” and “host” countries?

Theoretical Framework

The cinema is a privileged place for an examination of the themes mentioned because of its use of a mix of political, economic, cultural, religious, and ethnic and gender codes. It can function as a social engineering tool, whether intended or otherwise. This thesis relies largely on feminist film theory and utilizes textual analysis and psychoanalysis in order to attempt to address the research questions.

With regard to the social and cultural setting of Turkish immigrants in Germany, I use Deniz Gokturk and Ayse Caglar’s work as reference points. Gokturk’s essays on Transnational Cinema and Turkish-German Cinema in particular underline the failure of the practice of government-subsidized filmmaking in Germany. Caglar’s works give us some insight into the dynamics parallel societies in Germany and aspirations of social mobility of Turks, which cannot be achieved by money alone.

In terms of a gender analysis of some archetypal film characters, motifs and

suchlike, I draw from a wide range of film theory, gender and media studies, feminism, feminist film theory, new queer theory, Marxism, and Marxist Feminism. I rely for this on the works of Michele Aaron, Charlotte Ashton, Judith Butler, Carol Clover, Andrea Weiss, and Linda Williams among others. Most particularly, I am guided by articles, chapters and books by Laura Mulvey and Ann Kaplan; Ana Lopez, Osman Sezgi, and Nezih Erdogan; Roy Armes, and Hommi Bhabha.

While Butler shifts our collective hegemonic view of gender, contending it as a socially constructed performance, rather than a biological given, Mulvey's groundbreaking psychoanalytical essay, "Visual Pleasures in Narrative Cinema,"²¹ establishes ways in which traditional, namely heterosexual male and female archetypes are portrayed in Hollywood cinema. According to Mulvey, active-male characters, who further the narrative and with whom the audience identifies, are contrasted with females, who are passive characters serving as spectacle in moments of erotic contemplation in order to defuse the castration anxiety of the male spectator.

Granted, there will be many dissimilarities due to cultural differences, as others have commented in critiquing Mulvey, as well as differences between America (from which context Mulvey writes) and Europe in the cinematic practices that inform film making (insofar as these can be generalized). Nevertheless, I would argue, Mulvey's

²¹ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

approach is still applicable in terms of developing a basic framework for deciphering the function of gender roles and codes in these films.

Kaplan's work on melodramas,²² which builds on Mulvey, facilitates an examination and understanding of the many claustrophobic/melodramatic scenes of "domestic" spaces, which are characteristically used as a cinematic tool in Turkish-German films. Additionally Fatih Ozguven's²³ examination of gender roles in Turkish melodramas and Nezih Erdogan's²⁴ essay on the hybrid nature of Yesilcam Turkish Cinema, which borrows heavily from Hollywood, offer further insights. Roy Armes'²⁵ take on Third World Cinema, in particular on director Yilmaz Guney, is used to assist the deconstruction of the issue of masculinity in Turkish films, as in an ongoing crisis with itself and with the Turkish state and the Islamic tradition.

Ana Lopez' focus on the Madonna/whore archetypes in Mexican Cinema, which is applicable also to Western Cinema generally and to Turkish Cinema, helps us to

²² E. Ann Kaplan, "Mothering Feminism and Representation: The Maternal Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-1940," *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Film*, ed., Christine Gledhill (London: The British Film Institute, 1987), 223-34.

²³ Fatih Ozguven, "Male and Female in *Yesilcam*: Archetypes Endorsed by Mutual Agreement of Audience and Player," in *Turkish Cinema: An Introduction*, Christine Woodhead ed., (London: University of London SOAS Turkish Area Study Group Publications, 1989), 35-41.

²⁴ Nezih Erdogan, "Powerless Signs: Hybridity and the Logic of Excess of Turkish Trash," in *Meditated Identities*, in *Mapping the Margins: Identity Politics and the Media*, Deniz Derman and Karen Ross eds., (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003), 163-176.

Nezih Erdogan. "Mute Bodies, Disembodied Voices: Notes on Sound in Turkish Popular Cinema," *Screen*, 43-3 (2002): 233-249.

Nezih Erdogan, "Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in Turkish Melodrama between 1965 and 1975," *Screen* 39-3 (Autumn 1998): 259-271.

²⁵ Roy Armes, *Third World Filmmaking and the West* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987).

further understand the masculinity in crises.²⁶ Linda Williams and Carol Clover go a few steps further and explore the excess in melodrama and slasher films and our reactions to the films as an audience. Williams contends that like “porn” and “comedy,” the “excess” in “melodrama” creates an outlet for emotional indulgence and much needed escapist venting for the viewer.²⁷ Clover goes into detail as in why the “choice of weapon” in the slasher genre is not a gun but a phallic knife, and how “the terrible place” functions as the negative womb for the male killer in crisis. She goes on to explain how, unlike the other more sexually active females who die early on in the film, the main hero(ine), aka “final girl”, manages to survive due to her asexual and androgynous characteristics.²⁸

These analyses will inform the reading of the films here, as well as those of the later works of Weiss, Ashton and Innes’ on gay and lesbian visibility in film and TV. As Weiss aptly points out in his article, “A Queer Feeling When I look at You”: Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s,” the “mannish maiden” in Hollywood wasn’t always unattractive; reading in-between the lines, the gay and lesbian audiences could render an alternative, even oppositional interpretation of the narratives in films such as *Queen Christina* and *Morocco*, even while mainstream audiences are charmed by Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich as archetypal

²⁶ Ana M. Lopez, “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema,” in *Femnism and Film*, ed., A. Ann Kaplan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 505-520.

²⁷ Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed., Nick Browne (California: University of California Press, 1998): 42-88.

²⁸ Carol Clover, “Her Body, Himself: Gender in Slasher Film,” in *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 20-65.

females.²⁹ Similarly, in the late 90s, as explained by Ashton³⁰ and Innes,³¹ while the cinematic visibility of and for lesbians in particular was to increase, this was still facilitated through a lingering phallogentric male gaze clinging to its traditional, hegemonic (heterosexual) version of lesbian erotica.

Marxism is also visited here through Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, outlining the early tensions between the suffragettes and the proletariat. Suffragettes as described by Luxemburg were privileged bourgeois women dividing and therefore weakening the revolutionary effort of the proletariat.³² Luxemburg believed that women would achieve equality through communism,³³ which proved to be false, due to in part to Marxism's failure to provide a clear ideology for women's issues.

MacKinnon³⁴ and Ghorashi's³⁵ work on femininity and feminism—or lack thereof—in the early 20th century leftist movements in the West and in late 1970s Iran, also yield valuable insights. The asexual comrades in arms archetype both empowers the woman while at the same time disempowers her by still ascribing her the role of the traditional female.

²⁹ Andrea Weiss, "A Queer Feeling When I Look at You: Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s," in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice R Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 239-40.

³⁰ Charlotte Ashton, "Getting Hold of the Phallus: 'Post-Lesbian' Power Negotiations," in *Assaults on Convention: Essays on Lesbian Transgressors (Women on women)*, eds., Nicola Godwin, Belinda Hollows, and Sheridan Nye (London: Cassell, 1996): 158-177.

³¹ Sherrie Innes, *The Lesbian Mennace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1997), 65-66.

³² Rosa Luxemburg, "Women Suffragettes and the Class Struggle," <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1912/05/12.htm>

³³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto: a modern edition*, ed., E. J. Hobsbawm (London, New York: Verso. 1998 [1848]), Section 1.

³⁴ Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," in *Signs*, 7-3 (1982): 515-544.

³⁵ Halleh Ghorashi, "From Marxist Organizations to Feminism: Iranian Women's Experiences of Revolution and Exile," *Journal for Study of Religions and Ideology* 2, no. 6 (2003): 89-107.

A further perspective that I will use is Edward Said's revolutionary work on Orientalism, which exposes the exploitative Western colonial gaze as it constructs of the Middle East and its peoples as mysterious and dangerous others.³⁶ Said contends that, starting with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, through scientific surveys, literature and visual arts, the West has been "producing" perceptions of the Orient as "objective knowledge." This Western construction of the Middle East and its "lesser breed"³⁷ continues to be perpetuated by Hollywood Cinema. One of the important consequences of exposure to this is the internalization of Orientalism by the Middle Easterners themselves, which extends to include Turks living in Germany (the sub-text for Orientalism, of course, being the religious history of Christianity's relationship with Islam).

Said's thoughts on the intellectual as the postmodern nomad³⁸ is also highly relevant to the films discussed here, along with its extension through Dick Pels' work on the 20th century academic scholar. Taken together, these essentially comprise the notion of a contemporary form of the nomad as culturally privileged and adept, with a mobile self adapting to any location, always on the go and shifting identities from one land to another, from person to place to space.³⁹ The postmodern nomad conception has obviously strong links to notions of identity, society and culture in

³⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pantheon Books, London, 1995).

³⁷ *Edward Said: On Orientalism*, DVD, director, Sut Jhally, producers, Sut Jhally and Sanjay Talreja, USA, 1998.

³⁸ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 53.

³⁹ Dick Pels, "Privileged Nomads, On the Strangeness of Intellectuals and the Intellectuality of Strangers," in *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 63-86.

respect of migration. In this context, I also include Hommi Bhabha's work on diaspora,⁴⁰ which views home as a mobile concept and immigrants as existing in a "third space." This is employed to gain a clearer understanding of the everyday "reality" of Turkish Germans and the Turkish immigrant community in Germany.

Lastly, I cannot fail to include the psychological and social approach of Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault to the individual and his/her existence within the collective. Freud goes inwards, deeply into the human psyche in explaining patterns of human behavior: those relating to the sexual and maternal in particular are utilized here.⁴¹ Foucault's archeology explores the history of human sexuality, in its' homogenization and social categorization of human sexual behaviors, resulting in both empowerment and simultaneous oppression of the individual, and the individual's response to it. These theorists become quite relevant when looking at the role gender plays in the Turkish migrant community living as a parallel society to that of the dominant and defining German mainstream.⁴²

Methodology

In the early years of television criticism, when social scientists failed to decipher clear-cut "effects" of TV on the viewer, the focus shifted from what the media does to

⁴⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 53-56, 143, 311-316.
Jonathan Rutherford, *Interview with Homi Bhabha*, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207-21.

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, XVII-1917-1919* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 217-256.

⁴² Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 135-159.

its viewers to what the audience does with the media.⁴³ However, since this “uses and gratification” method discards the “effects” of (traditional, i.e. non-“interactive”) media on the viewer, the dynamic between the (media) message and the viewer has remained a gray area to be deciphered at large.⁴⁴ We now understand the power to produce meaning as lying in between the two, in the active engagement of the both media and viewer as argued by John Fiske, Stuart Hall and David Morley.⁴⁵ Through contextual analyses of specific scenes and dialogues, I therefore look at how gender roles are constructed using the theories of gender and media studies assuming this overall approach.

Data Sources

The data sources—other than the three films themselves, of course, consist of one-on-one interviews, interviews with filmmakers, and archived films.

1. One-on-One interviews: I talked informally with individuals from many walks of life about their film viewing habits, reactions and thoughts about the Turkish-German films that they had seen. Interviews were conducted in mainly Turkish and English. No identifying data were collected or formal records kept.

⁴³ Elihu Katz, “Mass Communications Research and the Study of Popular Culture: An Editorial Note on a Possible Future for this Journal,” *Studies in Public Communication*, 1959, 2, 1-6

⁴⁴ Katz quoted in Justin Lewis, “The TV Audience,” in *The Ideological Octopus: An Exploration of Television and Its Audience* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 13.

⁴⁵ Fiske, Hall, and Morley in Justin Lewis, “New Audience Research,” in his *The Ideological Octopus*, 45-71.

2. Interviews with filmmakers: I conducted interviews with third generation German-Turkish filmmakers, actors and actresses. In addition to Fatih Akin, (*Gegen Die Wand/Head-On*, 2004 and *(Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven*, 2007), these included Sinan Akkus (*Sevda heißt Liebe/Sevda Means Love*, 2000), Ayse Polat (*En Garde*, 2004), Nursel Kose, (*Anam/My Mother*, 2005 and *(Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven*, 2007), Birol Uner (*Anam/My Mother* 2005, *Gegen Die Wand/Head-On*, 2004 and *Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven*, 2007), (Anna Soul (*Kebab Connection*, 2005), Rolf Schübel (*Zeit der Wünsche/Wishing Tree* 2005), and Mustafa Dok (*The Village*, 2008).
3. Viewing films in Film Archives: In order to access some of the earlier Turkish-German films under study and which are only available in Germany, I have visited The Goethe Institute and the Filmmuseum Berlin - Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, and the Filmmuseum München and Deutsches Film-Institut – DIF in Frankfurt.

Contribution

It was not until the 1990's that the third generation of Turkish-German migrants began to talk back from the margins of the society to the center.⁴⁶ Cinema in

⁴⁶ Scholars often draw parallels between Black in America and Turks in Germany as the marginalized oppressed group of peoples. Women being often at the edge of the oppressed's margins. See bell hooks about Black females experiences America as oppressed marginalized group of people. hooks writes, "Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked from both the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center." In her *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press. 2000), xvi.

particular became a window through they could express themselves. Presently, the Migrant filmmakers are uniquely situated. Like their European contemporaries, their work has provided an increased visibility to the otherwise underrepresented migrants both in Germany and in Europe at large. Their ability to sample various genres, musical forms, and speak multiple languages, and their movement across various borders puts them at the forefront of Transnational Cinema.

The particular sub-genre of Turkish-German Migrant Cinema can also offer interesting insights and emotional comprehension that can contribute to a conversation of some urgency. Recognizing the impact of the growing number of immigrants during the 1990s, the European Union set about developing a programmed response for cultural integration. In 2000, Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou and Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Antonio Vittorino gave this warning:

[U]nless more effective policies are developed to welcome the migrants the EU needs, the immigrants will not be able to fulfill their potential nor make their full contribution to economic development. This means that the EU must not only do better to ensure their full participation into the labor market, but also in social, cultural and civic life.⁴⁷ However, as recent developments in France (the ban on the veil), in the Netherlands (the murder of Theo Van Gogh), in Switzerland (the banning of new minarets), and in Denmark (the cartoon controversy) show, different approaches to inform constructive cultural programs are desperately needed. And in the quickened atmosphere of terrorist radicalism and fascist reaction and all the fanaticism and phobia around the looming phantom of the clash of civilizations, film can be one of these. The Turkish-German Migrant Cinema may be uniquely placed to make such a contribution.

⁴⁷ "Integration of Third-country Nationals," The European Commission, February 21, 2006, accessed January 28, 2009, http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/fsj/immigration/integration/fsj_immigration_integration_en.htm.

Chapter I

Edges of Margins: Lola and Billy the Kid

“Lola and Billy the Kid” (*Lola und Bilidikid*)

Director: Kutlug Ataman

Production Year: 1999

Country: Germany

Plot Summary

17 year-old Murat with a budding homosexuality is living in Berlin with his Turkish mother and brother Osman, who functions as the patriarch of the family in the absence of his dead father. Pinning their family's hopes on his younger brother Murat for their future, Osman is eager that Murat to grow up to be an educated, successful Turkish man. In his eagerness to help shape his younger brother, Osman closely monitors Murat, even taking him to a prostitute to ensure his manliness (i.e. heterosexual gender). There is a good reason for this act from Osman's perspective. As Murat will later learn, there is a third sibling, a middle brother Lola, who has been disowned by the family after coming out as homosexual.

One day, Murat wanders into a gay-friendly bar in Kreuzberg Street where Lola happens to work as a *transse*-performer in a *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) dance group. The two brothers are happy to find one another, and soon Lola wants to take Murat under his/her wings. Murat asks his mother about Lola, and she explains the

family's troubled relationship with Lola, and how Murat was planned as the replacement for Lola. She gives Murat comes across Lola's red wig which he had worn when he came out to family, but when he puts it on the wig Osman becomes enraged. They argue bitterly causing Murat to leave the family home and begin working for a German woman at a hotdog stand, who now also functions as his surrogate mother.

Lola, meanwhile, encouraged and pressed by her boyfriend Bilidikid, comes home to ask for his/her share of the family estate. Osman angrily refuses and tells her/him to never to show her/his face to the family again. Soon after, Lola is found dead in the canal. Following Lola's funeral, Bilidikid convinces Murat to help him take on the neo-Nazis who had been taunting Lola. The confrontation turns bloody and proves deadly for Bili and for Rudy, the leader of the neo-Nazis. It is with one of them, Walter, who is also a fellow schoolmate, that Murat had had a brief sexual encounter; and thus Murat learns that it was not, in fact, the neo-Nazis who killed Lola. Murat then confronts Osman about his homosexual tendencies and questions him about Lola's death: it was Osman who killed Lola. On learning this, Murat's mother leaves the house in protest, disappearing into the German streets.

Running alongside this as a secondary plot line, Iskender, a sex-worker with Turkish origin, falls in love with Frederich, an East Berliner of aristocratic background. Fredric's mother Ute at first opposes the relationship because of Iskender's racial, class, and gender background, worried that her son will not produce an heir and

that the foreigner will inherit the family estate. Similarly, Iskender is not too thrilled with the prospect of a German mother-in-law, but in time the two come to accept each other, and develop a growing affection.

Web-link to film trailer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMnCfBd2YHY>

Freedom is always the freedom of the one who thinks differently.

Rosa Luxemburg ⁴⁸

Ataman rehumanizes the other in *Lola and Bilidikid* by directly tackling racial and Gender stereotypes. He does so by juxtaposing archetypes of Turkish and Germans, fascist and communist, straights and homosexuals, bluecolor/gastarbeiter (guestworker) and aristocracy. Characters and their stories are placed in socio-historical context by with contemporary events, reminding the viewer that coexistence is possible, and in fact is a must if we are to avoid the mistakes of our forefathers, the darker pages of our collective twentieth-century history, both German and Turkish. This is especially true when it comes to race, gender and sexuality. With more engagement and better communication, and embrace of difference and diversity, forming loving and compassionate human social relationships is possible, not only between Germans and Turks, but also among Turks themselves. On this assumption, implicit in Ataman's work, the migrant does not need to go back to his/her native land to reclaim his/her humanity. Home is now where they are, in Germany, where they live, where the new generation is being born, and where they die, in the present tense. As such, Ataman adheres to Guney and Fassbinder's aspirations of social engineering through the use of Cinema.

⁴⁸Rosa Luxemburg, "The Problem of Dictatorship" in *The Russian Revolution*, by Luxemburg, (Workers Age Publishers New York, 1940), trans. Bertram Wolfe, in marxist.org, accessed July 2, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch06.htm>.

Socially Sensitive Cinema

Does cinema have a responsibility to speak for the masses? Is it the duty of cinema to tackle social, political, and religious issues or should it focus on art making and providing entertainment? Straddling this tripartite division of conscience and the commissar (from social engineering to fascist propaganda), entertainment (democratic escapism and capitalist production), and art (the audio-visual dynamic and its perceptual aesthetic), through which notions of what cinema is and what it does may be structured, flourishes a wide spectrum of genres created by *artists*, teams, and institutions, by independent, for-profit, and state production companies alike. The *different* reality of the migrant has led to the development of yet another, the genre of Migrant or “Accented Cinema,”⁴⁹ as Naficy terms it, in reference to immigrants’ vocalizing of host languages with an accent. When challenged by the exclusion of his/her presence from the mainstream art and culture, the migrant simultaneously embraces and subverts art. Cinema is one of the strongest artistic mediums through which migrants can testify, and are able to recount their unique experiences, accented through their own particular aesthetics.

As Shermin Langhoff, director of the *Ballhaus* theater in Berlin states:

[A]rt is the only social force that doesn’t have to make compromises, whereas politics and economics always have to make compromises. Politicians have to think about getting re-elected after a legislation period, economists have to worry about benefit. Art, however, is the only societal movement, which may discuss problems

⁴⁹ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

and issues of migration and identity without compromises. Art is not required to tackle problematic issues, but at least it has the potential to do so.⁵⁰

Echoing Langhoff on the function of art, Böttcher, Burford, and Morris state that:

Art does not provide or even seek to provide answers, but it can be used as a tool to critique society, to challenge one's way of thinking, and to push society forward into more progressive directions. The diverse art formsranging from film and theater to music and photography, play an important role in the individual exploration and expression of Turkish-German identity, fostering dialogue about previously taboo topics and giving a voice to those who did not possess one beforehand.⁵¹

Since the medium of film presented as cinema, is one of the most popular and therefore influential art forms, widely broadcast through various types of outlet and consumed now by a global popular culture, one might argue that certain genres in cinema, documentaries and docu-narratives in particular, not only can but *should* reflect the reality of the time, of the people and places it portrays, and that these carry an imperative to the *authentic*. In Germany, as Gokturk points out, the immigrant films were largely funded by the government through the 60s, a practice that continued well into the late 90s.⁵² This had an important influence on the filmmakers' creative choices and process and resulted in narratives in which immigrants were isolated from their German context—a failed authenticity, or at least one that was limited, partial and thus distorted. Such government sanctioned “duty” films resulted in well meaning, but ultimately counterproductive works that often featured Turkish female who was victimized at the hands of her husband, brother and father, without possibility of escape or any chance of upward

⁵⁰ Quoted in Böttcher, Burford, and Morris, “Beyond Stereotypes How Artists of Turkish Descent Deal with Identity in Germany.”

⁵¹ Böttcher, Burford, and Morris, “Beyond Stereotypes: How Artists of Turkish Descent Deal with Identity in Germany.”

⁵² Deniz Gokturk, “Beyond Paternalism: Turkish German Traffic in Cinema,” *The German Cinema Book*, eds., Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Gokturk, (London: BFI, 2002), 248-256.

mobility.⁵³ When there was an escape, it came in the form of a rescue by a German man.

This failing was most unfortunate, since the power of the cinematic medium—both in terms of a representation of human realities, and ubiquitous appeal and mass distribution—positioned it ideally to help create a bridge to and with that “third space,” as Homi Bhabha⁵⁴ puts it; a space that transcends the native land left behind and the adopted land, the consciousness and daily existence, not of simply drawn characters, but of real individuals on their “personal borderlines.”⁵⁵

In this regard, Kutlug Ataman’s film *Lola und Bilidikid* serves as the first Turkish-German film to embody this third space, a groundbreaking exposure (depiction) of the day-to-day life of Turkish-German immigrants in Berlin. The irony of the film is that in order to do this, to express the Turkish-German third space, Ataman’s film gives us the voices of individuals and their micro-community who are among the most marginal of all—Turkish transvestite sex-workers in Berlin—to make meaning of the Turkish-German community at large.

⁵³ Filiz Cicek, interview with Nuri Ozturk, German-Turkish Cinema Notes, Berlin, July 2006.

Also see: Ayse Caglar, “German Turks in Berlin: social exclusion and strategies for social mobility,” *The Journal of the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations* 21, no.3 (1995): 309-323.

⁵⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 53-56, 143, 311-316
Jonathan Rutherford, *Interview with Homi Bhabha*, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207-221.

⁵⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Translator translated: interview with cultural theorist Homi Bhabha,” *Artforum*, 33-7 (1995): 80-4.

Ataman is not Turkish-German; he was born and raised in Turkey and migrated to London as a political exile after the 1980 military coup d'état. He had attended film schools in Sorbonne and UCLA before moving to Berlin for about two years, for the duration of the film's production. A transnational-immigrant-homosexual-artist-filmmaker, Ataman's focus has always been on the margins and the marginalized. In 2004, for example, he was awarded the Turner prize (Britain's premier award for visual artists) for his eight-hour long video installation (displayed at London's premier exhibition space for contemporary art, the Tate Modern), documenting the lives of internal immigrants living in a shantytown (*gecekondu*) near Istanbul, named *Kuba*.

The film, *Lola*, tells the coming of age/coming out story of a young man, Murat, (played by Baki Davrak) born to Turkish immigrant parents in Berlin. His father is dead, his mother a housewife. He has two elder brothers: Osman (played by Hasan Ali Mete) is a cab driver repressing his homosexuality, and Lola (played by Gandi Mukli), who performs as a transvestite dancer at a nightclub. Osman as the eldest male in the family functions as patriarch and has thrown Lola out of the house when she came home to dinner one night wearing a red wig. Murat, who was born to replace Lola, doesn't know that Lola exists until the middle of the film (nor does Lola know of Murat). Struggling to find his voice as a homosexual, Murat ends up at the nightclub where Lola performs one night. Thus the two brothers meet and the story proceeds with a number of interesting twists and turns.

With *Lola and Billy the Kid*, his only Turkish-German film, Ataman was one of the first directors to successfully problematize the “muteness” of the Turkish immigrant. Similar attempts were being made by others at the time, most notably Fatih Akin in films like *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz Und Schmerzlos*, 1998) and *In July* (*Im Juli*, 2000), which were more populist in their intention than *Lola*, but nonetheless distinctly different from earlier immigrant “duty” films, such as Sinan Cetin’s *Berlin in Berlin* (1993), which subscribe to the conventional cinematic binary of female/passive/victim and male/active/villain, thus keeping them (the immigrant Turkish Germans) in a negative box, as Gokturk argues.⁵⁶

Lola also won significant international recognition (with a nomination at the Stockholm Film Festival), but not nearly as much as some of Akin’s recent works. Despite its wide distribution, this film did not extend beyond the art cinema circuit: *Lola* was essentially an underground, cult film, dwelling at the edges of the hegemonic. Conversely, of course, it dwelt at the center of the lives of the marginalized, at least in terms of subject matter.

Lola tackles stereotypes about Turks, Germans, Islam, machismo, homosexuality, transgender, neo-Nazis, and class, and deconstructs them by stripping its characters of their various ascribed and inscribed identities through the film and revealing their common humanity by the end. All have their similar desires and fears, to be accepted within a community of friends and family, and to be safe and happy.

⁵⁶ Gokturk, “Turkish Delight-German Fright.”
Gokturk, “Beyond Paternalism: Turkish German Traffic in Cinema.”

However they find themselves there, at the edges of the margins, whether it be their fascist response to (working) classoppression or their third sex-gender queerness that marks them out. In *Lola's* humanistic vision, the need for acceptance and safety, what guides them mark out the shared territory of the marginalized and dispossessed, from margins towards the center.

Ataman achieves his deconstructive humanism by utilizing diverse cinematic genres, from melodrama, westerns, and Turkish Cinema to New (Wave) and postmodern Cinema. Thus Ataman is able to successfully depict and simultaneously diffuse the counter-productive, fear-based human behavioral patterns that are manifest in both German and Turkish cultures as specific responses within the universal framework of human potential. As a call for what might be understood as a spiritual freedom from dehumanizing constrictions of the social construct (as opposed to contract), *Lola* functions primarily as a socially sensitive tool of social engineering (that is at the same time highly artistic).

Lola's Pioneers: Cinematic Roots

Lifting part of its name and theme from Fassbinder's *Lola*,⁵⁷ Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid* draws from, among others, Reiner Werner Fassbinder as well as Yilmaz Guney. It utilizes, for example, the cinematic devices of social realism and antihero, which feature in the work of these directors. With *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974, one

⁵⁷ *Lola*, directed by R. W. Fassbinder, 1981, referenced in Roger Hillman, "Lola and Billy the Kid (1999): A Turkish Director's Western Showdown in Berlin," *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, 25- 2 (2006): 44-55.

of the earliest of the rather few successful films on migration), Fassbinder had given visibility to the immigrant as well as to the racism of 1970s Germany. Fassbinder created two protagonists for this film, which tells of the relationship of an older German, a widow, Emmi (played by Brigitte Mira) and a younger male immigrant Ali (played by El Hedi ben Salem).

Based on a newspaper story, this film also recalled the cross-class and -age romance in Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows*, a Hollywood melodrama of the type to which Fassbinder had looked for inspiration. With *Ali*, however, the cross-race theme takes the romance a further step into the illicit, with, crucially, the immigrant theme providing a deeper texture to the inherent structural dynamic of social confrontation and romantic doom (notwithstanding the shared ending of love's redemption). Indeed, accentuating the differences between the immigrant and the German, Fassbinder chose one of his real-life lovers to play the Moroccan immigrant, instead of a Turk, as was the case in the newspaper story; Morocco is further away and El Hedi ben Salem is darker in skin, more "other" than a lighter skinned Turk.

Ali shows the sexism and the racism as well as love and compassion that were exercised by ordinary Germans in the 1970s. Fassbinder himself plays a racist and sexist character Eugen, Emmi's son-in-law, who hates working under a Turkish foreman at the factory and verbally and emotionally abuses his wife at home, in order to compensate for his self-perceived loss of German masculinity. Less overtly

and to a lesser degree, Emmi too expresses her indigenous racism. While she withstands courageously the scornful opposition to her marriage to the younger, dark, foreign migrant by her own children, neighbors, and co-workers alike, she nonetheless refuses to cook couscous for Ali, on the grounds that he should eat German food now that he lives in Germany, and when this upsets him, she quickly dismisses it, attributing it to one of his “foreign moods.”

Feeling hurt and unloved, Ali cheats on Emmi with a younger neighborhood barista who has known him longer and is used to his foreign moods. Barista plays Arabic music at the bar for Ali and his buddies—and she knows how to make couscous and have it ready whenever he visits her. In this context couscous stands for homeland: it is through couscous that, barista gives him a taste of home, albeit temporary, hourly in fact, in fluttering in and out of lust. Ali knows that it is his body that the barista wants, which he gives to her half heartedly, in exchange for the natal nourishment.

Emmi, too, objectifies his body by parading his big flexed muscles to her older female friends. But when he is emasculated as his body falls prey to sickness, it is Emmi that comes to his rescue, determined not to let him die. One of the last scenes of the film takes place at the hospital where many immigrants with lung disease caused by their harsh working conditions die alone in neglect. In the end, it is Emmi’s compassion and wisdom that heals the immigrant, and brings Germany and the foreigner/other back together. The combination of compassion and

bigotry exercised by Emmi and others in the film show the diverse dimensions of human psyche in a way with which the audience can easily identify. By telling an immigrant story through a series of daily events, Fassbinder is able to show us how everyone, each of us, is capable of racism and sexism against such others.

It is this realism, as well as the humanist idealism, that Ataman brings to *Lola and Billy the Kid*. From mother to brother, neighbor to nightclub workers, there are no innocent characters in the film. The mother's self-claimed ignorance in not showing unconditional love to Lola, the brother's inability to deal with his own homosexuality, Bilidikid's twisted sense of masculinity, the German neo-Nazis' exaggerated way of dealing with coming-of-age sexual and national identity, and more beside, all reveal people in crisis.

The protagonist in crisis, men in particular, also comprises the main theme of many of Guney's films. Turkey's premier director during this period (culminating with a Palm d'Or for *Trek*), Guney often depicts characters who are in conflict with themselves and sets out to show that the roots of such intrapersonal conflicts lie with the collective in the form of traditional society, the authoritarian state, and institutionalized religion. Sometimes together and sometimes at odds with each other, it is these three patriarchal forces that determine individual destinies in Guney's films.

Trek has five male Kurdish prisoners (crises caused by the government) each with a destiny strongly tied to a woman. Each struggling with love and sexuality during their furlough; the central character's story among the five brings the film to a climax with death of his adulteress wife, death willed by him to clear the family name, (crisis caused by the dictates of tradition and Islam). As in all of Guney's films, the main character fails in the end: the courage to forgive his wife and to stand up against tradition to save her life comes too late and he knows it. Ataman's Bilisimilarly lacks the courage to accept Lola as s/he is and stand by her against the homophobia of her fellow Turks. Similar to Seyyit in *Trek*, Bili conjures up courage only after Lola's death. At the individual level, therefore, Guney's characters are always in the middle of crises with the collective and with themselves, and Fassbinder's characters are less than innocent—and they all show up in Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid*.

Marginal Warriors at the Cultural Frontiers

Lola and Billy the Kid above all is a drama that tells the tale of immigrants through the bodies of a group of ultra-marginalized people; Turkish transvestite-sex-workers in the streets, nightclubs, toilets, abandoned buildings and Turkish ghetto neighborhoods of Berlin. The film borders on documentary at times, and the audience gets a realistic depiction of the immigrants in Germany via the marginalized voices. They experience alienation both as immigrants and homosexuals, not only from Germans, but also from their fellow heterogeneous

Turks, and what is worse, from each other. What seems like a collage of desperate stereotypical characters -- Turkish-gay-sex workers as well as a domestic mother and an oppressed gay patriarch Osman, rich upper class Hans and his mother and neo-Nazi youth-- tell us about both the Turkish and German cultures. Also the collage of different cinematic genres such as western, documentary, cinema noir and melodrama in the end force us, the audience, to identify with these characters, rendering them one of us and we began to imagine ourselves one of them. The desire to roam free and wild like the western heroes, everyday reality of having to work to ensure food and safety and unconditional love between mother-son/daughters, as well as amorous entanglements, are among our shared collective human experiences that Lola's characters also experience. Thus, utilizing various narratives and genres Ataman deconstructs stereotypes of cultures and removes the "otherness" of marginal characters.

First of all, Ataman portrays the homosexual Turkish immigrant community in Berlin as confused and ambiguous. Two of the main characters, Lola and his lover Bilidikid live in a queer space that does not extend far from the nightclub district where Lola works. Bili, who sees himself as a man since he is the one who penetrates, mimics the homophobic behaviors of his fellow Turks. Even though he is living as a gay man in Berlin, he is the point of cultural reference and morality, which is still the Turkish culture and Turkey. When confronted in the streets with fellow straight Turks, he assumes a heterosexual identity and willing to deny the

existence of Lola. He advises Murat, Lola's brother to never admit to being gay and never let himself be penetrated, stating: "Living as a fag is no way to live."

He insists that Lola should have an operation to get rid of his 'dick', and become a woman so they can move to Turkey and live like so-called normal people do. Lola also goes by the name Sugar, after Jack's Lemmon's American *transse* character in Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*. Although his own sexual orientation was heterosexual, Wilder, a Polish Jew, who was forced by Nazis to migrate from Germany to the US, was one of the first directors to use gay content and to create a sympathetic (temporary) *transse* in mainstream cinema. As the film reaches its somewhat screwball climax, Jack Lemmon's Sugar takes off her blond wig and declares to Walter, who wants to marry her:

- I'm a man, Walter!
- Nobody's perfect!

Walter answers without missing a beat, comically accepting her/him as s/he is, with no hesitation or question asked. Played for real, this is something that Lola actually desires, deeply, but for which Bili is not prepared. Apparently resisting a proposed sex change operation, Lola gets short shrift:

- Why not you, why me?
- Because I am a man! [laughing]⁵⁸

Bilidikid's other cultural and moral point of reference in being a man is the

⁵⁸ Unless otherwise noted, dialogues in German/Turkish films quoted here are translated by the author.

machismo masculinity of Hollywood Westerns.⁵⁹ With his blue jeans and white t-shirt, black leather jacket and cowboy boots, he is both the “rebel without a cause” and a cowboy in the making. He is ready to take the law into his own hands after silver screen heroes like Clint Eastwood’s “Dirty Harry” and John Wayne’s “Duke.” He tries to set and live by his own rules like his namesake, Billy the Kid, the outlaw folk hero from days of the American frontiers. When Lola is killed, he does “what a man’s gotta do”; goes after the neo-Nazi kids to take revenge.

Bilidikid's frontier in Berlin is an abandoned building by the river that divides the city in the middle. It is there that he settles his account with the Germans. After a long bloody battle, he castrates one of the neo-Nazi kids and kills their leader, the castration echoing that which he had believed was key to his happiness with Lola—before his death, he had pressured Lola to have the operation so they could go back home to Turkey and live happily ever after like a husband and wife. His obsession with the demasculation through castration thus turns into an act of punishment administered through his own hands. As with the Wild West/Hollywood hero, Bilidikid dies at the frontier as a result of a (neo-Nazi) kid’s bullet.

⁵⁹ Roger Hillman, “Lola and Billy the Kid (1999): A Turkish Director’s Western Showdown in Berlin.” *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, 25- 2 (Winter 2006): 44-55.



Bili telling Lola about their future life in Turkey as husband and wife.⁶⁰

Bilidikid's *über*-masculinity ultimately fails him as an individual. Like Yilmaz Guney, who was heavily influenced by Hollywood westerns, Ataman depicts a man in Bilidikid who is in conflict with his self (his masculinity) and with society. And like the five male characters in Guney's *Trek*, Bilidikid's individuality is in conflict with his woman. Having internalized this, he asks Lola to sacrifice his androgynous sex-gender in order to remove this conflict and become a part of the collective. In the end, they both end up dying much like many of the heroes in Guney's other films.

A master at weaving socialist ideals into his cinematic narratives, Güney time and time again fails his aspiring western antiheroes. Unlike Clint Eastwood's macho Man With No Name,⁶¹ who the US Rebel army conveniently killing all his enemies for him

⁶⁰ The images are selected and placed in accordance with their relevance to the discussion.

⁶¹ *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, directed by Sergio Leone (1966; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001). DVD.

to live to find his pot of gold in the end, Guney's heroes lose their lovers, lands, jobs, and their lives. Guney's antiheroes try to convince the audience that individual action is doomed to failure and that one must take action within the collective in order to induce social change. In like manner Ataman does also fail the Turkish-German-western-macho-gay male who sees his lover's castration as a solution to his problems. What would such sacrifice on Lola's part accomplish other than protecting the social status quo in respect of the heterosexual hegemony and its denial of all things third, including gay relationships?

Lola's androgyny, on the other hand, places this character in a more marginal space, one deeper in-between and without easy recourse to the charade of normality.

Working as a belly dancer at a Turkish nightclub—and depicting a *gastarbeiter*/guestworker in one of her acts—s/he is relatively happy in the relationship with Bili and wants things to remain as they are. Hence his refusal to accede to Bili's request to surgically remove his penis to become a woman: s/he knows that doing so will eventually destroy them. He tells Bili that if he becomes a woman and manifests the wife archetype baking cookies, it will ensure the end of their relationship. It is not the future wife Bili fell in love with, it is the Lola, the one with a "dick"—thus reminding Bili that he is a homosexual male, regardless of his role (penetrator/dominant or a penetrant/submissive) in relationships.



Lola performing as a gastarbeiter together with Kalipso and Shahrazad at a Berlin Bar.

What Bilidikid most wants is to be able to live without being discriminated against, and he thinks the way to achieve this is to become “normal,” to be like everyone else, not realizing that such self-inflicted imitation would only contribute further to his own oppression. When Lola finally agrees to the operation to become a woman and goes to ask his brother Osman for his part of the family inheritance to pay for it, she ends up dead on a canal, dressed as a *transse*, with her red wig, blue jacket and stockings and high heels, instead of going back “home” to Turkey to live like a “normal” woman.

As in the Turkish melodramatic tradition, Lola, who has transgressed various cultural boundaries in going along with Bili’s internalized repression, is only

redeemed by death, insofar as this is any redemption at all. Unlike those melodramas, however, this film does not end there. Employing a broken narrative structure of post-modern cinema, which tend to be disjointed in its use of time and space, in its aim to “reflect -or even celebrate- the fragmentation of contemporary life... as the cultural logic of late capitalism.”⁶² Hence Ataman rather than castrating Lola’s marginalized body, he sacrifices him/her as an in-between character to open up a third space for his younger brother Murat to enter into. Thus the film takes the dramatic turn of a re-beginning.

Murat, the third male character in the film, exists as a replacement for Lola. As mentioned, when Lola comes out the family disowns him/her and produces another son, Murat, to replace him, only to reproduce a third gay male. Murat’s scenes, shot mostly in dark in the Tiergarten, have him looking for hook-ups, and in the grey streets of Berlin, searching for his predecessor Lola, but almost always against the backdrop of a statue of an angel on top of the Victory Column.

Murat represents redemption and hope for the future in the film, not only for his family, but also for the next generation of Turks who are born in Germany. In Ataman’s narrative, it takes three generations after the initial guest worker migrating to Germany to achieve the possibility of belonging. That person, Murat, comes to terms with his cultural and gender identity. However, this comes after a confrontation with the racist and homophobic elements in both German and Turkish

⁶² M. Keith Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood: What's New in Film and Why It Makes Us Feel So Strange*, (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 6.

culture, manifested in and through the bodies of Rudy (played by Willi Herren) and Bilidikid.

On the German front, there is a scene at the “site of the Summer Olympics of 1936 ... the foremost example of Nazi architecture in contemporary Berlin ... Ataman clearly evokes elements of Germany’s National Socialist era and suggests a sense of continuity between past and present.”⁶³ Murat is there on a field trip with his schoolmates, reminding us of the xenophobic past and challenging the collective amnesia in post-war Germany about its past, a major theme of the New German Cinema.

Ulrike Ottinger, Werner Schroeter, and Fassbinder, in particular, were “preoccupied” with the “Unmastered Past” of the “Third Reich and Hitler’s totalitarian dictatorship.”⁶⁴ Indeed, it was only in 1977, after the broadcast of an American melodrama on the topic, that the word “Holocaust” entered the German vocabulary. Until then, everything that had to do with the Nazi era was carefully removed from film scripts, or else they would lose funding for production. Those foreign films that had Nazi scenes in them were censored or the dialogues changed

⁶³ Nicholas Baer, “Points of Entanglement: The Over determination of German Space and Identity in Lola + Billy the Kid and Walk on Water,” in *Transit*, Department of German, University of California, Berkley, 2008, accessed June 3.2012, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8q04k8v1>.

⁶⁴ Caryl Flinn. *The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style* (University of California Press, 2004), 10-15.
Also in Leonie Naughton, “Recovering the Unmastered Past,” *History on/and/in Film*. 3rd History and Film Conference, Perth, (1987), 121-130.

at the dubbing stage into something benign, or else the Nazis were portrayed as mobsters or communists (i.e., not ordinary, socially accepted Germans).⁶⁵

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, feeling “it was a moral task,” the radical German filmmakers tried to counter the national amnesia about its Nazi past with films such as *Marriage of Maria Braun* and *Germany in Autumn*. The late 80s and early 90s, however, saw a backlash to this. Fueled partly by post-oil crisis inflation and economic recession, there arose a new xenophobic discourse on migrants, articulated by the university elite in the Heidelberg Manifesto.⁶⁶ According to this manifesto, Turks and Italian migrants were taking over German business and culture, while the threat to the Aryan population understood to be posed by the high birthrates of these foreigners and the logical response to it echoed Third Reich procreation policies. The professors who penned the manifesto feared that the “guest-worker child” was diluting the stagnant German population. The polemical discourse resulted in violent attacks by skinheads against Turkish businesses, which saw five Turks killed in Solingen in 1993.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Flinn., *The New German Cinema*.

⁶⁶ The Heidelberg Manifesto which was published in 1982 was signed by: “Prof. Bambeck, Ph.D.; Prof. Fricke, Ph.D.; Prof. Karl Götz; Prof. Haberbeck, Ph.D.; Prof. Illies, D.Sc.; Prof. Manns, Th.D.; Prof. Oberländer, Ph.D., ret. Federal Minister; Prof. Rasch, Ph.D.; Prof. Riedl, Ph.D.; Prof. Schade, M.D.; Prof. Schmidt-Kahler, Ph.D.; Prof. Schröcke, D.Sc.; Prof. Schurmann, M.D.; Prof. Siebert, Ph.D.; Prof. Stadtmüller, Ph.D.”

See: “Heidelberger Manifest [Heidelberg Manifesto],” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 4, 1982, trans. Allison Brown, in *German History Documents and Images (GHDI)*, accessed July 28, 2012, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=857

⁶⁷ Deniz Gokturk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds., “Is the Boat Full?, Xenophobia, Racism and Violence,” in *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1955-2005), 105-147.

In August 1983, rather than face deportation, “a 23 year-old asylum seeker, Kemal Altun [decided] to commit suicide by jumping from a window.”⁶⁸ This event was used as a visual reference by Ataman in *Lola and Billy the Kid*. After a long drawn-out, and bloody battle with Rudy, the neo-Nazi wannabe leader, Bili, fatally wounded by then, falls out of the window into the river (Rudy dies soon after). Ataman thus shows how fear-based othering begets violence, which returns to its perpetrator. Etched in the Turkish migrant’s collective psyche, this incident will later resurface in *The Edge of Heaven* as a social engineering plot, this time in the form of a female, asylum-seeking political Istanbulite who does not die—due to be deported and jailed, she will be saved by good hearted Germans.

These violent events attested to the validity of the aspirations of the New German Cinema, launched two decades earlier with *Oberhausen Manifesto*,⁶⁹ with the goal of shifting the collective post-war German conscience by forcing the country to face its past and to self reflect rather than moving blindly forward with the newfound economic prosperity, as though nothing had ever happened. While at the macro-economic level the post-war German miracle was based on currency reform and free market liberalization from price controls, at the human level its progress was very

⁶⁸ Gokturk, Gramling, and Kaes, “Is the Boat Full?, Xenophobia, Racism and Violence,” 108.

⁶⁹ “Oberhausen Manifesto,” in *Oberhausener Manifest: 1962-2012*, accessed August 18, 2012, <http://www.oberhausener-manifest.com/en/>

much built on the backs of masculinized “rubblewomen”(*Trümmerfrauen*)⁷⁰ and the male migrant guest-worker. Having lost about 15 million of its men in war, task of clearing the rubble of war destruction fell on women. Put to task by Allied Control Council:

Long lines of women on the rubble piles, hammering out stones and handing them down in buckets was a common sight, even years after the war ended. But these so-called *Trümmerfrauen*, or rubble women, not only tended the wounded, buried the dead and salvaged belongings. They also began the grueling task of rebuilding war-torn Germany by clearing the country's cities of an estimated 400 million cubic meters of debris, using only basic tools and, above all, their bare hands.⁷¹

Two decades later, blue color male immigrants from Greece, Italy and Turkey joined them, working in the newly built factories, hospitals food industries and so on. One of the clichéd archetypes created as a result was the interaction of these two groups expressed as romantic relationship, between the dark haired Turkish men, and the blond German *fraulein*. Back home in Turkey it was reflected in popular culture. As the song went:

Our village folk coming from *Gurbet*
Say that Recep now loves a girl from *Gurbet*
I asked, they said that *Gurbet* is a far away place
But don't count me off just yet
For I am a woman born of a hard-land!
Be warned Recep, be warned!

⁷⁰ *German History in Document and Images*, (GHDI), Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961. 11-12, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/English%20Introduction%20Vol%208-2.pdf>
See: Hester Baer, *Dismantling the Dream Factory: Gender, German Cinema, and the Postwar Quest for a New Film Language (Film Europa: German Cinema in An International Context)*, (New York, London: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1-20.

⁷¹ Sabina Casagrande, Remembering Germany's "Rubble Women," DW-WORLD.DE, 08.05.2005, accessed November 25, 2012, <http://www.dw.de/remembering-germanys-rubble-women/a-1575535-0>.

When I get there
I'll swear [a bullet] on your head!
When I am planting months and harvesting years here
How dare you forget me!
When I am nurturing our hope here!
This won't do Recep! Splitting hearts into two,
This won't do!
Neither the money
Nor the women of *Gurbet*
Be warned Recep, be warned!
When I get there
I'll swear [a bullet] on your head!⁷²



"Rubblewoman" (Trümmerfrau, in GHDI)

⁷² *Gurbet elden gelen bizim köylüler / Recep gurbet kızı sevdi dediler / Sordum ki çok ırakmış orası / Belli olmaz kıraç toprak anası / Yaktın Recep, / Gelirsem vallah / İki kaşın arası. Ben burada ay ekip, yıl biçeyim / Sen beni unut ha, ben umut edeyim / Olmaz Recep, almaz aklım arası / Ne gurbetin kızı, ne de parası / Yaktın Recep / Gelirsem vallah / İki kaşın arası.* Popular Turkish-folk song of the 70s and 80s, made famous by singer Asu Maralman; lyrics by Bora Ayanoglu, 1973 (translation by the author).

The dark-haired man's Turkish wife did not take kindly to the transgressions of her husband.

It is at the Nazi-built stadium used for the 1936 Olympics that Murat rejects the archetype, the blond, blue-eyed German females. Neither the girls nor the boys are paying attention to the significance of the building, all as bored as their female teacher monotonously reciting its history in a voice as flat as the speeches made there by Hitler were fiery. The life has been lost from this relic, it might appear, or at least it is presented as historical artifact. Meanwhile, the girls are flirting with Murat, gesturing oral sex, but Murat instead goes for the blue-eyed blond boy Walter, one of Rudy's friends, whose name references the open-minded character of *Some Like It Hot*. Walter, too seems interested in Murat.



Murat and Walter at the 1936 Olympic Stadium in Berlin.

The two start making out in the bathroom, Murat performing oral sex on him—until Rudy shows up, that is, with a litany of racial insults which reference the derogatory language used against the German-Jews before and during the Holocaust.⁷³ He is there to resurrect the masculinity of the *Heimkehrer*, the emasculated post-war German, something, it is argued, the Germanic tribes have been trying to do since the time of the Romans,⁷⁴ only this time by othering and at the expense of the Turk.



Rudy and Walter beat and urinate on Murat.

⁷³ Uli Linke, "Murderous Fantasies: Violence, Memory, and Selfhood in Germany," *New German Critique* 64, (1995): 37-59.

⁷⁴ The Germanic Wars with Roman Empire lasted 700 years, taking place from 2BCE -6 CE. See: Charlene Sand, "A Historic Guide to the Wars of the Roman Empire: From the Germanic War to the Armenian Conflict" Webster's Digital Services, February 28, 2012, accessed, July 18, 2012, <http://www.amazon.com/Historic-Guide-Wars-Roman-Empire/dp/1276186010>.

Convinced that Rudy and his neo-Nazi friends killed Lola, Bili convinces Murat to dress up as Lola in order to lure them to an abandoned building on the riverside and revenge Lola's death. Bili had seen them taunt Lola a few weeks earlier, and Murat, too, is quick to believe this to be the case since Rudy and his friends had beaten him quite badly at the Olympic stadium during his brief sexual encounter with Walter. Caught red-handed with a Turk, Walter had himself turned against Murat, joining in on the beating.



Murat's mother.

At this point, his mother invokes Turkish-patriarchy as a protective survival device:

In these foreign lands [we] must stick together. We must obey Osman as the head of the family as his intentions and deeds are essentially good and well intended.

However, rather than obeying Osman, who in an earlier scene have failed to even to assert his authority over a German female prostitute, Murat follows the other Turkish macho-male, Bili's lead. As instructed by Bili, he puts on Lola's red wig,

lipstick, miniskirt, blue coat, and high heels, to taunt and to lure the neo-Nazis with his gay Turkish identity to avenge Lola. By doing so, however, he enters a new gendered space that is coded with racial and national identities of both cultures.



Murat dressed as Lola.



Bilidikid taking on neo-Nazis.

There, in an abandoned riverside building we see two extremes of Turkish and German cultures; Bili, who embodies the machismo of the Turkish male, and the Hitler-inspired Rudy. They self-destruct by attacking and killing each other, in an extended fight sequence referencing the Hollywood westerns by which Bili was so inspired. And just like the antihero of his adopted name, *Billy The Kid*, the Turkish Bilidikid too will die an untimely death from a gunshot wound.⁷⁵ Their choices of weapons are also loaded with codes. Rudy has a gun (destructive power) while Bili has a knife (penetration), and with which he castrates one of the neo-Nazis, literally and metaphorically.

⁷⁵ Among a number of films that have been made telling the story of Billy the Kid, a civil war soldier turned outlaw, are King Vidor's *Billy The Kid* (1930), Howard Hughes' *Outlaw* (1941), and Gore Vidal's *Billy the Kid*, (1989), as well as Jennifer Venditti's recent coming-of-age version, *Billy the Kid*, (2007).



Walter and Murat after the deaths of Rudy and Bili.

In the course of the confrontation, Murat and Walter will find themselves “cornered” in a dark part of the building. Beaten and bloodied, and in a state of panic, they freeze. There, staring at one another in their newfound vulnerabilities, they utter words of fear and frustration, confusion and hurt, in tears. They now realize what a terrible mistake they all have made and are forced and able to return to their primordial selves, going beyond their racial, national, and cultural differences. This is enabled by their mutual attraction and its potential future transformation into love, between Murat and Walter, between Turkey and Germany, between gay and (neo-)Nazi; a union of all the inner and outer conflicts they embody. Walter and Murat are the only two that survive the bloody fight physically intact. Murat realizes

then that it was not Walter, Rudy, and the other neo-Nazis who killed Lola. Sadly, he will later find out that was his older brother Osman.

Osman himself embodies multiple identities, and he is sexually quite frustrated. As the eldest son, he takes on the privileges and responsibilities of traditional Turkish patriarchy. This is a role that requires considerable macho posturing and internalization of the machismo identity, so Osman's duty causes him great anguish and inner conflict since he himself is "queer." His attempts to ensure Murat's heterosexually have failed as well. Not even the German female prostitute takes his forced macho front seriously when he tries to procure her for Murat—she just gets his money and runs. Murat walks away from the scene and from the family house in search of Lola, in search of his future self as a free, homosexual man.

Osman does not feel free to do as he wants; he feels the burden of his responsibilities. "In order to survive in these foreign lands," he must put on his patriarchal Turkish-warrior façade, which is in direct conflict with his homosexual tendencies. Trapped between his repressed homosexual individual desires and his masculine Turkish identity, he reverts to incest: he rapes Lola, until s/he runs away from him, and later, when Murat goes to live with Lola, in desperation he kills him, to hide his truth.



Murat and Osman arguing about Lola's death; mother overhears them.

When Murat then confronts Osman about Lola's death, he understands how Osman killed Lola, how, having no outlet for his own homosexual inclinations, he had repeatedly raped Lola. Their mother overhears them and strikes Osman, the acting (in both senses) patriarch, in the face. She walks out the door, leaving her designated feminine domestic space behind for the first time in the film; she strides in firm and decided steps, not looking back, not even towards Murat who is running behind to catch up with her. As she leaves the government designated district of Kreuzeberg for Turks, and blends into the streets of Berlin, she rips her headscarf, Murat picks it up to retain certain sense of his Turkish self.

Osman, in contrast, is left in the ghetto alone and crying. He has tried to walk the line, but unsuccessfully. His individual desires unexplored and homosexuality

repressed for the sake of the family/collective have transformed him into a rapist and a murderer, irreparably undermining his humanity. Unlike Rudy, Bili, and Lola, redemption by death is not an option. He has destroyed the very family he held dear, with its spiritual heart, the mother and future, Murat, having left him to his own devices, to face his conscience.

Murat now follows his mother in her appropriation of outside space, the public realm of the German streets of Berlin, an appropriation later repeated by the transvestites as they pass by *Tiergarten* and the *Victory Column*, the same column that Murat had passed by during the night at the beginning of the film. But now in the daylight, as Murat walks across Tiergarten under the watchful and caring gaze of the Victory Goddess Nike, nearby, two of Lola's *transvestite* friends from her performance troupe are driving by in cab with a Turkish driver.

The German *Pink Triangle*, the Turkish *Pink Certificate*

It is not only the Turkish mother who is having difficulty coming to loving terms with the homosexuality of her son(s). Ms. von Seeckt (played by Inge Keller), is equally troubled about her son Frederick's sexual orientation. She is a dominant matriarch presiding over and living vicariously through her son. Like a great many women in post-war Germany, she has no male-husband figure around, and lives life on her own terms. But she is not a *Trümmerfrau*: she is a rich aristocrat. Her Prussian surname, "von Seeckt," belongs to a German general who had fought in

WWI and was an influential figure in the Nazi rise to power, as well as in post war Germany. This is the second device through which Ataman links Germany in the 1990s to its past. In this case, however, it is not the Nazi background that Ms. Von Seeckt is anxious to hide, but Frederick's homosexuality, which she believes may ruin their family's good name. Her set of values and priorities are structured strategically by Ataman to reference the Nazi persecutions of homosexuals, which remains a lesser-studied topic in comparison to the Holocaust. Similarly to the raping of women, the violence against homosexuals during the war was for decades described generically under the category "war time crimes."⁷⁶

Ataman's choice to tackle the Nazi treatment of homosexuality through the context of aristocracy is also intentional since the policies of the Third Reich towards homosexuals were in part procreation oriented. In these policies, there was a linking of homosexuality with abortion, which "reflected the Nazi regime's population policies to promote a higher birthrate of its 'Aryan' population."⁷⁷ On February 18, 1937, Heinrich Himmler gave a passionate speech to SS commanders outlining the party policy regarding homosexuality. A portion of it reads:

If you further take into account the facts that I have not yet mentioned, namely that with a static number of women, we have two million men too few on account of those who fell in the war [WWI], then you can well imagine how this imbalance of two million homosexuals and two million war dead, or in other words a lack of about four million men capable of having sex, has upset the sexual balance sheet of

⁷⁶ Michael Berenbaum, and Abraham J. Peck, eds. "The Pink Triangle: Homosexuals as 'Enemies of the State'," in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 345-57.

⁷⁷ Homosexuals: Victims of the Nazi Era, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC., accessed, August 16, 2012, <http://www.ushmm.org/education/resource/hms/homosx.php>.

Germany, and will result in a catastrophe.⁷⁸



Pink Triangle Holocaust Monument for the Gay victims of the Nazis, Mauthausen, Germany, 1984.

He then goes on to explain the punishment for those who donot abide by party laws, which rendered homosexuality a criminal act (a status unrevised until 1969):

I have now decided upon the following: in each case, these people will naturally be publicly degraded, expelled, and handed over to the courts. Following completion of the punishment imposed by the court, they will be sent, by my order, to a concentration camp, and they will be shot in the concentration camp, if attempting to escape. I will make that known by order to the unit to which the person so infected belonged. Thereby, I hope finally to have done with persons of this type in

⁷⁸ Ben S. Austin, "Homosexuals and the Holocaust," *Jewish Virtual Library*, acceseed August 12,2012, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/homo.html>.

the SS, and the increasingly healthy blood which we are cultivating for Germany, will be kept pure.⁷⁹

Frederich's homosexuality is, then, not only emasculating to the glorious von Seeckt name, but it also potentially fatal to the nation, since there will be no progeny to ensure its survival. This symbolic killing of the bloodline, (which as we will see later on, is Murat's mother's choice precesie of curse against neo-Nazis who beat up her son), of the patriarch-general who helped shape the Third Reich, operates as a cinematic device to *re-just*, as it might be termed, has been utilized in various forms. Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* and in Quinton Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards* spring to mind as recent popular examples of historical facts being rewritten to help alleviate the collective sense of injustice that continued to be felt throughout history and thereby ensure a fiction or representation off airness. And the fictional, the imaginary, I would argue here, help to shape our perceptions and conceptions which in time come to manifest, to stand for and stand in for truth. In this way, the cinema may function not only as a tool for social engineering but also as a manipulative propaganda device.⁸⁰

Not only Frederich's homosexuality but also his choice of partner complicates life for his mother Ms. Von Seeckt. Frederich is dating Iskender, a Turkish sex worker he met on a subway in Berlin, one of the hook-up venues for gay men. Like his

⁷⁹ Austin, "Homosexuals and the Holocaust."

⁸⁰ The ending of *Gladiator* reflects the popular desire for justice respect to the Roman Emperor Commodus, who is believed to have betrayed and killed his father Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who had wanted to return Rome to a republic, and which the fictional character General Maximus Decimus Meridius achieves in the film by killing Commodus in the arena at the Coliseum. Similarly, Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards* creates a fictional allied-army-unit that defeats a fictional Nazi unit.

namesake (“Iskender” is the Turkish form of “Alexander”), Frederick’s partner is very headstrong, independent, and proud. Frederick, for example, takes a medication, and offers to wear a condom for protection against AIDS and STDs. But Iskender refuses, angrily, on the grounds that his Turkish blood makes him immune to such diseases. German-science versus Turkish-might creates a cartoonish scene, dismantling the dysfunctional excessiveness of both of these cultural attitudes with ridicule.

Homosexuality in the military is not just a historical issue related to the Nazi regime, of course. We are familiar with the recent American version of this, the “Don’t ask don’t tell” policy. The Turkish military’s stance on the issue is also worth visiting. Ataman had left Turkey after the 1980 military coup due to his leftist politics (a quarter of a million people, predominantly leftist sympathizers, were rounded up and imprisoned in the years immediately following the army takeover). Had he stayed, Ataman would have had a prickly engagement with the army as a homosexual male. Azizlerli explains:

There's a Turkish saying that every man is born a soldier. Military service is mandatory for all Turkish men. There is no alternative to this; Turkey does not recognize the concept of conscientious objection...while there are no specific laws against homosexuality... openly gay men are not welcome in the army. Their presence in the army is deemed damaging to morale and operational effectiveness. ... they have to "prove" their homosexuality in order to avoid military service. But the process by which homosexual men are asked to prove their sexual orientation is arbitrary and humiliating.⁸¹

⁸¹ Emre Azizlerli, *The Pink Certificate*, The Documentary, BBC iPlayer, accessed August 18, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00q864h>.

See also: Emre Azizlerli, “Proving you’re gay to the Turkish army,” *BBC World Service*, 25 March 2012, accessed August 18, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17474967>.

Had he stayed in Turkey, Ataman would either have had to serve in the military that tortured him, or else obtain a “pink certificate” from a military doctor to avoid being drafted. The criteria for recognition of gayness remain quite conventional. In the documentary *Pink Certificate*, Gokhan, who went through this process explains that it was necessary to bring

explicit photographs of himself having sex with another man... it would be impossible to get out of military service without them. And "[t]he face must be visible, and the photos must show you as the passive partner." ⁸²

Many Turkish gay males look for ways to go abroad to Europe to avoid the choice between military service and the humiliating process of obtaining the pink certificate. Germany, and especially Berlin, is an obvious preference, being both, home to a large Turkish immigrant community and a long-established base for alternative sexualities and bohemian lifestyles. In fact, this city is said to house the largest GLBT population in Europe. It certainly hosts one of the world's largest gay events, the Love Parade. By 2006, the number of marchers gathered at the *Victory Column* in Tiergarten had reached over 750 thousand. People from around the globe, including Turkey and its neighbors, such as Greece and Iran, painted the gaytropolis pink!⁸³ When I asked why they were marching and why they chose to live in Berlin, they responded as in unison: “I am free to be myself here.” ⁸⁴

⁸² Op. cit.

⁸³ “Painting The Town Pink!”, *Berlin-Life.com*, accessed, July 10, 2012, <http://www.berlin-life.com/berlin/gay>.

⁸⁴ Filiz Cicek, *Berlin Love Parade Project*, 2006.

The prevailing attitude of the Turkish military about what a gay man looks and acts like is reflected through Bili's character. Having taken a liking to Murat, he takes him under his wing, helps him to get his first client and gives him free advice, both as a pimp and a fellow Turkish sex worker, as to how to handle himself:

- A man is a man, and a hole is a hole. Don't ever be a hole. And don't ever lose your street cred like that.

Meaning the dominant male is never penetrated; he is active and male and therefore he is still a man, and not a homosexual, which gives the essence of what may be termed the macho ideology or "army view" of masculinity in reference to homosexuality. The receptive-feminine thus defined as non-man.

Going back then to the relationship between a Turk and a German, we also can see that Iskender is the active male to the physically larger Frederick. Thus his active masculinity protects him from AIDS and possible STDs as much as the Turkish blood running through his veins. In fact, they equate, insofar as every Turkish man is a born soldier. During the "blood" conversation, these lovers fall over an architectural mock-up of the city, composed of both East and West, crushing it for a possibility of the new Berlin, the pink heaven of the Love Parade.



Filiz Cicek, "Love is in the Heart", Berlin Love Parade Project, 2006

Dark Histories



The racism and ethnic nationalism which historically manifested as military aggression in both German and Turkish cultures is further referenced by Ataman in his choice of surname for the German character Frederick.⁸⁵ During World War I, into which the Ottoman Empire had entered alongside Germany, one General Hans von Seeckt was Chief of Staff to the Ottoman

Army, and later, in 1933, von Seeckt would write a book entitled *Germany between East and West (Deutschland zwischen Ost und West)*.⁸⁶ Thus, with the stroke of a name, Ataman brings forth the historical military relationship (and forged in the film through the fusion of bodies, of the two male lovers, Frederick and Iskender). This is not all that Ataman does with this reference.

When Frederick takes Iskender to a Chinese restaurant, the informed viewer, the German in particular, is reminded of General von Seeckt's professional ties to the Chinese, as Chiang Kai-shek's military advisor during the period 1933–35.⁸⁷ This connection to other lands and peoples (Ottoman, Chinese) on the general's part may be taken to indicate the possibility of a certain cultural catholicism, suggestive,

⁸⁵ Roger Hillman, "Lola and Billy the Kid (1999): a Turkish director's Western showdown in Berlin," 2006.

⁸⁶ Hillman, "Lola and Billy the Kid (1999)."

⁸⁷ Hillman, "Lola and Billy the Kid (1999)."

perhaps, of a man at the heart of the German establishment who would have been less than convinced by the implicit eugenics of racial superiority. In the context of what was to come, this parallels the ambiguity of Friedrich's role as a gay man in a German family of high standing—as the other within, one might say.

Indeed, the General was opposed to Hitler's fascist party, and the feeling was mutual: his Jewish wife as well certain military/political decisions he took as Chief of the General Staff made him a highly suspicious character for the Nazis. He was even once described in a Nazi newspaper as the "pawn of sinister Jewish-Masonic elements." In 1928, Von Seeckt had written another book, *Thoughts of A Soldier*, on the impracticality of the mass infantry warfare of WWI, expressing a line of thought that became instrumental in the inter-war reorganization of the emasculated German army (limited by the Treaty of Versailles to 100,000 men). And in time he would change his position also in respect of the Third Nationalist. As time unrolled, Von Seeckt's military contribution was to lay the foundation of a new, mobile war strategy, later to manifest as *Blitzkrieg*; and after being elected to the Reichstag in 1930, he also fell into line with the new ideology of Hitler's Germany—thereby betraying his own wife and therefore his family unit for the good of the collective, so ultimately more like Osman, perhaps, than Friedrich.

The visual connection of all this dark, bloody history to the darkness and bloodiness of *Lola and Billy the Kids* perhaps most dramatically made through the film's title characters. Lola's body, like that of Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish Jew and the founder of

German Communist Party, would wash up in a canal near a bridge by the Tiergarten.

Luxemburg's violent death is detailed by Paul Frolich:

With two blows of his rifle-butt he [Otto Runge, SS soldier] smashed her skull. Her almost lifeless body was flung into a waiting car, and several officers jumped in. One of them struck Rosa on the head with a revolver-butt, and First Lieutenant Vogel finished her off with a shot to the head. The corpse was then driven to the Tiergarten and, on Vogel's orders, thrown from the Liechtenstein Bridge into the Landwehr Canal, where it did not wash up until 31 May 1919.⁸⁸

The equation of action and agency with the masculine gives a manly quality to political activism (c.f. issues around sexuality and the image of Joan of Arc), which, particularly in the context of the early 1900s, symbolically renders Rosa Luxemburg androgynous. It is this androgyny, therefore, that is visually commemorated in Lola's body thrown into the same canal, as s/he floats on the water, in red wig, blue leather jacket and stockings, face up and with open arms in feminine surrender.



Lola's body in the canal.

⁸⁸ Paul Frolich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010), 297-300.

A little girl on the bridge asks Lola: “Are you a mermaid?” Making her into a mythological being. Unlike Lola, it would be four months before Luxemburg’s deformed body would resurface. Lola’s fatal drama thus honors both their spirits.

Luxemburg had once written an article about the “oriental despotism” of the Ottoman Empire “whose existence is financed by the professional pillage of the people.”⁸⁹ This was a subject close to Ataman’s heart, who had personally felt that cruelty before fleeing Turkey as a political exile. As Mark Prince explains:

As an 18-year-old, left-wing activist, he recorded the street protests that preceded the Turkish military coup of 1980; those early films—shot in Super 8—were confiscated and destroyed by the military authorities following a raid on Ataman’s house. He was arrested, imprisoned for 28 days, and subjected to beatings and electric shocks.⁹⁰

Ataman’s leftist, egalitarian politics and now exilic experience, made him particularly sensitive to issues of the migrants striving for economic freedom as well as social capital in order to survive and flourish in a foreign land. Housing over two million Turkish immigrants along with the largest gay-lesbian population in Europe would seem to have made Berlin a better city for a cinematic exploration of social justice and conscience than London, where Ataman first had landed after leaving Turkey.

⁸⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, “Social Democracy and the National Struggles in Turkey,” first published October, 1896, the German Social Democratic paper *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Dresden. In *The Balkan Socialist Tradition in Revolutionary History*, Vol.8 no.3, 2003. Luxemburg Internet Archive, 2004. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1896/10/10.htm>.

⁹⁰ Mark Prince, “Kutlug Ataman,” *Art in America*, International Review, 2/4/11, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/kutlug-ataman>.



Director Kutlug Ataman

Britain's Royal capital was more imbued in the exploitative history of capitalist colonialism and Dickensian reform, while Berlin offered the ideological background of both the fascism and socialism(c.f. also the Nazi party as "National Socialist", or Hitler's preference for the title of "Social Revolutionary") to explore the everyday world of the other, the third space of foreigners as well as the non-heterosexual. Berlin, Tiergarten in particular, was a fitting place to pay homage to the fallen leftist warriors, and to Luxemburg in particular.



Image of Rosa Luxemburg on a portion of the Berlin Wall in Potsdamer Platz in Berlin.

Over the central arena of Tiergarten, the angel watches the people below. This place has seen the murders of Luxemburg, as well as the secret love making of homosexuals, the picnicking of the *gastarbeiter* Turks, and now the harassment of Lola by neo-Nazis and Murat's desperate lonely walks through the park at night, trying to find himself, a Turkish boy born in Berlin who likes other boys. And the Turkish woman "with balls" in a cab.

With its large gay and immigrant populations, the Berlin of the turn of millennium looks quite different from Hitler's and Himmler's judging from the grainy, gray film images we see today. The dark faces and rainbow society have manifested what the Nazis feared. Whether Turk or German, the older generation has not changed enough

yet perhaps, still homophobic and racist beneath the mists of that post-war amnesia, while the youth of repressed brothers and fear-driven neo-Nazis still skulk in the shadows when they are not on parade. But there are no concentration camps for homosexuals, while Frederick and Iskender and Murat and Walter offer glimpses of hope.

Mothers

If Berlin during the first part of the twentieth century belonged to von Seeckt, then it is Luxemburg who has inherited today's city. Reactionary notwithstanding, the spirit of the feminine seems to glow more brightly today. And women become kinder and stronger, especially the older generation of mothers through the film lens of Ataman. In *Lola and Billy the Kid*, Ataman juxtaposes two mothers of very different characters who have one thing in common, their love for their sons. One is a strong, rich, German aristocrat, the other a dutiful, demure, Turkish-Muslim housewife. One is overtly dominant in her son's affairs, the other not assertive enough. They both learn to hear, however, to compromise, to let live let life in, to set their children and themselves free.



Murat and his mother after the neo-Nazi beatings.

The Turkish mother (Lola, Murat and Osman's) is shown mostly indoors, as in the melodramatic formula. She has trusted her life to her husband and then to Osman. The most striking images of her comes during the bathing of Murat, when we see a middle-aged woman bathing her teenage son.⁹¹ He is all bloodied and beaten, so this operates as a cleansing/purification scene and perhaps a rebirth. As she pours

⁹¹ Turks in Berlin lived in designated areas, and in apartment houses that did not have private baths. They had to use the communal baths and showers, which resulted in them using a basin (*legen*) to bathe in their own apartments. The lack of private baths has been an ongoing source of complaint.

water over the dirt and blood, she exclaims a curse from a mother's heart, like a protective puma over her cub: "May their seed dry up for good!" Which is precisely what Frederick's mother is worried about: Frederick is not siring young and Iskender the Turk stands to inherit the family fortune. Ataman thus implies a reflection of the post-war anxiety that led to the Heilderburg Manifesto through its results on Murat's body (albeit set in the context of the failure of the Nazi supremacist policy directed against the homosexual and the foreigner).

Both women are marked as mothers whose very bearing is inscribed with tradition. As such, they are its carriers, and it is through them that the established cultural frameworks are reshaped. The German mother's comfortable ensconcement in the German bourgeoisie is undone by her son's behavior (below), while the Turkish mother's faith in the Islamo-patriarchy that was supposed to guarantee her safety and survival in the foreign land is turned on its head in the pivotal moment when she overhears Murat confronting Osman: "Not because he was queer, but because you are!"

As an uneducated woman who had followed the traditional mores unquestioningly, she suddenly finds her world collapsing from beneath her. The falseness of the self with which she had identified, whose role she had played, is exposed as a sham, its spuriousness laid bare. The family tragedy is apparent, that it was her eldest son who had murdered her middle son. The unspoken, deeper realization for her here, however, is confessional: in allowing her husband to disclaim and disinherit the child

who became Lola (when the boy went to the family dinner table in female attire), she had failed Lola as a mother. By acceding to the patriarchal tradition she had lost touch with her feminine expressed as the matriarchal, with the intuitive, simple sense of what is right and wrong for her children.

The Turkish mother thus expresses her moment of resistance as an admission—by hitting Osman she is not only judging him as perpetrator but also marking him as a co-conspirator with herself in Lola's fatal demise, she strikes an acknowledgement, an accusation of a shared bad conscience; and which placed on the face of Osman as patriarch, lays the blame on the whole family, and beyond. Lola's fate might stand for that of any such gender transgressive other in any society perhaps, but here it is specified by the Turkish-German migrant sub-culture. It is an indictment which could theoretically be made on the Turkish in Turkey, but which in fact is made on the Turkish in Germany. The Migrant Cinema comments on the immigrant community.

Having rejected the family patriarchy, she leaves. She is not concerned about the fate of what she had previously lived by and held dear as she takes her first steps out of her designated domestic space and towards her individual empowerment. Unrestricted, the mother is no longer so defined. We do not see where this new woman is headed, but as she walks away without flinching, in strong long strides now, we know there is no turning back. No longer in the role of (Turkish) mother as she takes on the "foreign infidel [*gavur*]" land, as described earlier, she tears off her

headscarf, symbol of her Islamo-Turkic identity, and throws it to the ground. Quietly and decisively thus, she is gone, towards her true(r) self, blending into the streets of Berlin as an emancipated woman.

Tradition is historically inscribed in a woman's being, in her body, and in her clothing.⁹² Thus, when she leaves her domestic space, she rejects not only the female role of the Islamo-Turkic cultural nexus, but that very system itself. What at the personal level is the moment of resistance and at the gender level a woman's breakout/breakthrough to empowerment, at the social is a denial of tradition, the very fabric of the society itself. This, of course, is the inevitable and continual challenge to the immigrant community.

Thus it is that Ataman immediately problematizes his Muslim woman's rejection of tradition, by having Murat run after her to pick up the scarf. The break with the past cannot—should not—be complete. Murat's recovery of the scarf thus rescues the future, signaling that the third generation can live with Germans without having to deny the past (and thereby replay the past, by initiating another history of Turkish muteness). By having Murat reclaim his mother's headscarf from the street, Ataman is able to depict the immigrant community's frustration with their Islamo-Turkish tradition in the contemporary German context without a wholesale rejection in

⁹² Filiz Cicek, *Inscribing the Woman's Body*, Art Exhibit and Artist Statement. Published and exhibited at The Kinsey Institute Permanent Collection, Williamsburg Art Center in New York, Women Made Gallery in Chicago, University of Santa Barbara in California, National Organization for Women in California, Indianapolis Herron School of Arts in Indianapolis, Creative Action Coalition at University of North in Carolina, Greensboro, and Feminist Art Project in New York.

favor of the European (the origin of the Kemalist silencing in the establishment of the Republic).

It will be a German woman, Hella (played by Gundula Petrovska), who will mother and guide Murat instead. She gives him a job at her hotdog stand above the very subway where he first met Bili and had his first sexual encounter as a sex-worker, taking his film's journey full circle. She speaks to him lovingly, offering him a way forward, to start over with a more wholesome, "normal" life: "It's an honest crust."

The other German mother, Ute, is very weary of Iskender. Without asking, he has taken her son's expensive car, a vintage Daimler, for a ride. From Iskender's point of view, he is only borrowing. From Ute's perspective, he is stealing it and wants her son to call the police. Perhaps he is learning about the German past in the same way that he is insinuating himself into the family. As such, it is also another expression of the immigrant's search for place (imbuing and identification with the host culture as one strategy of belonging).



Ute and Iskender traveling to countryside in Berlin.

Ute is boastful and distrustful of Iskender, who is equally distrustful of her, as well as of Frederick (the immigrant desire to integrate must be met by acceptance, otherwise it becomes just a self-humiliatory ingratiation). Hence, Iskender represses his deepening feelings for Ute's son, telling himself that Frederick is just another Johnny (client). After attending Lola's funeral, however, he is moved to reassess his view of life, realizing how unpredictable it is, how it can be cut short, quite unexpectedly. He decides to give love a chance and, gathering all his courage, calls Frederick to express his feelings: "I like you." Elated, Frederick asks him to drive his mother to her mansion in the countryside in the hope that they will overcome their differences. The uneasiness, mistrust and miscommunication experienced by both cultures is thus played out in the claustrophobic (German/host) space of the

mother's fancy car, accompanied by a yapping dog that seems to mirror their constant bickering.

After a series of fiery and colorful exchanges about love, money and pride, they eventually come to an understanding wherein there can be a space for their mutual existence. Ute offers to pay him off, handing over a very old and expensive brooch in exchange for leaving Frederick, to which Iskender swears (in Turkish), chucking the brooch out of the car. So he is not after the family fortune. Their relationship shifts, for the better.



Frederich von Seeckt.

Convinced that this Turk really does love her beloved son, Ute now relents and becomes quite tender towards Iskender. She begins to see him with a mother's eyes. In the last scene as they say goodbye, she reaches over and moves a strand of hair

off his face, putting it behind his ear, affectionately. Iskender's response is receptive, accepting, appreciative.



Ute and Iskender make peace.

Thus Ataman both confronts and resolves Germany's violent past and the immigrant's future through these two characters. He then completes this by having them travel together in the forced meditative space of the car: the two races make amends, the healing begins, through Ute and Iskender's newly formed mother-son relationship. In order to make peace, to heal, and then to prosper and flourish, mothering is what is needed, we understand. Here, it is mothering the immigrant that is invoked. This is an image echoing the Emmi/Armin relationship in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (due to the age difference), and later to be repeated in *The Edge of Heaven* (below). Here, however, the homeland and hostland are unified, in Berlin. At

this stage the healing work can be done in Germany, without the need to take the migrants back to Turkey, as will later be the case.

The film ends where it begins, in Tiergarten. There has been a death, of the past, followed by reconciliation, in the present, and now there is hope for the future. The start of the film showed Murat entering the park in the dark, into the unknown to try to explore his homosexuality, the angel on top the column dimly lit by the streetlight appearing as his only guide. This time Osman is not there to follow him with his taxicab, to take him to a prostitute in order to make him “real” man out of him. He has come of age now, the work is done.

Murat keeps on walking and the camera pans out from his close-up to a medium shot. Unlike the beginning, the camera is not handheld, no longer shaking. Murat walks in confidence. Cut to the long panoramic shot, and we see the Victory Column in the background, always watching—this time overseeing Lola’s fellow *Gasterbeiter* performers, Shahrazad and Kalipso from the nightclub where she had worked in their *transse* attires. They are riding in a taxi, a scene shown once before, at night, when they were together with Bili and Lola before her death. This time the scene is taking place in broad daylight. Shahrazad and Kalipso declare to the driver: “Let us tell you from the outset: we’re broads with balls! Don’t say we didn’t tell you!”

Making once again, an audio-visual and *transse* reference to dialogue between Sugar and Walter in Wilder’s *Some Like it Hot*.

This is the second Turkish taxi driver we have seen, symbolically representing the prevailing collective consciousness of the Turkish-German immigrant, and it is as such that he replies with a simple nod and a smile in the same spirit as Walter: “Alright sister!”



Victory Column in Tiergarten, Berlin.

In Ataman’s Berlin, the lesser is gone; antagonists are reconciled, others embraced and disparate united; ultimately, the good triumphs over the bad and the ugly.

Chapter II

Home is Where your Foot is Where your Heart Beats: Head-On

“Head-On” (*Gegen die Wand*, lit. *Against the Wall*; Turkish: *Duvara Karşı*)

Director: Fatih Akin

Production Year: 2004

Country: Germany, Turkey

Plot Summary

Of Turkish origins but with a Western nihilism, forty-something Cahit crashes head-on into a wall trying to kill himself. At the hospital, he meets Sibel, who also has attempted suicide, in protest against her repressive Turkish parents. In her quest for personal and sexual freedom Sibel convinces Cahit to enter into a pretend marriage. Cahit secures Sibel a job at Maren's saloon as a hair stylist to help pay her part of the rent. Sibel finds a role model in Maren as an independent strong woman, and begins to copy her, to the point of getting similar tattoos. Their relationship comes to a halt when Sibel learns that Maren and Cahit have a partnership based on sex.

Meanwhile Cahit slowly begins to fall in love with Sibel. Sibel too has growing feelings for him, but she chooses to reject love-based relationship with Cahit in favor of one night stands: she is young and wants to continue exploring before committing herself. When one of her lovers, a local bartender, Nikko, does not take no for an answer, Sibel pulls out the macho Turkish husband card and tells him to leave her alone or her husband will come after him. Enraged, Niko taunts Cahit about

“pimping” his wife. Both reacting to Niko and in a jealous rage, Cahit hits and kills Niko with his fists, and ends up in prison for homicide. The incident appears on the front page of the newspapers, and as a result, Sibel’s father and brother, determined to reclaim their family honor, disown her. Fearing for her life Sibel hides with Cahit’s friends and patriarch uncle who advises her to flee to Istanbul and forget Cahit. After a run in with her brother, who chases her through the streets, Sibel moves to Istanbul with her cousin Selma, a business-woman with no personal life.

Sibel begins working for Selma as a cleaning lady at the hotel where she works as a top manager. Sibel soon becomes bored with the routine life, and, generally unsettled by her past and current situation, goes into a self-destructive downward spiral, with random sex and drugs with strangers she hooks up with on the streets and bars. Yet she remains in touch with Cahit, now in prison for the homicide, writing him that she loves him and that will wait for him. After his release from prison, Cahit comes to Istanbul looking for Sibel. The two consummate their love and their marriage at last. While Sibel still feels love for him, however, she now has a daughter with a man who saved her life when she was brutally attacked and left to die at a street corner, and to whom she feels indebted. Cahit suggests that Sibel and her daughter come with him. At first she agrees, but ultimately decides to remain in Istanbul with her child and the father. Cahit takes off alone, heading to Mersin, the city of his birth.

Web-link to film trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usTNEfKyDL4>

Exile for the intellectual in the metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others.

Edward Said⁹³

Desire for freedom from a loveless sexuality and for a sexuality free from love what brings the main characters, together Cahit and Sibel together of Akin's melodrama, *Head-On*. This is the first film of histrillogy structured around the themes of Love, Death and Devil. The middle aged Cahit of Turkish origins, who appears to be quite Germanized by now, is still grieving his beloved but very dead German wife, hinting that love with a German according to Akin, is impossible, or impermissible.

Instead, Cahit has a non-committal German lover, Maren, with whom he engages in occasional casual sex. He leads an empty existence in a decadent West, imbued with nihilism.

Sibel on the other hand is eager to explore life, including her sexuality, and with more than one man, as she puts it. Her suffering caused by the traditional Islamic Turkish patriarchy that doesnot permit such freedom, for girls in particular. The two meet at a psychiatric clinic—emphasizing to need for healing after their attempted suicides, which represent the impasse their separate journeys thus far have reached—and save each other through a mutal and intereaving journey of ever shifting love—and in so doing, theytry to save and rebirth themselves in the womb of the motherland, Turkey. Adhering to melodramatic formula, Cahit, as he main active male character continues his (Sufi) journey toward his origins, to Mersin, the

⁹³ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 53.

city of his birth, while Sibel, the female character, settles in Istanbul into domestic life as a mother.

Identities and Narratives

Having shot to fame with *Head-On*, Fatih Akin has now assumed the mantle of Turkish-German filmmaker. But his aesthetic sensibilities, social sensitivities and perceptions, his choice of cinematic tools, as well as his target audiences, differ vastly from that of Kutlug Ataman. And the impact of *Head-On* certainly went far beyond the art world:

Its controversial topics were discussed among Turkish immigrants, Austrians and Germans and within the media. Liberal politicians used the film to argue for better immigration policies and conservative politicians abused it to underline cultural stereotypes.⁹⁴

Whereas *Lola and Billy the Kid* spoke from the margins to the hegemonic cultural center, by a decade later, Fatih Akin was beginning to reverse the dynamic. Thus in 2010, he stated, "Today we no longer tell our stories from the margins, but from the center of society."⁹⁵ Fittingly also in the context of today's post-modern representation of population fluidity as opposed to the earlier, modernistic image of single-track migration, that center is a shifting one, moving in Akin's case, for example, from Hamburg to Istanbul and now to America, where he is setting *Cut*, the

⁹⁴ Sandra Berchtel, "Identity, Cultural Representation and Feminism in the Movie *Head-On*," *Cinej Cinema Journal*, Special Issue: 1 (2011): 127, accessed November 10, 2012, doi:10.5195/cinej.2011.9

⁹⁵ Peter Keough, "Fatih Akin interview," *Outside of the Frame*, August 19, 2010, <http://blog.thephoenix.com/BLOGS/outsidetheframe/archive/2010/08/19/fatih-akin-interview-part-2.aspx>

third film of his trilogy, following the two films examined here, *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*.⁹⁶

Identities are as fluid in the context of the shifting socio-geographical centers in the transnational world of the cinema, a fluidity that is not something ethereal but grounded in the social context of experience. For today's (partly or wholly) Young Turks in Germany, the Turkish ethnic youth, who were born in Germany to parents themselves born in Germany, this means a certain ease of transition between nation-culture context, a relatively effortless slipping between their lands of birth and heritage, in what becomes actually a continuous process of highly skilled negotiation between the often tense and even opposing (defined as dichotomous) relationships of sets and subsets of communal norms and their significations. Akin strikingly reflects the double lives of the third generation German Turks / Turkish Germans as an everyday reality, living in the midst of German Germans, as something not apart from them.

The original, nineteenth-century Young Turks had led the rump Levantine empire Westward through ethno-nationalism (culminating in the realities and mythologies of the figure of Atatürk);⁹⁷ now their grandchildren as the New Young Turks, as they

⁹⁶ This means, necessarily, that the present work does not look at the trilogy as a whole, for which reason I prefer not to assume Akin's stated framework of *Love (Head-On)*, *Death (Edge of Heaven)*, and *the Devil (Cut)*—but which certainly does not undermine, I would argue, the basic premise here, as established by the research questions.

⁹⁷ Gabor Agoston, and Bruce Masters, eds., *Cyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 603-6. Also see: Serif Mardin, "Young Ottomans," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 357.

might be dubbed, try to adhere to the rules of the traditional Turkish household, and not always successfully as is the case in *Head-On*, while working, living, eating, drinking and making love with Germans, as well as with each other, and therein blurring the lines of ethnic and cultural (as well as gender) identities for both the Turkish and the German audience as well as the transnational immigrants.

“Home is under my foot,” stated Birol Uner in 2006 when I asked him if he considered himself Turkish or German, or both, or neither: “I was born in Mersin but right now I am in Kreuzberg Street, so for now that is my home” he continued, echoing Deleuze and Edward Said who have both celebrated the intellectual nomad.

⁹⁸ Uner plays Cahit, the love struck Turkish-German in *Head-On* who giving up on life after his first wife Kristina dies and crashes his car into a wall, but survives.

Sibel, the other protagonist in this film, also seems to look for freedom via death, in her case from her traditional Islamo-patriarchal Turkish family, by cutting her wrists (her brother had previously broken her nose for holding hands with a boy). Cahit and Sibel end up at the same clinic, to survive physically and to help save each other emotionally. They are homeless; love becomes their home. “My films are about homes and losing homes and finding new homes,” explains Fatih Akin.⁹⁹ In *Head-On*, home is mobile, an unfixed abode and thus emblematic of the migrant condition,

⁹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

Gauri Viswanathan, ed., *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, (New York: Random House Inc., 2001).

⁹⁹ Peter Keough, “Fatih Akin interview.”

even to the third generation. Home is also represented in the feminine through Sibel's body for the most part. As it will be discussed in Chapter III, this is a concept Akin uses more fully in *The Edge of Heaven*.

Birol Uner characterizes the female character as a "victim [*kurban*]." ¹⁰⁰Sibel's sacrifice (the other meaning of "*kurban*") is her own self, forced to dwell in the realm of the masculine, in order to survive, she must escape to Istanbul and work after her husband Cahit goes to jail, and in doing so, she help save Cahit. Although her sexuality is never presented as an issue as such, Sibel does, therefore, have to take on an opposite gender persona and thus live in the third space of androgyny, paralleling the no woman's land of her geo-cultural travels.

Like Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid*, *Head-On* has an obvious reading from the perspective of Sibel's story as a coming-of-age film, and with an ending that stays true also to the melodramatic formula. ¹⁰¹Her psychic rebirth and incorporation from liminality into the social world of adult gender has her simply reverting to her birth-gender, as woman in the home: she becomes a mother in the end. However much melodrama may implicitly subvert the established order, its role is never to openly oppose it as such.

¹⁰⁰ Author's interview with Birol Uner, Berlin, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Christine Gledhill, ed. *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London: British Film Institute, 1987.

The female character of Sibel is clearly the victim of this order as she goes from one man to another, father to a husband, and from one institution to another, family to clinic to marriage. Structurally, and crucially for a properly contextualized reading of the narrative, Sibel's story is the sub-plot: the privileged male-gaze of the hero remains the active character. Indeed, as Laura Mulvey states in her influential essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* narrative is conventionally driven by the male with the female serving as spectacle. Sibel's role as spectacle may not be very apparent, yet structurally this analysis does apply, as can be inferred from Mulvey's explication:

An active/passive heterosexual division of labor has similarly controlled narrative structure...the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle.¹⁰²

Hence *Head-On's* narrative begins and ends with Cahit. We start with a man crashing his car and end with his taking a bus trip. Cahit must revisit his birthplace, which he had left at the age of six, to find and re-center himself; and Sibel's role is to help him get to that point on his journey of self-discovery, to enable him to separate from the hostland and make it to the homeland—which ultimately frames her cinematic image through his eyes and thus does, indeed, ultimately reduce her to spectacle.

¹⁰² Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 20.

Men are often privileged in Cinema, as in life: as such they follow their quest wherever it may take them, even if it is to fight the windmills of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. This suggests another female function, as standing for or representing the quest, which is quite compatible with the function of spectacle. Thus Budd Boetticher:

[W]hat counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance.¹⁰³

Since the woman is ultimately unimportant, the real man rides alone into the sunset, as John Wayne and other countless cowboys did for decades in the American Western. In this conventionalized version of masculine narrative, the quest must continue on pain of the male ego death. There is no resolution through the woman: heroes cannot be tamed or domesticated in what may be regarded as the macho melodrama. A student more of the Hollywood than European Cinema in his early career, Akin ironically mimics and combines elements of cowboy culture with a punk-rock angst in his male characters.¹⁰⁴ This may be regarded as invoking Guney's aspiring western antihero themselves drawn at least in part from the Anatolian tradition of glamorized banditry (below). Indeed, I would argue, Akin's rendition of the gender roles in *Head-On* and his cinematic sensibilities do reflect a macho side of traditional Turkish culture and one that, at the same time, both critique and perpetuate it.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Other Pleasures*, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Particularly in *Short Sharp Shock*, modeled after *Scarface*.

Concluding, it may be stated that, as in most melodramas, *Head-On* grants a temporary agency for the woman to take charge and empower herself in the absence of her men: in this case, for Sibel, her father and brother, who disown her in the course of the film, and then Cahit, now her husband who ends up in prison when he kills his wife's ex-lover. But even here, it should be stressed, the room for maneuver is defined by the male, albeit negatively, by his absence, which actually itself points to the real issue, which is that of a masculinity in crisis.

Men in Prison, Women Imprisoned

Prisons play an important function in Turkish melodramas. The real life, primarily male rite, typically of passage, of a state-determined incarceration in real life has also long been a common feature of Turkish Cinema, generally starring the lead male and co-starring, (as friend or foe), the military, and Islam in the role of feudal-patriarchy.¹⁰⁵ As in the tradition of Hollywood, the jailhouse -that is, the law enforcement complex of arrest, police cell, court, etc.- is often enough *not* where the bad guys go, and the sheriff—in Turkey, the mayor, state governor (*vali*) is just as if not more likely to be crooked or corrupt than upstanding.

With strong nomadic roots and rebellious pasts against (non-tribal, extra-village) delocalization by the state and its taxations, Turkish men have resisted the secular

¹⁰⁵ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York and Toronto: Vintage, 2nd Edition, 1995).

government and its Western-oriented normative regulation since Ottoman times.¹⁰⁶

Establishing an anti-hero cultural base, as a stock theme in Turkish cinema, the nomadic Turkish rebel archtype, namely based on Seyh Bedreddin and Pir Sultan Abdal¹⁰⁷ both of whom revolted against the Sultan's unjust reign and died for their divine and noble cause, functions in various ways to justify and glorify the outlaw or out-of-law—which, in the Islamo-patriarchal context, especially when it comes to women, means the protection of virtue and men's honor (*namus*), on moral grounds.

Time and time again Turkish films of the 60s, 70s, and 80s depicted stories of men who go to prison with pride, heads held high, having protected their honor.¹⁰⁸ As seen in the tortuous snowy sequences in Guney's *Trek*, when it comes to adultery, there is no bigger authority than that of the rules of the feudal-patriarchy, ensconced in Islamic doctrine:

If any of your women are guilty of adultery, take the evidence of four [reliable] witnesses from amongst you against them; if they testify, confine them to houses until death does claim them. Or God ordains for them some [other] way.¹⁰⁹

Akin channels Guney in *Head-On* by sending Cahit to prison; the formulaic forced retreat and meditation for the Turkish man on self and life, in particular in

¹⁰⁶ Ayhan Aydin, "Osmanlı'da Alevi Ayaklanmalari-Baki Oz," *Cem Vakfi*, (1995), accessed November 10, 2012, <http://www.cemvakfi.org.tr/alevi-tarihi/osmanlida-alevi-ayaklanmalari-baki-oz>. Also see: Baki Öz, *Osmanlı'da Alevi Ayaklanmaları* (Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Alevites and Turkish left in particular embrace Pir Sultan Abdal (1480–1550) and Seyh Bedreddin (1359–1420) for their fight for equality and justice for all. See for example Nazim Hikmet's poem "Seyh Bedreddin Destani/Epic of Seyh Bedreddin." Also see: Abdalbaki Golpınarlı and İsmet Sungurbey, *Simavna Kadisioglu Seyh Bedreddin manakibi*, (Istanbul: Milenyum Yayınları, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ Fatih Ozguven, "Male and Female in *Yesilcam*: Archetypes Endorsed by Mutual Agreement of Audience and Player" Christine Woodhead, ed., *Turkish Cinema: An Introduction* (University of London SOAS Turkish Area Study Group Publications, 1989), 35-41.

¹⁰⁹ Kuran 24-31 Nūr.

melodramas.¹¹⁰ The reason for his imprisonment, the deed itself, the murder he committed, is not a cause for judgement—indeed, it may even reflect well on his character that he has acted emotionally to protect his wife’s honor. There is certainly more than an element of heroism in his demeanor when departing from the institution.



Cahit leaving the prison in Hamburg.

In Guney’s *Trek*, with the five prisoners journeying from their jail in the west (of Turkey, but also by extension the West, as generalized socio-cultural form) to the east (and thus to the traditional), each with a destiny tied to a woman, home

¹¹⁰ Nezih Erdogan, “Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in Turkish Melodrama between 1965 and 1975,” *Screen* 39, no. 3 (1998): 259-271.

is defined as feminine, represented through the five bodies of their women: the silent, the whore, the innocent, the wife, and the imaginary. We follow each male character's journey and observe the woman. She is dependent and largely voiceless, in one case to the point of death. The adulterous wife/whore character Zine forced to journey through the bitter winter cold by her husband Seyyit, only screams for her life as the end nears. The other women are even more accommodating, resigned to their fate, obedient to their men.

In the Seyyit/Zine story, however, there is a key moment of doubt, when his reluctance to make good on his *namus* causes him to renounce the cultural imperative. The primordial compassion for his wife arises too late, but this last minute change of heart/mind by the husband is nevertheless highly revealing: it discloses a masculinity in crisis. Honor is no longer enough in the face of the realization that he has undermined his individual humanity for sake of the morality of the collective moral order.¹¹¹ Zine is dead and he has become her murderer. He enters the prison of bad conscience, his sense of the deed he has done, his realization of the crime, the film's awful conclusion—but which also makes her death the means for his awakening, if not salvation. And once again, the woman (her body, physical being) is positioned as vehicle for the male narrative.

In *Head-On*, Sibel functions similarly. She is the catalyst in Cahit's story, serving the male dynamic and also, to use an Anatolian/Middle Eastern analogy, operative in the

¹¹¹ Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1987), 269-280.

Sufi construct whereby the man utilizes the love of a woman for transcendence into the higher realms of divine love and immersion in the eternal union, which is Allah.¹¹² Thus it is that Cahit first has to make a stop at the love-prison, to metamorphose through the forced meditative space of jail. And like Yilmaz's Zine, Akin's Sibel too is a whore, at least in the colloquial judgement of femininity within Islamic patriarchy, as she does drugs and seeks one-night stands with strange men: "I want to be free, I want to live, I want to fuck, and not just one man!"



Sibel wants to be free.

In the contemporary, Westernized, third generation context, Sibel is no silenced woman or Turkish mute. Indeed, she asserts her promiscuous desire to Cahit right

¹¹² As a masculine construct, the romantic feminine as love divine has its expression in the Occidental tradition, of course, since at least the Renaissance (c.f. Beatrice's role in Dante's *Comedy in Paradiso*).

after she propositions him with a pretend marriage in order to free herself from her family. And so strong is her desire “to live” that she cuts herself (once again), her blood gushing all over the two of them. To which Cahit responds: “Girl, are you crazy?!”



At the restaurant, Sibel cutting her wrist again, as an act of protest, to convince Cahit to agree to a pretend marriage.

Cahit’s rhetorical question is as much projection as perception. They are both cut from the same cloth, both “crazy about living” to the extent that they are willing to kill and die for it. This third generation is young and vital. Akin’s genderized expression of this passion as the starting point for Cahit and Sibel’s journeys, takes rather different forms for the two, however.

Cahit's passion has a deeply nihilistic source, born of the loss of life/love, and we learn of the seriousness of his intent from the psychiatrists' explanation that there were no skid marks from the car tires in front of the wall into which he drove head-on (showing that Cahit he really did mean to die). Sibel, on the other hand experiments with death in the hope of liberating her body / her self from the restrictive repression of the familial patriarchy. As Cahit points out to her, one cannot die from cutting your wrists diagonally and she should cut horizontally next time (showing that Sibel did not really mean to die).

There is a difference between (attempted) suicide (genuine attempts, "successful" or otherwise) and self-mutilation / "calls for help."¹¹³ Sibel's repeated cuts are rendered more as the latter. In Cahit's case, the attempted suicide is about achieving liberation from life through death; Sibel's self-mutilation, however, is an anti- and act of resistance. This is an effort to take control of one's body, its assigned identities and functions, of the physical as one's being. Such self-mutilation is a gesture directed toward life, not death. Thus the warning from Sibel's mother, Birsen:

- What do you think you are going to achieve with attempting suicide? You won't get anywhere with an attitude like that.

And the response:

- I thought they will let me be.

Sibel will continue to suffer dearly at the hands of men, almost to the point of death,

¹¹³ Armando Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 251-53. Also see: Favazza, "The Coming of Age of Self-Mutilation," *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, 186-5 (1998): 259-268.

for the desire “to fuck free like a man.” That is what happens to free and crazy girls who do not adhere to rules of the patriarchal collective. She cannot engage and express or explore the wildness of her youthful sexuality like a man because she is not one. Politically, the energy of Sibel’s contemporary (read German) feminism is imprisoned by the institutions of traditional (read Turkish) conservatism. And thus standing for the New Young Turk, she can only make her best attempt at a woman’s journey framed as an escape from history.

Madonna/Whore Complex

The traditional feminine rent in two as the Madonna/whore divide, or the cold-villainess versus warm-nurturer, has an ancient history. The biblical discourse in the West from at least the times of Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine has turned Mary Magdalene into a prostitute while celebrating Mary as the virgin mother. This war on women, it may be argued, was most effectively fought by the ancient Greeks, when they pitted women against women, having Athena, a Goddess born of a male God Zeus, defeat the Amazons. And Aeschylus with his *Oresteia*, thereafter presented a three-part tragedy in Greek theaters to celebrate the end of the Amazon’s and heroes of a Trojan War and thence make successful case, for centuries to come, as to why women should never possess power, except in progeny.

Heblames the Trojan War on women, even though it is men who revert to violence in order to possess and demystify the beautiful Helen.¹¹⁴

In this patriarchy, it appears, women became at best incubation vessels for men's procreative seed. And they are still valued as such. Motherhood as the primary empowering agency is echoed in the world religions. In Buddhism one prays to Tara, Quan Yin, and Matsu as the mother-Buddha-goddess who loves and heals unconditionally; Islam celebrates women aphoristically with the idea that heaven is under the mothers' feet; and in Christianity, if woman is not revered as the mother of Jesus (or God, in the tradition of Orthodoxy), it is because she has been removed altogether.

However, since motherhood alone cannot address or fulfill all the needs of every man or woman, the feminine is split into two personalities upon which desire is projected. This is the Madonna/whore dichotomy. Once a woman becomes a wife and a mother, the patriarchal passion has difficulty in relating to her as a sexual being. This is clearly shown and with a certain mockery and also reverence in *Head-On*, in a scene when Sibel and Cahit visit Sibel's family a few months after their marriage. A group of Turkish men is playing the game of Okey.¹¹⁵ Amidst lurid sexual jokes, they invite Cahit to come to a brothel with them. To which Cahit

¹¹⁴ A. M. Bowie, "Religion and Politics in Aeschylus' Oresteia," *The Classical Quarterly*, 43 -1 (1993):10-31. Also see: Amber Jacobs, "Towards a Structural Theory of Matricide:Psyhoanalysis, the Oresteia and the Maternal Prohibition," *Women: a Cultural Review*, 15-1 (2004), 19-34.

¹¹⁵ A Turkish rummy based game played with tiles (thought to have developed in Turkey from the game Rummikub which was discovered in Germany by the guestworkers).

responds: “Why don’t you fuck your own wives?” This comment provokes a righteous anger from the man who had invited him, who is ready even to attack Cahit when they are interrupted by one of the wives—which in turn forces all the men to stop and deny what has just happened; instead they pretend to talking benignly about what else but sport. As soon as the wife leaves, the righteous-angry man gets up and, pointing his finger directly at Cahit, warns him harshly never to refer to their wives with that sort of language! Cahit’s silent but mocking expression reflects the hypocrisy of these men; it is also implicitly directed at the patriarchy and succinctly testifies to the existing exercise of the Madonna/whore dichotomy in Turkish-German culture.

For centuries, the bodies of women have functioned as the objects of male desires and fears. The modern development of patriarchal religion in particular has seen the desire sanctified and the fear demonized. The twentieth century saw this Madonna/whore complex projected onto the silver screen with women as glamorized objects on high heels with lipstick. The studio Goddess represents the sexualized ecstasy that transcends the worldly realm and transports men to the magical mystical (and sometimes thence to their own destruction). For what is the world of the movie, after all, but so many moments of fleeting magic (and mayhem) created by men and for men?

Of course, the women must play their roles, as spectacle, supporting emblems to the male hero, and motivation, causing him to move mountains for love’s sake—but this

also implies women as audiences having to follow the film, as Mulvey puts it, via the male gaze, which thus conceives an androgynous experience.¹¹⁶ The woman looks through the (male) director following the (male) hero's look upon the woman as the object of his (male) desire.

This valorizing of the sexual comprises an empowerment of the objectified female (as utilized, apparently, by the femme fatale), but which in turn creates an imbalance, according to Mulvey, leading, in Freudian terms, to a castration anxiety in the male.¹¹⁷ In order to disavow that anxiety, she must be demystified. Hence, the female is carefully dissected into body parts, cut by certain camera angles. Her totality is regularly reduced to her legs, bosom or torso as the camera focuses on one body part at a time at various, often critical, points in the film, visually and thematically nullifying her narrative agency.

When Sibel begins to exercise her freedom to have sex with no strings attached, however, for herself rather than in the interest of Cahit's male narrative, it is hardly surprising that her active agency is a threat that creates castration anxiety so violent as to be uncontainable by cinematic technique. The director's cut is insufficient and the harlot needs to be disposed of, quickly, completely. Thus patriarchy puts a stop to her whorish assault on its system with a brutish assault on her body, and Akin's male narrative has her raped in the streets of Istanbul.

¹¹⁶ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Other Pleasures*, 19-20.

¹¹⁷ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Other Pleasures*, 14-26.

The streets are dangerous for women in traditional cinema.¹¹⁸ They warn the strong-willed independent woman not to venture outside of her designated domestic space. A masculinized woman must tread carefully in the masculine outdoors. For not heeding that advice, Sibel almost loses her life, being rescued by a cab-driver in the nick of time. Saved by a man, she pays her dues by going back into the domestic realm under the wings of this kind man, to become a mother and a wife. Thus, the patriarchy is restored¹¹⁹—as in most melodramas, and also some musicals and comedies (e.g., most Doris Day films), in which the independent working girl leaves her job as soon as she finds domestic bliss with the man of her dreams.¹²⁰

Insofar as the cinema generally has given women agency—and this is certainly true in the melodramatic tradition of Turkey's popular film industry—it is only to find love, contextualized by the implication of (heterosexual) monogamy, i.e. marriage. She is not awarded the imaginative to change the world, other than as a consequence, mostly unintended, of this desire, and if the desire is somehow transgressive, the result is somehow violent. The Madonna/whore duality is regularly expressed thus in cinema, and it is thus that Turkish melodrama, like its Hollywood counterpart offers women two formulaic redemptions: motherhood or death. These are both explored as possibilities in *Head-On*.

¹¹⁸ Ozguven, "Male and Female in Yesilcam," 35-41.

¹¹⁹ Ann Snitow, "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different," in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, eds., Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 259-276.

¹²⁰ Janice A. Radway, "The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction," in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 86-118.

The heroines of melodramas are often forced outside of their safe domestic space, into the dangerous outside world of men, forcing them to undermine their *namus* and thus risking death. And if the women survive, they must retreat back inside, into motherhood, or else tempt fate a second time. Once is enough for Sibel.

The melodramatic film formula that starts with the gaze of the male hero has this opening as a parenthesis for the switching from male to female gaze in the absence of the hero, whose masculinity is in crisis.¹²¹ *Head-On* exemplifies this well when Cahit goes to jail for homicide, and it is Sibel who steps up and works as a cleaning lady in Istanbul to support herself financially and her man, emotionally—before the inversion of this temporary agency is restored and the parenthesis closed, returning us ultimately to the male gaze and the man as hero.

Thus, when Cahit leaves for Mersin¹²² at the end of the film, Sibel is not there. She has fulfilled her role, and he does not need a female to find his center. While the woman needs a man for completion, for redemption, for security, the man as independent agent, author of his own destiny, does not. In this case, the male hero has transcended the emotional prison of his past through the love of a woman, the latter in the end operating as a tool to transport him to a higher realm that offers the prospect of wholeness and holiness. Sibel, meanwhile, has gone from abused victim

¹²¹ E. Ann Kaplan, "Classical Hollywood Film and Melodrama," in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, eds., John Hill, and Pamela Church Gibson; consultant eds., Richard Dyer, E. Ann Kaplan, and Paul Willemen, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 272-82.

¹²² Mersin: a port city on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

to dangerous rebel to “normal” feminine, through stages of lover, whore and motherhood.¹²³

Masculine Feminine

Foucault who defended “everyone’s right to kill himself” states that suicide is the ultimate defiance of the power over one’s own body.¹²⁴ That certainly seems to fit Sibel’s point of departure as victim and rebel in *Head-On*, even if the suicide is not really attempted and the defiance not ultimate. In the early part of the film, after her self-mutilating and self-defeating acts of rebellion, Sibel finds a way to achieve freedom from her Islamo-patriarchal family in her sham marriage to Cahit. The solution to her imprisonment in the confines of one social institution, is shelter in the pretence of another: She marries a fellow Turk, albeit a drunk punk bum. A man is a man, a Turk is a Turk. It will have to do.

¹²³ Ana M. Lopez, “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema,” in *Femnism and Film*, ed., A. Ann Kaplan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 505-520.

¹²⁴ Quoted in James Miller and Jim Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Grand Street Press, 1993), 54.

Also See: Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 135-159.



Sibel and Cahit's Turkish wedding photo.

The compromise of her pretend marriage proves to be deadly, however. Although living more as a German than a Turk (or, as a New Young Turk)—having lived in Germany since the age of six and been married (genuinely, we assume) to a German woman—Cahit nonetheless reveals his native Turkish machismo. He begins to fall in love with the youth, beauty and optimism of Sibel, desires to possess her and grows ever more jealous.

Sibel, meanwhile, feels emancipated. She has reached the point where the journey of Osman and Murat's mother in *Lola* ended, and takes off from there. This younger woman is sufficiently confident to be the subject of her own narrative, allowing the camera to follow her story through the German city streets. Finally free to live as she has desired, she has one-night stands with numerous men, including the neighborhood bartenders, one of whom wants to pursue her. When Niko, played by

Stefan Gebelhoff, does not take “No” for an answer, Sibel pulls out the I-have-a-(Turkish)-husband card, telling him that if he does not stop, her husband will come after him. Little does she know that her threat will become a reality. When Niko repeatedly asks Cahit how much it would cost to “fuck his wife from behind,” Cahit snaps and turns around and kills him with a blow. The male violence that will see Sibel make the final marital compromise is predicted, though for now she is still protected.

Having committed the ultimate daughter’s betrayal of dishonoring her family name, Sibel is swiftly disowned by her father and brother and, fearing for her life, makes the move to Turkey, escaping to Istanbul with the help her mother and best friend Selma, played by top Turkish actress Meltem Cumbul. Female solidarity overcomes the aggressive male front, in the fight for female survival. Or at least, it provides a temporary respite.

Once in Istanbul, Sibel begins to work at Selma’s hotel as a cleaning lady, the very phrase betraying this most traditional of women’s jobs. Yet at nights, Sibel lives life hard, with hard drugs, hard liquor, and random sex with strangers. And this time on overtly masculine terms. With her hair cut short, she dresses butch in baggy cloths; no longer adopting the body-projection of male desire, she walks and talks with the arrogant phallic mystique. She no longer cuts herself but taunts the men to cut her instead, screaming in protest: “You want a piece of me, then go ahead, come and get it or you’re a faggot son of a bitch!”



Sibel in Istanbul, looking out the window of Selma's apartment.

By now, Sibel is not imitating men, but challenging them, attacking the patriarchy (head on), her provocation like a mirror held up to its own violence, her rage meeting its aggression until she is raped and almost killed at knife-point, being stabbed and penetrated multiple times, as most “sexually promiscuous” women are subjected to in both melodramas and horror films.¹²⁵ The patriarchy provoked reveals itself.

Significantly, Sibel is only permitted to tap into her active persona during the absence of her man. As discussed below (Chapter III), this was also the case, for example, with American women in the workforce during World War II. When the men returned, women left the factories and went back to their kitchens. And in Iran, after the revolution, which women had helped to bring about in large numbers,

¹²⁵ Carol Clover, “Her Body, Himself: Gender in Slasher Film,” in *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 20-65.

when the need was passed, they were told to go back to their domestic realms to better serve the Islamic Republic. When the masculine crisis ends, the women must return to their designated roles in domestic space.

In the context of the Akin's traditional Istanbul, if a woman rejects the "husband and wife" formula and pursues an independent life and career, she may be presented as selfish and less than feminine. Certainly this is the case in Selma's character in *Head-On*. Defined by her professional identity as the second masculine female, Selma travels to Germany to be Sibel's witness during the marriage ceremony. It is Selma, with a stern handshake, who tells Cahit to take good care of Sibel. And it is Selma who helps Sibel to escape from Germany after the death of Niko, before sharing her house with her and giving her a job at the prestigious Hotel Marmara, where she has a managerial position.

But Selma is not rewarded or celebrated: instead, she is judged by both Sibel and Cahit and therefore by the audience. A divorced woman, she is now devoted to her work. Her life is presented through Sibel's eyes as a lifeless, quite boring and rather meaningless existence. Thus, when Selma tries to stop Sibel from moving out of her apartment to be with new friends, Sibel responds with vengeance:

-All you do is go to work, you don't do anything else. That's why your husband divorced you. Don't you understand?!

This earns Sibel a slap in the face (echoing the broken nose she received from her brother), this time from the masculinized matriarch. Sibel, we suspect, has hit a raw

nerve, since “sexuality is reserved for the ‘bad women’” and “wisdom and rationality for men, women must emulate masculinity to gain credibility and power.”¹²⁶ Selma’s ambition to achieve economic freedom has indeed been won at the expense of hersexuality. Her masculinity is really—deeply, internally, spiritually—her loss.

This suspicion is confirmed when Selma wants to protect Sibel from Cahit. He comes to Istanbul to find Sibel after being released from jail in Germany, and Selma is judged once again, when Cahit asks: “How strong are you Selma, to stand between her and me?”

The implication being that Selma—shown ordering about her male employees as Cahit enters the scene—has become masculinized to such a “professional” degree that she is now firmly detached from her emotions, and hence her femininity, which is the price that professional women must pay to reach to the top as Selma has done and to stay there, competitive.

¹²⁶ Gonul Donmez-Colin, *Women Islam and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 35.
Gonul Donmez-Colin, *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 143.



Selma the professional – a hotel manager.

Again, however, one might be led to wonder about the extent to which this is Akin's contemporary social realism or just his historicized male vision. Certainly one might suggest that a woman in Selma's position today might (be presented as being able to) maintain her sexuality; and that if she could not, the cause might lie less in her choices than the inabilities and disabilities of the unreconstructed men and patriarchal environment around her—which certainly might be presented thus on film. If Sibel's husband had indeed left her because all she did was work (and did not give him sex), that might have been because his macho ego could not handle a socially powerful woman committed to her job.

By the time Cahit comes searching for Sibel in Istanbul, a few years have passed. Sibel has become a mother and a partner to the cab driver who saved her when she

had been stabbed and left to die. Selma and Sibel now represent opposing female personas. Sibel the whore, now tamed and redeemed by motherhood, stands as a challenge to and in judgment of Selma, who has no such aspiration to motherhood, wifehood or even love. Selma's soulless existence carries a bitter warning to women: economic power, the professional life, divorces them from their own femininity and isolates them from human love. They are condemned to live alone.¹²⁷

Dear Husband, Dear Wife

Sibel, on the other hand, embodies the feminine values of emotional relationship even while living wild. She writes to her "Dear Husband" in prison dutifully and regularly. And then she is given glasses to wear, hence making reference to the intellectual, to science and education. This all involves an engagement with established institutions, thus also making a narrative connection to the beginning of the film, where we first saw her at the psychiatrist's clinic. Indeed, she has come full circle. She can see better now—the glasses also give her a certain level of enlightened vision—that neither death (imagined suicide) nor promiscuity will deliver the freedom she is seeking, but love will.

She has a daughter (implying her newfound link with the socially traditional feminine) named Pamuk (lit. cotton, or cotton wool, implying softness) to whom she

¹²⁷ As a very successful professional woman, the top Turkish actress who plays Selma, Meltem Cumbul, may identify quite easily with some aspects of her character. While Cumbul may not be alone or divorced from her sexuality, she does freely state that "Marriage isn't something that I attach great importance to," (*Evlilik benim için çok önem taşıyan bir şey değil*). See: "Meltem Cumbul Biyografi," *Biyografi.net*, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.biyografi.info/kisi/meltem-cumbul>.

is devoted. She is participating in the mundane and the profound, in the miracle: she has chosen life after all. In that life, Cahit now has become a secondary transformative character, thus inverting the (male) gender narrative with the enclosed (female) gender narrative.

Sibel feels for Cahit when he reappears in her life, but this love is something elusive, intangible. They meet up and make love at what becomes their secret rendezvous hotel in Istanbul, but after the sex she calls to check on her daughter, indicating her eventual choice of a life with the father of her child, rather than with Cahit, who had asked her to make a life with him together with her daughter. She maintains her new role through staying faithful to the biological, nuclear family. Cahit has come to represent the dark and violent past for Sibel, and she has been redeemed through motherhood, tradition and patriarchy restored.¹²⁸

This is emphasized if anything by the fact that we never see Sibel's new man, her knight in shining armor. In fact, it really does not matter very much who he is, as an individual. He merely represents the archtypal man who is decent, caring, and kind, as all men are or ought to be. Through the vehicle of this man and this marriage, therefore, Sibel decides to leave behind her whorish past and settle instead for the Madonna.

¹²⁸ E. Ann Kaplan, "Mothering Feminism and Representation: The Maternal Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-1940," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill, (London: The British Film Institute, 1987), 113-137.

Gavur/Infidel Lover

Another female character in the early part of the film who reflects the male projections of desires and fears in the Madonna/whore binary, is Maren, (played by Catrin Striebeck.) Maren is Cahit's non-committal German lover. The two have aggressive, drug-induced sexual sessions, followed by scenes in which they are casually naked, playing backgammon, or drinking. One minute glorified, before sex, and the next ordinary, post sex, Maren's body and sexuality are thus simultaneously glorified and undermined.

From the Islamic perspective, Maren is also the German *gavur* woman, the free *frauline*, in equal measure desired and despised by the Turkish immigrant. In the Turkish-Muslim collective psyche, the tall, blue-eyed infidels are accessible (which makes them attractive), but with an easy virtue (which makes them worthless). This duality is also expressed through Maren as the Madonna/whore dichotomy, for she too displays moments of feminine nurturing, as she tiptoe' around Cahit's fragile ego and accommodates his moods with kind and caring words, yet also fights him both with words and in bed during their sado-masochistic sexual encounters.



Cahit and Maren at a bar in Hamburg.

In fact, according to Berchtel this violent relationship may be taken as emblematic of the film as a whole, as demonstrating that the sexuality in *Head-On* is one of domination and power¹²⁹— and eloquently expressed by this brief exchange:

Maren: How was the concert?

Cahit: Piss off, Maren!

Maren: Asshole!

Cahit: Fuck you!

Maren: Motherfucker!

Like her female predecessor, “the hour of the woman,” in postwar German Cinema, “who has been decentering the male protagonist,” Maren too is sexually promiscuous and aggressive, empowered by her economic freedom, and

¹²⁹ Berchtel, “Identity, Cultural Representation and Feminism in the Movie *Head-On*,” 128.

therefore assigned responsibility for the moral, economic, and social problems of Cahit, her postmodern *Heimkehrer*.¹³⁰

(O/A)ccidental Turk

Like Birol Uner, who plays him, Cahit is shaped more by the German culture than the Turkish. Cahit is quite impatient with the inferior German of a taxi driver who has been deported from Bavaria back to Turkey and even prefers to speak in English to Turkish with Selma.¹³¹ Back in Hamburg, when Sibel's brother judgmentally asks him what he had done with his Turkish, Cahit replies that he has "thrown it away."

With his sense of hopelessness and Western nihilism after the death of his German wife, Cahit becomes at once the perfect Turkish anti-hero of Guney's Western-dramas and the emasculated man in crisis who never feels at home in Fassbinder's post-war Germany, no matter where he is. In fact, "home" for Cahit, as we see in the end, will be back in Mersin, Turkey, the motherland (his resistance to the Turkish language thus revealed as a denial of his past). But he first must shift the object of his lust from the infidel German Maren, the postmodern rubble woman (*Trümmerfrau*), and find his heart through the Turkish Sibel. Maren is left behind without even so much as a goodbye.

¹³⁰ Hester Baer, *Dismantling the Dream Factory: Gender, German Cinema and the Postwar Quest for a New Film Language (Film Europa: German Cinema in An International Context)*, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1-20.

¹³¹ Like Cahit also, Uner was born in Mersin, which he left at the age of six, and speaks very little Turkish, preferring German (he has also little patience for people—leastways artists and intellectual—who are not fluent in German), or else English.



Cahit at the clinic after his suicide attempt.

Cahit has been choosing German women over Turks—before Maren, his dead wife, Catherina, had also been German. It is the love of a fellow Turkish woman who will save his life however; after Cahit's death wish of an unhealthy life style and a love for the infidel finally drives him against the wall at 80 miles-an-hour. Then having fallen for Sibel, the Turk reverts to type and the man who had dared to insult her honor ends up dead. And to cap it all, the slain man was Greek, so we have a Greek killed by Turk. Ethnic clichés lurk behind the scenes and between the lines in *Head-On*, as in all Akin's previous films.

As well the use of cliché, Akin also confirms the image of non- integration between Turkish and German integration. Turks and Germans can play at love, even be lovers, but they do not end up as husbands and wives. In his earlier films *In July* and

Short Sharp Shock, Turks end up with Turks and Germans with Germans—the story is no different in *Head-On*. The impulse to this is as much patriarchal as it is racial. Western, emancipated women would not be as accommodating and as dutiful or worthy as Turkish Muslim women. They are the objects of desire to be possessed and conquered, but when it comes to marriage and procreation, they are no better than Turks for the German.

Such an impulse comes from not only Akin's own upbringing but also his overall populist philosophy of cinema. He may be a student of Fassbinder and Guney, but he is also a self-confessed product of Hollywood Cinema, and as he puts it himself, he “wants his aunt with an elementary school education to like his films, as well as the art critics.”¹³²

This adherence to the traditional and populist yields Akin some interesting results in *Head-On*. Sibel's redemption in motherhood and marriage with a fellow Turk offers a traditionalist alternative to rescue by a German male lover, as in some earlier films made by sympathetic German female directors, such as in Helma Sanders-Brahms' 1975 *Shirin's Wedding* (*Shirins Hochzeit*); while Sibel's antihero “husband” (Cahit) and caring husband (the taxi driver) are a welcome relief from the archetype of oppressive husband, such as in Tevrik Baser's 1986 *40 Square Meters Germany* (*40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*; *Almanya 40 Metre Kare*)—who is displaced in *Head-On* to the father and the brother.

¹³² Filiz Cicek, conversations with Fatih Akin, Cannes Film Festival, France, 2012.

Akin's mix of the traditional and populist may also be seen in the way he romanticizes and glorifies the dutiful Eastern Muslim women for Cahit, against the backdrop of Germany and German women. After all, Sibel does get a tattoo like that of Maren, does fuck like a man, like Maren, and does do drugs and take up a punk-lifestyle like the rest of her fellow Germans—only to end up in Turkey, in the motherland with a Turkish gentleman.

For both Cahit and Sibel, the motherland here becomes the Promised Land in reverse, a psychic resolution by spiritual return. Just as they started from different points in their commonality of non-suicide, however, so does this return also occur in rather different ways, with very different meanings. For Sibel, the Turkish home proves to be family life; the destination is grounded in social convention and, in particular, the motherland as motherhood. For Cahit the motherland of his birthplace, Mersin, is a further journey of retreat and rediscovery; he must go back another stage, to the womb, to re-parent himself for rebirth.

Cahit almost destroys himself and Sibel is almost destroyed by men. The Turkish motherland is thus also constructed in opposition to the German destructive (notwithstanding the fact that Sibel's men are the Turkish patriarchy). With the happy accident of a match made in the suicidal heaven of a German psychiatric clinic, Cahit and save one another through their pretend marriage that enables them to invoke and find love and strength in one another long enough to survive the

Occident. They make it outlive, so this melodrama is indeed romantic comedy after all, even if they do not find romance with each other, and it is not always very funny.

Melody in Drama: Gender-in(g) Soundtracks

Music is an integral part of melodrama. Reference may be made to Hollywood, and certainly to the Turkish tradition of Yesilcam, as influences on Akin in this respect. The extravagances of Indian Bollywood may also be offered as exemplary of the escapist use of music (and dance) for emotional release within the confined, pressurized context of the intricate dynamics of intimate human and social relations. In this film, music not only employed to both sustain and structure the narrative, but is also has this function.

Head-On starts with a male voice signaling a start, “1, 2, 3...” over a black screen, before we see images, then comes music, and the scene. This ordering reflects Akin’s own prioritizing insofar as he chooses his soundtracks before writing his scripts. The soundtrack to *Head-On* switches back and forth between the East and the West, present and past, masculine and feminine, aggressive and melancholic. Western punk rock of the 80s, for example, struts rebellious, violently discordant tones.

In his first scene, as Cahit argues with Maren and begins to break chairs over the table at the neighborhood bar and to kick the guy who insulted him by calling him “gay” (sic), the punk rock soundtrack aids him in venting in his anger. In another scene Cahit and Sibel are dancing in their Hamburg apartment, jumping up and

down, to *Punk is Not Dead*.¹³³ Akin captures Cahit's "raw energy" by an intermittent freeze of his face in mid air as in screaming along to the music he frees the restrictions of his domestic space newly decorated by Sibel, and claims it for the masculine: "PUNK..! IS..! NOT..! DEAD..! YEAH BABY!!!"



Cahit partying with Sibel after their wedding at his apartment.

The music of the East which sets the tone of the film at the countdown start, conversely, is melancholic, while later in the film, bittersweet nineteenth-century love songs situate Istanbul in its Oriental past. These songs, used between scenes to divide the film into chapters, are sung by Turkish-German female singer Idil Uner

¹³³ *Punk is Not Dead*: by *The Exploited*, a Scottish punk band from the second ("new") wave of UK punk. See: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Exploited/e/B000APBP90>.

against the backdrop of a romantic Istanbul skyline comprising the silhouettes of mosques and their minarets in the historical Golden Horn (*Haliç*) district.¹³⁴



Musical ensemble at Golden Horn

Now this image is read as a modern day *Thousand and One Nights*, told by the bard (*aşık*) Shahrazad. The film opens (and closes) with the tableau of Idil Uner,

¹³⁴ This image is particularly associated with the Tulip (*Lale*) Period (1718–1730), somewhat decadent period during which there was a flowering of [the] arts, culture and architecture. Most famously, the poet Nedim broke new ground in verse and was famous for his musical and poetry escapades on *kayiks* (a type of boat). It was during this period that the Ottoman Empire began to orient itself towards Europe. Today the Haliç district is once again a popular place, and there has been a TV sitcom under the same name, with its characters situated in that period.

See: Fatma Muge Gocek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Also: “*Lale devri geri dönüyor*,” *Haber Turk Gazete*, June 11, 2012, accessed July 20, 2012, <http://www.haberturk.com/yasam/haber/757968-lale-devri-geri-donuyor>.

accompanied by clarinet virtuoso Selim Sesler and a group of male musicians in black tuxedos. Uner's body, clothed in long, velvet, red dress, dramatizes and feminizes the scene. Her mouth voices the words translated on screen, the songs of yester-love, love gone wrong, of the flirtatious and of impossible love.

With each interval (the interruption of the main narrative), the scene becomes more and more sexually charged, taking the viewer on a journey into the present-past of the decadent Orient, which, with its forbidden harem and sexual delights, had so captured the imagination of the prudish Protestant Occident.¹³⁵ The presence of the mosques stands strong as a reminder of the moral codes for human sexual desires, the voice of the woman in red velvet dress calls for love and temptation juxtaposed against the backdrop of the minarets from which the Muslims are called to prayer. On this Orientalist carpet, the woman, desire and patriarchal control are laid out before the viewer.

The viewer is asked for engagement: which one will you choose? Woman or mosque, desire or duty? As the viewer watches the story unfolding of characters who struggle with their dark passion (*kara sevda*), the boundary line and the tension between religion/men and sexuality/women is that of power. Cahit kills for it. Sibel oscillates between rebellion and subordination.

¹³⁵ C.f. its employment by Virginia Woolf as the 1928 representation of a seventeenth-century (gender) liminal space for the eponymous Orlando.

Life Imitates Art Imitates Life

In hindsight, the Oriental music set the perfect stage for the lead actress Sibel Kekilli's own background as counter to the wholesome Muslim-Madonna-mother image her character achieves at the film's conclusion. Plucked from a shopping mall and unknown before *Head-On* (this was her first film), Kekilli was exposed by the tabloid newspaper *Bild-Zeitung* as an ex-porn actress; apparently in her past she had gone under the pseudonym "Dilara" (this was not her first film).

At the Berlinale in February of 2004, Akin and cast members including Kekilli were on hand to collect the Golden Bear for the film (*Head-On* was feted, even appropriated perhaps, as the first German winner of the award for 18 years, while for its part, reported Akin, "the Turkish film world saw it as part of Turkish cinema").¹³⁶ Then the lurid *Bild* story broke and a media frenzy followed; the holly untouchable muslim-women archetype was thus fractured.

Kekilli herself admitted, "Yes, I did make these (porno) films. But that's the past. What counts is the Golden Bear."¹³⁷ Akin who already knew her past, found the tabloid reporting "bigoted and disgusting." And the Berlinale director who had to handle the scandal, too, was frustrated:

¹³⁶ Wendy Mitchel, Going to Extremes: Fatih Akin on His Turkish-German Love Story "Head-On," *Indiewire*, 1/19/2009, accessed August 15, 2012, http://www.indiewire.com/article/going_to_extremes_fatih_akin_on_his_turkish-german_love_story_head-on.

¹³⁷ DW Staff, "From Bare to Bear for Ex-Porn Queen," *Deutsche Welle, Culture*, 02/18/2004, accessed August 18, 2012, <http://www.dw.de/from-bare-to-bear-for-ex-porn-queen/a-1118125-1>.

We're behind her all the way... But I have nothing to say here morally... Thanks to the media, she can't even go out of her home, she's totally besieged.¹³⁸

Indeed, after seeing reproductions of some of the pornographic images in *Bild*, the actress's father was quick to disown her:

The disgrace is too great for the family...Sibel moved to Hamburg two years ago. Apparently she worked in the city hall and now this news. I can never forgive her for it. I don't want to ever see her again.



Sibel Kekilli at the Bambi Awards.

Sibel's father in *Head-On* also disowned her after reading about his daughter in a newspaper that she had been transformed into an unfaithful promiscuous woman in her search for her personal freedom and sexual liberation.¹³⁹ On various occasions, Kekilli explained that she did porn because of lack of money and opportunity, but she was nonetheless publically humiliated and punished by her family for her whorish activities.

¹³⁸ DW Staff, "From Bare to Bear for Ex-Porn Queen."

¹³⁹ Relationships between and uses of the personal lives of actors made in the film have also been noted in respect to Unel and also Cumbul; other examples no doubt found their way onto the film scenario from Fatih Akin, one such being the idea of Cahit's being propositioned for marriage by a stranger (Sibel), which apparently occurred to him (unlike Cahit, he did not accept, but he did see its value as a plot device).

Kekili's acting achievement in the role of Sibel was widely recognized, however. She won a Lola (Germany's premier film prize) for her work in the film, as well as a Bambi (Germany's oldest media awards). The awards ceremony for the Bambi that year was held at the *Theater am Hafen*, in Hamburg, where Kekilli seems to have experienced an emotional meltdown:

She railed against the media, calling their interest in her past part of a "dirty smear campaign" and describing the ordeal of having her past being resurfaced as "media rape."¹⁴⁰

As a result Kekilli was cast to the winds and into a no-man's-land by the German media, neither rejected nor accepted, existing for a while in a new and a rather abstract "third space."¹⁴¹ Most Turks in Germany refused to go to see the film on the grounds that both the film and Kekilli reflected badly on Turkish women and the Turkish community in Germany as a whole.¹⁴² In time, Kekilli was able to embrace her newfound fame and go on to play lead role in number of European and US films and TV series, but with each film, there comes a renewed interest in her porn-past. Kekilli herself has thus come to function as an embodiment of Madonna/whore complex in media discourse, as well as in real life.

¹⁴⁰ Tucker Cummings, "'Game of Thrones' Actress Sibel Kekilli Performed in Adult Films " Yahoo! Contributor Network, Jun 16, 2011, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://tv.yahoo.com/news/game-thrones-actress-sibel-kekilli-performed-adult-films-173300981.html>.

¹⁴¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 53-56, 143, 311-316.

¹⁴² Filiz Cicek's conversations with German-Turkish actors, actresses, and residents of Berlin, 2006.

“Back” to the Motherland

Berghahn argues, and I disagree, that Akin’s endings in Turkey are not really homecomings. Instead, she contends, Turkey is just another place where characters happen to go to, explaining, for example, that the reason Sibel goes to Istanbul is not because she wants to go back to her roots but because her cousin Selma is there.¹⁴³ Akin too states that it is not his intention to emphasize any back-to-roots theme—and yet, from *In July* through *Head-On* and *Crossing the Bridge* to *The Edge of Heaven*, all of his main characters do just that. They don’t happen to have a cousin, or a friend in, say, England or France where they can go to regroup and re-find themselves. Instead, in Akin’s films, the inner compass of his core cast always leads them “back” to the country of origin. Even though Turkey tends not to represent a stable, permanent new home for them—in this sense, Sibel is something of an exception—it is, nevertheless, a necessary stop in their quest to self-discovery, a Freudian womb of incubation for the rebirth of their future selves.¹⁴⁴ Even in *Solino*, a film about an Italian immigrant family, one of the main characters goes back to his parents’ village in Turkey.

¹⁴³ Daniela Berghahn, “No Place Like Home? Or Impossible Homecomings in the Films of Fatih Akin,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 4-3, (2006), 151-57.

¹⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny.’” In James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, XVII-1917-1919* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 217-256. Freud linked *womb* with *home*:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. there is a joking saying that ‘Love is home-sickness’; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before’, we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body.

Also see: John Bowlby, “The Nature of the Child’s Tie to His Mother,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 39 (1958): 1-23.

Various possibilities for siting the rejuvenation in other places are suggested along the way, but they are not taken up. The German physician at the psychiatric clinic in *Head-On*, for example, suggests Africa to Cahit as a place of healing. In *The Edge of Heaven*, Lotte tells Ayten she had been in India for the last three months, a place her mother aspired to go 30 years ago. Yet we never see either of them there. And like the Turkish characters, even the Germans who travel, end up in Istanbul and nowhereelse. *In July* in particular, a road movie, the road buddies could easily have gotten distracted and stayed in one of many countries they were crossing. Instead they stay true to their course to arrive at the Ortakoy Mosque by the Bosphorus Bridge axiomatically linking Europe to Asia.

Akin explains that he wants his characters to be mobile and that home is always moving and shifting. This is so when we see Cahit moving in a bus to Mersin. His destination is determined yet we don't see him getting off at the last stop; we leave him as his bus starts leaving off from the garage. There is no guarantee that he will indeed land in Mersin, nor do we know what will come after that. In contrast Sibel is more settled in a family life, though not the happiest of human beings. Following Freud, there is no "attainable happiness" in life for these Eastern rooted/bound "Westerners," only the "manageable unhappiness."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 5-90.

Claudia Barucca, and Ilaria A. De Pascalis argue that Sibel and Cahit's journey doesn't necessarily mean that they are rejecting their "Occidental" culture of Germany. They state that this is especially true of Cahit, who is imbued with "western nihilism." See Claudia Barucca, and Ilaria A. De Pascalis, "Multiculturalism in Transition. Representation of migrants in Fatih Akin's contemporary cinema." Conference paper, ECREA – Diaspora, Migration and the Media section Diasporas, Migration and Media: Crossing Boundaries, New Directions, Utrecht, 2009.

While both Sibel and Cahit reject and challenge traditional Islamo-Turkish-patriarchy, as well as what seems like a shallow, superficial German existence, they nonetheless, follow the melodramatic formula as explained by Linda Williams, display a certain level of conformity to these hegemonic cultures in the end.¹⁴⁶ Sibel's (de-)individuation becomes complete with motherhood, while Cahit, like Birol Uner himself, functions as the self-declared "post-modern-nomad," from beginning to end, but who still ends up on the road to his birthplace.¹⁴⁷ They both find their way home, to a home of sorts, in Turkey.

The issue is not, whether Cahit and Sibel go "home" to Turkey—quite clearly they do—or whether there is anything there for them—just as clearly the answer is "Yes"—but rather, what does this "return" mean for them? Obviously the fetishized home of the migrant is not waiting for them, abandoned and fossilized, like an old tree just needing to be watered. On the contrary, there is not even the space for nostalgia: that belonged to the first generation, and is certainly denied to the third. Rather, like any home after that of childhood, home has to be made. Sibel and Cahit have to make meaning. In this sense, the framing of *Head-On* with the Orientalist tableau refashions the question in terms of the tension between the symbolic and the material reality of place. The journeying characters know that Turkey does not offer any easy passport direct to the home of the heart—in which sense the framing tableau merely presents an ironic comedy—and yet they know no other route.

¹⁴⁶ Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, Ed., Nick Browne (University of California Press, 1998): 42-88.

¹⁴⁷ Dick Pels, "Privileged Nomads, On the Strangeness of Intellectuals and the Intellectuality of Strangers," in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 16, no. 1 (1999): 63-86.

Chapter III

Help me Find my Mother: The Edge of Heaven

The Edge of Heaven (Auf der anderen Seite; Turkish: *Yaşamın Kıyısında*)

Director: Fatih Akin

Production Year: 2007

Country: Germany, Turkey, Italy

Plot Summary

The Edge of Heaven is post-modern narrative put together from the connected but disjointed stories of its central characters, Ayten, Lotte, Yeter, Ali, Nejat, and Susanne. Ayten is a member of a leftist armed political resistance organization in Istanbul. After clashes with the police during the May Day celebrations, she becomes an illegal, homeless exile in Hamburg, Germany; and then, after refusing to work as a waitress at a restaurant ran by her fellow leftist comrades, Ayten finds herself homeless, sleeping at the university campus, where her classes include Nejat's German Literature and Philosophy course.

A German student, Lotte, offers Ayten a room at her mother Susanne's house. Lotte and Ayten soon become lovers. However, described as a "typically strict German" by her daughter Lotte, Susanne is not thrilled by the prospect of having an illegal Turk under her roof, especially since she has little sympathy for Ayten's politics, even though she had herself once been a leftist hippie, some thirty years before. Ayten, believing that her mother Yeter is working at a shoestore in Bremen, sets out to find

her with the help of Lotte, without success. On their way back, they are stopped by the police; Ayten first attempts to run, and then, when she is caught, asks for political asylum—unsuccessfully, it transpires.

Meanwhile, Yeter is working as a prostitute in Bremen, and not having heard from Ayten in a while, does not know her daughter's whereabouts and is quite distraught. After being threatened by radical Muslim Turks, Yeter decides to move in with one of her clients, Ali, who wants to have her only to himself and is willing to pay her wages for this. A widower and a divorcee, Ali has a troubled relationship with women. Following his first wife's death, Ali has singlehandedly raised his son, Nejat, now professor at the University of Hamburg (teaching the German Literature and Philosophy class).

During one of Nejat's visits to his father in Bremen, Ali drinks little too much and ends up at a hospital with a heart attack. Fearing that Nejat and Yeter might be having an affair behind his back, he hits and kills Yeter in a drunken jealous rage and ends up in jail for homicide. Nejat subsequently disowns his father, and then decides to take Yeter's body back to Turkey for her final resting place. He starts looking for her daughter, to pay for her education as her mother Yeter had been doing. In the end Nejat gives up teaching and buys a German bookstore in Istanbul and settles there. Ali too, returns to Trabzon, Turkey, to his place of origin after his release from prison. The father and son do not stay in contact, however.

Lotte, also travels to Istanbul and settles there in effort to help her lover Ayten, now living under a pseudonym, Gul, following her deportation to Turkey by the German authorities. Lotte is renting a room from Nejat above the bookstore in his apartment. Unlike the audience, Nejat and Lotte donot know that they are seeking the same person. Nejat's efforts to find Ayten prove fruitless, but Lotte's efforts to make contact deadly. After finally managing to visit Ayten after waiting for many long months, Lotte is shot dead by street children—with the same gun that Ayten had carried few years back during the May Day celebration and hid on a rooftop running away from the police.

Following Lotte's death, her mother too journeys to Istanbul, a place she had passed through thirty some years ago on her way to India. In Istanbul, Susanne meets with Nejat and decides to take residence in her daughter's room. She visits Ayten in prison and offers to help her, as Lotte would have wanted. Ayten, having had a change of heart about the armed struggle, accepts Susanne's offer and repents to be freed. Susanne also helps Nejat to come to terms with his father Ali's past. Nejat leaves Susanne in charge of the bookstore and takes to the road again in search of his father, this time towards the Black Sea, heading to his father's village in Trabzon. After being freed from jail, Ayten visits Susanne at the bookshop, to live together once again, this time in Istanbul, where they begin to form a mother-daughter relationship

Web-link to film trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8rhDyhIloM>

*To live like a tree, single and free, and to live like a forest in brother/sisterhood.*¹⁴⁸

Nazim Hikmet

Following the trend developed in postmodern films like *Babel*—and *Lola and Bilidikid*—*The Edge of Heaven* cynistically tells the stories of six characters, mothers and daughters, father and son, and lesbian lovers. Themed as *Death* in Akin's trilogy, *The Edge of Heaven* sacrifices two of its female characters towards the middle of the film, Yeter, a Turkish prostitute mother, and Lotte, a German lesbian daughter, thus referencing and building on Ataman's *Lola* character. For the living characters, Nejat, Ali, Ayten and Susanne, the glimpse of *Heaven* is in the Promise Land, which once again for Akin proves to be Turkey, or at least, Turkey-for-the-time-being. *The Edge of Heaven* signifies personal breakthroughs for each remaining character, achieved at the expense and by the death of their loved ones as is exemplified particularly by Ayten's character who loses almost everyone, including her father, mother, lover, and comrades in arm.

Revolution Now, Here: Ayten versus Goethe

On the lecture podium in Hamburg, a professor is quoting from Goethe. He explains that Goethe was talking about Revolutions, which to him seemed uncontrollable, and which therefore destroy many good, old things as well as creating new ones.

¹⁴⁸ In Afsar Timucin's, *Nazim Hikmet'in Siiri* (Istanbul, Kavram Yayinlari, 1978): 80.



Professor Nejat Aksu lecturing at a Hamburg University.

Among the students is Ayten, a homeless Turkish female political activist in exile. Oblivious to Goethe's teachings, Ayten is sleeping. She is here illegally due to her past with a leftist armed political organization back in Turkey. Ayten wants a Marxist revolution for the illiterate, the hungry, and the poor. Some time after the lecture, the now hungry activist, encounters Lotte, a German student who has just returned from India who asks:

Where do you live?
Nowhere.
But where do you sleep?
Do you really want to know?

Ayten (Nurgul Yesilcay) is one of six characters in Fatih Akin's award winning film,¹⁴⁹ whose stories are told in fragmented, non-linear segments. The narratives of

¹⁴⁹ *The Edge of Heaven* won Fatih Akin the 'Best Scenario' award at Cannes in 2007.

two Germans and four Turks shift continually from place to place, city to city, person to person, country to country, referring to Alejandro González Iñárritu's 2006 *Babel*, a successful example of a postmodern film.¹⁵⁰ According to Carl Boggs and Tom

Pollard the postmodern film:

Turn towards nostalgia and romantic pastiche, [characterized by] death of the conventional hero, images of tormented human relationships and dystopic (pessimistic, fearful, mordant) visions of the future... [in it] film images have often become murky and disjointed... [its] narratives and style tend to be broken, discontinuous.¹⁵¹

This new trend of disordered cinema (*cinéma désordonné*)¹⁵² allows the filmmaker to experiment artistically while retaining and appealing to wider and even mainstream audiences.¹⁵³

Goethe will be proven right in the course of the film. Death will claim two of the female characters -Lotte and Yeter- as we follow Ayten's revolutionary journey, to self-discovery. The four surviving characters, Susanne, Ali and Nejat, along with Ayten, will journey back to Turkey, "on the other side" and "the edge of [blue]

¹⁵⁰ Akin became more aware of and influenced by Mexican and Latin American Cinema, the works of Guillermo Arriaga Jordán in particular, after his marriage to German-Mexican actress Monique Obermüller.

See: Nicholas Kulish, "A Hand That Links Germans and Turks," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/movies/awardsseason/06kuli.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁵¹ Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, "Postmodern Cinema and Hollywood Culture in an Age of Corporate Colonization," in *Genre, Gender, Race, and World Cinema*, ed., Julie Codell (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 99, 106, 112.

¹⁵² David Denby, "The New Disorder," *The New Yorker Magazine*, March 5, 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2007/03/05/070305crat_atlarge_denby.

¹⁵³ Marina Hassapopoulou, "Babel: Pushing and reaffirming mainstream cinema's boundaries," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema*, No. 50, spring 2008, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc50.2008/Babel/index.html>.

heaven”¹⁵⁴ by the end of the film, hence while not providing a classical happy ending to its narrative as such, there is at least offering an emotional closure for the audience.¹⁵⁵

The Edge of Heaven is primarily about paternal and maternal relationships, as well as cultural identities, gaps, differences, and similarities. Ali and Nejat are father and son, Lotte and Susanne mother and daughter, and Ayten and Yeter also mother and daughter; they crisscross between Germany and Turkey, in death as in life. Death, in various guises, as well as love is also at the heart of *The Edge of Heaven*.

Two female lovers, Lotte and Ayten, are the central characters carrying of the narrative.¹⁵⁶ Following the criticism he received for *Head-On*, for its hetero-patriarchal and somewhat orientalist rendering of its theme and characters, Akin chooses a lesbian romance this time around.¹⁵⁷ His impulse, though, is still rooted in cultural-cinematic-capitalism, as well as in artistic risk takings. “All of a sudden, when I thought of putting two girls as the lovers it became sexy, you know,” he

¹⁵⁴ The literal translation of the film’s German title *Auf der Anderen Seite* is “On The Other Side,” but Akin chose instead to accentuate the feeling of the last scene where Nejat is standing by the sea for the English title.

See: Peter Keough, “Artist on the “Edge” Interview with Fatih Akin,” *Outside of the Frame*, in *The Boston Phoenix*, June 29, 2008, <http://blog.thephoenix.com/BLOGS/outsidetheframe/archive/2008/06/29/artist-on-the-quot-edge-quot-interview-with-fatih-akin.aspx>.

¹⁵⁵ Akin has said that he likes to have open endings to his stories, which is characteristic of most of the postmodern art house films. See note 73.: Peter Keough, “Fatih Akin interview.”

¹⁵⁶ Lars-Olav Beier, and Matthias Matussek, “From Istanbul to New York,” Interview with Director Fatih Akin, *Spiegel Online International*, 09/28/2007, accessed, Augsut 18, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/spiegel-interview-with-director-fatih-akin-from-istanbul-to-new-york-a-508521.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Filiz Cicek, Conversations with Monika Treut on German Turkish Cinema, Fall 2012.

says.¹⁵⁸ And yet as in Akin's other films, the narrative of *The Edge of Heaven* begins and ends with a male hero. This adherence to classical Hollywood cinema, already discussed, is particularly striking here since four of the six main characters whose stories are told are female. Nonetheless, the temporary parenthesis in which the female character becomes active is quite expanded in the case of Ayten.

Prostitute Mother, Criminal Father

After the lecture on Goethe's take on revolutions at the Hamburg University (where the homeless Ayten was asleep), the scene cuts to the red light district of Bremen (where Ayten's mother, Yeter, works). Yeter's death is announced at the beginning of the segment. Played by Nursel Kose, Yeter is a forty-something, self-sacrificing Turkish mother working as a prostitute in order to pay for her daughter Ayten's education back in Istanbul. She is completely in the dark about Ayten's revolutionary aspirations, as is Ayten about her mother's real occupation.

Yeter has been sending shoes to Ayten since her daughter told her that she is working at a shoe shop. Shoes serve here also as metaphor for this marginalized female immigrant, who had to flee her motherland after her husband was "shot and killed in Maras in 1978."¹⁵⁹ In accordance with the melodramatic formula, in the

¹⁵⁸ Beier and Matussek, "From Istanbul to New York."

¹⁵⁹ More than 120 people were killed during the Maras Massacre in December 24 1978, caused by the conflict between right- and left-wingers as well as Sunnis and Alevites, with Turks and Kurds fighting on both sides. According to historians and eyewitness accounts, the government and military were unable or unwilling to intervene.

See: Aziz Tunc, *Maras Katliami: Tarihini Arka Planı ve Anatomisi* (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2011).

Also: "Gedenken an das Maras Massaker 1978," Youtube Video, uploaded by LAKB2011,

absence of her man, and in the absence of law and order in her country in general at the time of her loss, she has been forced to journey out of domestic space and into the public realm. Her shoes had taken her all the way to Germany. Prostitutes are popular and important characters in Turkish Cinema, but unlike “the villainess” characters of soap operas, they are not there to create a subversive outlet of empowerment for the female audience.¹⁶⁰ The prostitute in Turkish Cinema caters to male desires, in which respect *The Edge of Heaven* is no different.

Ali, Turkish man in his 60s, played by Tuncel Kurtiz, strolls the street of Bremen with a certain excitement and ease as he heads towards the red light district. Whistling, with a smile on his face, he passes by the May Day activists and stops at Jesse’s (Yeter’s) window, who is dressed in short red leather dress and black leather boots and wearing a blond wig. She greets him flirtatiously, and he asks her the price. Hence begins their relationship. Theirs is a match made in German-brothelheaven. A popular Turkish song is playing at the background, sung by Nese Karabocek, one of Turkey’s blond musical icons of the 1970s—an era Yeter was supposed to have left behind, together with her now dead husband.

(*Alevitische Kulturgemeinde Linz/Linz Alevi Kültür Birliği*), produced by *Dostluk Yardımlasma Vakfı*, December 23, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZ7b9J-Q5jM&feature=related>.

And: “Maras Katliami/Maras Massacare, 24-26 Aralık 1978,” 32. *Gun Belgeseli*, 2006, <http://www.kanald.com.tr/32gun>.

¹⁶⁰ Tania Modleski, “Search for Tomorrow in Today’s Soap Operas” in her *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies For Women* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 77-102. Modleski contends that the villainess character in Soap Operas “is able to transform traditional feminine weaknesses into source of her strength,” by “seiz[ing] those aspects of a woman’s life which normally render her most helpless and tries to turn them into weapons for manipulating other characters,” (Modleski, 87).



Ali visits Yeter at Bremen Red Districts.

Ali begins visiting Yeter regularly and proposes that she live with him and make love to him exclusively, for which he will provide for her financially. Soon afterwards, conservative Turkish Muslim men confront Yeter, and feeling that her life is in danger, she accepts Ali's offer and moves in with him. Yeter's self-determination and life story of movement, shifting from one country to another, and from man to man, and comes to an abrupt end when Ali hits and kills her in a jealous rage.

This random death is in accordance with not only with the postmodern but also with the melodramatic film formula, since Yeter simultaneously embodies both the Madonna/whore and prostitute/mother dualities. Since she became, prostitute

after she was already a mother, redemption for her transgressions is through death, just as in the case of Zinein Yilmaz Guney's *Trek*. Jail, too, is once again utilized as a forced transitory meditative space for men, for Ali in this case.



Ali in a German prison-cell after killing Yeter.

The masculine crisis here is caused by the hegemonic rejection of his existence, the socio-cultural center forcing him to find and (re)create his own center at the edges, in anow confined marginalized space.¹⁶¹ Looking out of the window of his prison cell, Ali comments to the German Prison guard, "It's very small."

In contrast, Nejat, played by Baki Davrak of *Lola and Billy the Kid*, seems to be at peace with himself and his surroundings. Whether he is teaching Goethe at a German University, eating Turkish food with Ali and Yeter, or reading a book in

¹⁶¹ Pels, "Privileged Nomads."

Turkish, he slides in and out of spaces with relative ease. The exception to this is when he is with his Turkish father. His father clumsily tries to open up a conversation about love and sex, for example, but gets short shrift:

- Who are you fucking these days?
- A gentleman does not ask such questions.

There is clearly a disconnect between father and a son which is not just generational, but also in class and education as well as in their lifestyles as individuals. When Nejat tries to stop Ali from drinking and smoking after his massive heart attack, the father's response equally precludes further communication: "Don't interfere with my life. Your life is yours and my life is mine." Their non-relationship comes to an abrupt end when Ali goes to jail after killing Yeter. His father's fatal action shakes Nejat's faith in his father's humanity, so, in contrast to *Head-On*, it is the child who disowns the parent.

Leaving behind his father in a German jail, Nejat takes Yeter's body back to Turkey for her burial. Not knowing that the young woman, Ayten, who was sleeping in the back of his classroom during his lectures back in Bremen was Yeter's daughter, he sets out find her in Istanbul in order to pay for her education, something her mother would have wanted, and in way had died for. Ironically, after a few weeks in Istanbul, Nejat realizes that teaching has become irrelevant for him. He decides to buy the German Bookshop from a German shopkeeper who has become homesick for the Fatherland and the German language.

Nejat settles in Istanbul and makes himself a new home. In way, *Head-On's* conclusion of a Turkish home becomes a starting point in *The Edge of Heaven*. The reading of organic development that this implies for Akin's work applies also to his discursive subject: the German-Turkish community is not fixed in place by the immigrant decision or impelled home as a trek, but may be able to move quite easily from one to the other, sliding in and out like Nejat; this also means that the immigrant community is extended to a wider third space, to also include Germans in Turkey, in this case Lotte and Sussane as we will see.

Lesbian Visibility

While the male character Nejat dwells at the edges of his heaven, Ayten is placed at the very center of the film as a political activist, turned exiled, lesbian lover, asylum seeker, a political prisoner, and repentant. While the political activist and lesbian lover markers at first glance seem exciting, as raising visibility and sexy, and raising the character's visibility, there is nonetheless—again—a certain conformity to the both the Hollywood and postmodern film formulas in Ayten's narrative as she loses her lesbian lover and winds up an anti-hero. And although the love affair between two women as one of the stories within this multilayer multi-narrative film somewhat normalizes the lesbians' presence for the viewer, it stills taps into the already celebrated and collectively commodified lesbian erotica, rather than two people in love bothwhom happen to be womem. Nonetheless Akin balances the elements of lesbian erotica with moments of active engagement between two

characters as more dimensional characters utilizing independent, queer cinema aesthetic.

While German and Western audiences generally might have had more exposure to such plot lines, especially in the recent years, lesbian visibility in Turkish Cinema was non-existent until the late 1980s, until the emergence of the New Queer Cinema in the West and still remained still very marginal after that. In Hollywood, it was hinted at best in between lines at the birth of the Cinema. When the suffragette movement was gaining ground, gaining women the right to vote in 1920 in the US, many women took up the male attire as an act of resistance of the constraint of the femininity ascribed by the society. This was reflected in films in queer moments that broke from the established narrative lines of the 1930s, notably with *Morocco* (1930) and *Queen Christina* (1933), which empowered female androgynous (and thus feminist) moments.¹⁶² As Weiss explains, while the main narratives of neither of these films stray far from the heterosexual convention, since “poignant lesbian moments are constricted by the demands of heterosexual narrative closure,” the German-born Marlene Dietrich and Swedish Greta Garbo insert their rumored lesbian personas through a variety of casual comments and gestures and, of course, their attire.¹⁶³ These signs open small windows for alternative readings for the lesbian audiences who lacked visibility, in life as well as on screen.

¹⁶² Andrea Weiss, “A Queer Feeling When I Look at You: Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s,” in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 239-40.

¹⁶³ Weiss, “A Queer Feeling When I Look at You.”

Even such small moments would come to a halt with the Hayes Decency Codes, adapted in 1934. Even popular straight wives such as Donna Reed and Lucille Ball would begin to sleep separately from their husbands in their TV screen beds, up until the end of the fifties. By the early 1990s there were signs of progress with the visibility of homosexual men, albeit depicted as lovable “incidental queers,” serving more as comic relief to the real dramas of straight people than fleshing out three-dimensional characters with lives of their own.

As poignantly expressed in *The Celluloid Closet*, most lesbian characters were still being depicted, insofar as they were depicted at all, as perverted villains.¹⁶⁴ After the move from a minimal “women’s liberation” to an assertive “feminism” and reclaiming of the “homosexual” as “gay,” this situation began to change, while the onset and height of the AIDS epidemic of the late 1980s saw a major development of New Queer Theory that critiqued “the heterosexual assumptions of some feminist theory” and challenged “binary thinking” (male- female) in gender politics.¹⁶⁵ As a result more apparent, fluid and positive gay, lesbian, queer characters were began to be presented in Queer films. This new visibility, the offer of social inclusion, came with strings and conundrums attached, as Allan Berube and Jeffrey Escoffier explain:

¹⁶⁴ “The Childrens’ Hour” in *Celluloid Closet*, DVD, dirs., Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, prod., Home Box Office (HBO), UK, Germany, USA: Sony Pictures Classics, 1995.

¹⁶⁵ Mary Mintosh, “Queer Theory and the War of Sexes,” in *Feminisms*, eds., Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 364-368.

Queer Nationals are torn between affirming a new identity—"I am queer"—and rejecting restrictive identities—"I reject your categories"; between [rejecting] assimilation—"I don't need your approval, just get out of my face"—and wanting to be recognized by mainstream society [yet on their own terms]—"we queers are gonna get in your face."¹⁶⁶

This new—in-your-face, non-apologetic, I-demand—Queer politics resulted in a “positive self-identification” against that of the “collective identity rooted in sexual and gender commonality.”¹⁶⁷ By putting two lesbian lovers at the center of *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin both pays homage and appropriates this Queer resistance, portraying the resistance of the marginalized toor within the hegemonic culture, while keeping it “sexy” and mainstream. In other words, as he oscillates between “art” and “populist” cinema, Akin is consistent in presenting the divergence—if not opposition— within the bodies of the same character, as dominant:subordinate, rebellious:conformist, collectivist:individualist, socialist:capitalist, and so on.

By the late 1990s, gay/lesbian/queer visibility in films had increased considerably, and from the mid 2000s *The L Word* was being aired on HBO. Even then, the lesbian characters still had to conform and flirt with a heterosexual gaze as explained by Ashton:

“Post-Lesbian” Power Negotiations’, stating that, ‘With big hair, shortskirts, lipstick and lycra, post-lesbians are holding up a mirror to the mainstream and reclaiming the components of “passing” as totems of transgression. Or, put another way, as overheard at a chic London dyke club: “This is the Revlon revolution, Sister!”’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Allan Berube and Jeffrey Escoffier, “Queer/Nation,” *Out/Look: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly*, 11 (Winter 1991): 14-16.

¹⁶⁷ Bob Nowlan, “Queer Theory, Queer Cinema,” *Coming Out to the Mainstream: New Queer Cinema in the 21st Century*, eds., JoAnne C. Juett and David M. Jones (New Castle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2010), 2-19, 233-256.

¹⁶⁸ Charlotte Ashton, “Getting Hold of the Phallus,” quoted in Susan J. Wolfe & Lee Ann Roripaugh, “The (In)visible Lesbian: Anxieties of Representation in *L Word*,” *Reading The L Word: Outing*

The long sought prize of network visibility won seemed to be worth the compromise.

Looked from this perspective, the fact that Akin put the lesbian love story at the center of the film *can* be seen as progress in the marching dance to visibility. And yet, like most transnational filmmakers, Akin is once again mindful not to alienate the mainstream and global audience: hence the conformity to the classical formula with the rendering of female characters in the end of the film in terms of death and repentance.¹⁶⁹ The death of Lotte and failure of Ayten as a militant activist then also assure the viewer conditioned with a heterosexual and melodramatic narrative that the “mannish-maiden”¹⁷⁰ is not a threat to masculinity and patriarchy at large since its “impulse towards a happy ending places the women hero in a final position of subordination.”¹⁷¹

Furthermore, the dynamic between Ayten and Lotte is not overtly butch-femme: their dress codes merely employ the conservativemotifs of a heterosexual couple. While Ayten is seen in loose t-shirts, sweatpants and blue jeans, not in dresses or skirts or anything that would be coded feminine, we do see Lotte wearing a denim skirt when they first meet in Germany, while in Istanbul, she wears an attractive red

Contemporary Television, eds., Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 46.

¹⁶⁹ In various interviews, Fatih Akin has stressed the fact that he “wants his aunt to enjoy his films as well as the critics.” See for example: Bijan Tehrani, “An Interview with Fatih Akin, director of *Cinema Without Borders*,” 05/01/2008, <http://cinemawithoutborders.com/conversations/1569-an-interview-with-fatih-akin-director-of-the-edge-of-heaven.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Weiss, “A Queer Feeling When I Look at You,” 330.

¹⁷¹ See Linda Williams, “Something Else Besides a Mother: Stella Dallas and the Maternal Melodrama,” in *Femimism and Film*, ed., E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 500.

dress to meet the consulate general at the American Embassy, perhaps trying to appear more gentle and attractive in order to solicit help to rescue Ayten from jail.

The rest of the time, there is nothing about the couple's clothing, looks or body language that mark them out as "lesbian." According to Charlotte Ashton:

The reason for post-lesbianism's current popularity with the mainstream media lies in the fact that it doesn't look or act any differently from other forms of accepted femininity. For as long as men can look at post-lesbians and see sexy women they want to fuck, and who indeed might even fuck them back, they will not consider that they have been forced to concede any ground.¹⁷²

In other words, the film industry still makes use of similar marketing device to those Hollywood was employing in the 1920s. When talking about the utilization of lesbian images as a marketing device in the present time, Inness writes:

Using models who look stereotypically heterosexual pretending to be lesbians provides titillation without threat as there is an implicit understanding that these are not "real" lesbians.¹⁷³



Ayten and Lotte parting at a bar in Hamburg.

¹⁷² Ashton, "Getting Hold of the Phallus," quoted in Susan J. Wolfe & Lee Ann Roripaugh, "The (In)visible Lesbian," 47.

¹⁷³ Sherrie Innes, *The Lesbian Mennace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1997), 65-66.

In this case also, the actresses playing Ayten and Lotte, Nurgul Yesilcay and Patrycia Ziolkowska, are known as straight in their off-screen lives, which once again renders their on-screen lesbian personas non-threatening.

Ayten's lesbian persona coupled with her masculine political identity makes her function more as a male protagonist. Between the two of them, it is she who has the active gaze, and Lotte's that is passive. At the political asylum quarters, in a clearly disadvantaged place and a space for Ayten as compared to Lotte who is free to go and do as she please, Ayten commands her lover: "Close the door." Then she takes Lotte's hand to hers, getting ready to make love, which the audience is not privy to see; instead the gaze denied is a form of resistance to her exilic condition under the law. There is a double resistancetaking place here. After the initial teasing of the audience with a potential lesbian erotica, complete with smoking marijuana from each others mouth, and making out at a disco-bar, and finally ending up in bed together, the audiences gaze is denied a second time around.



Ayten and Lotte at the compound for political asylum seekers.

Akin switches gears from exploring lesbian erotica with Ayten to exposing a female Marxist activist(s). Hence the use of lesbian visibility is multi purposed: to make the film “sexy” as Akin puts it, and to feminize and therefore pacify the Marxist movement. He strives to weave in his humanist philosophy with cinema as an entertaining art form.¹⁷⁴ Hence Akin chooses an anti-heroine: it is perhaps more readily acceptable for his multinational audience to see a woman protagonist give up and give in rather than a male. Ayten’s active moments of resistance and lesbian visibility is thus balanced by Ayten’s failure as the masculine Marxist activist, mannish-maiden, who causes her lover’s death.

Ayten’s borrowed masculine gender performance may also be seen as paralleling Guney’s anti-heroes, as well as those of post-German cinema, Fassbinder’s New German Cinema, and the melodramatic genre as a whole. True to the form, the anti-hero with a gun who is violent and will die or fail, as s/he would in Guney’s films, is repeated in both in Lotte and Ayten’s characters. Guney’s anti-hero scenario was meant to serve as a subversive social engineering agenda, built into the plot, in order to motivate the masses to unite for the Marxist revolution, rather than acting as capitalist individuals. By killing the main hero, Guney gave the proletarian message of class consciousness, that divided, by acting as individuals, we fail, thereby going against the Dirty Harry and Duke American cowboy archetype.

¹⁷⁴ Thus Akin: “[A]s a filmmaker, you become somehow intellectual and an intellectual these days kind of sounds like a bad word, because it means that you are far away from the audience; I try to be close to the audience... Honestly, it’s also important to be entertaining, and I tried to do that as well.”

Bijan Tehrani, “An Interview with Fatih Akin, director of *Cinema Without Borders*,” 05/01/2008, <http://cinemawithoutborders.com/conversations/1569-an-interview-with-fatih-akin-director-of-the-edge-of-heaven.html>.

In Akin's film, the hero/ine does not fail for the good of the collective in the same Marxist sense. In *The Edge of Heaven*, the Marxists fail collectively for the good of the Turkish nation, which creates a sense of contradiction for the informed viewer, since Akin structures Ayten after the Kurdish separatists with a Kurdish lineage, without putting a name to it. In fact, in selecting Nurgul Yesilcay, a star of TV soaps and respected cinema performer for the Ayten part, he was, as he admits, being careful to "cast a popular Turkish actress" specifically in order to "remain neutral with the Turkish public"¹⁷⁵—the contrast with *Kekilli* is manifest.

Mimicking some of the TV news report images covering the Kurdish issue, we see the public clapping in celebrating the arrests of Ayten's friends, rather than siding with them. As if in justification of the public perception, the activists are shown to be no better than the Turkish police, meting out violence and brutality. The May Day March scene shows a group of leftist activists (*devrimci*) brutally beating a fallen police officer, in an animalistic frenzy.

Given the Turkish public sensitivity over the deaths of its soldiers the past four decades in the Kurdish conflict, this violence directed against the "other" for the good of the collective, this time enacted by the leftists against the policeman, causes them to lose moral ground. The police, too, have treated activists with extreme violence in the past, causing untold deaths and casualties and torture of prisoners in

¹⁷⁵ Tehrani, "An Interview with Fatih Akin."

the name of the country/collective.¹⁷⁶ Since the leftists make a claim for justice for all with a humanitarian-egalitarian consciousness, however, their violence is rendered particularly culpable, devoid of justification. What is worse, we see here, their leader is an armed female.

The German audience may not pick up on the cultural and historical nuances of the leftist movement in Turkey, but they are certainly used to seeing strong *fraulein* in *Trummerfrauen* films. As such, the post-war German cinema had given women an active agency as the re-builder of the Fatherland in the absence of their men after the war.

Both audiences, Turks and Germans alike, are conditioned to seeing strong women with agency who conform to the patriarchal ideal. The strong woman, even if this is a role demanded of her as a necessity of life rather than freely chosen, is perceived as both heroine and transgressor who must be tamed. Simultaneously, she must rise to the task, when men fail and/or are absent, but not to the extent of replacing him, as was the case in postwar Germany. Hence the treatment of the strong woman in post-

¹⁷⁶ During the May Day city-center celebration in 1977, which was attended by over 100 thousand people, 34 people died, and 126 wounded in Istanbul. The event took place at the height of the conflict between the leftist-revolutionaries and rightist-nationalists, which resulted in nationwide civil unrest, including the murder attempt on Bülent Ecevit, then head of the main opposition leftist party, on May 29, 1977. The Maras Massacre in 1978 (above, note, 132), which in the film claimed Ayten's father's life, and eventually the 1980 military coup. CIA involvement in the shootings that caused the mayhem has long been suspected. (It is also believed by most that the Turkish military in collaboration with US government later encouraged and nurtured Islamic education and organizations as a means of countering the Left throughout the 1980s.) May Day gatherings have been banned for long periods since.

See: Cetin Yetkin, "Kanlı 1 Mayıs'ın Perde Arkası" *Yenicag Gazetesi*, 30/04/2010, <http://www.yg.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/habergoster.php?haber=34449>.

Also: "En Büyük Provokasyon: 1 Mayıs 1977 Kitle Katliamı," 04/30/2011, <http://marksist.org/dosyalar/3578-en-buyuk-provokasyon-1-mayis-1977-kitle-katliami>.

war German cinema: the failure by absence of German man was projected onto *Trummerfrauen* by making her strong but sexually licentious, and therefore guilty of transgressions in the same old fashion way. Her strength is reduced to her promiscuity.

This hypocrisy is referred to and critiqued by Fassbinder in *Marriage of Maria Braun*, in which Hanna Schygulla plays a hard working, self-sacrificing, and devoted and loving yet promiscuous woman. She appears to commit suicide at the end, when she learns that her older lover, a businessman, and her imprisoned husband, an ex-soldier, had made a deal over her body and her affections behind her back, this while she was working hard holding a candle for her husband's return, in order to begin their married life which had been interrupted by the war on the very day of their nuptials. The film ends with her death in an explosion that destroys all the material wealth that she had worked for those post-war years, devaluing Germany's post war economic miracle and in the process putting the responsibility for the failure of the country in war and the failure of her marriage squarely where it belongs, on the German man.

Red Rosa to Rose Ayten

As sexy as *The Edge of Heaven* is, with its two lesbian lovers, it is also highly political in tone. Before love takes hold as a vehicle for self-discovery, Akin further complicates the Marxist ideology, which has been followed by the Turkish left and

the Turkish-Kurds in Germany, some of whom have been living exilic lives, like Ayten, by turning her, the leftist activist, into an anti-hero(ine) by the end of the film. Akin further destabilizes the movement with a touch of sexism and radical feminism, which the Turks and Kurds have continued to nurture in their host country. As mentioned, Ayten, begins her journey in the film as an active armed political activist in the May Day Celebrations.

As she runs away from the police through the Istanbul streets, Ayten looks like the action-heroine we have now grown used to seeing. The women with gun, “who wears spandex and knows kung Fu” ¹⁷⁷ has been popular in the East, Hong Kong and China in particular for some time—and in the West, especially after the mid 1990s, we have had *Lara Croft* and *Kill Bill*, and most recently the anti-patriarchal, sexual abuse avenging *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*—sparking a debate in feminist film critique about whether or not these “mean women” are ultimately empowering to women or simply men in women’s clothing, embedded in male desire. King and McCaughey, for example, state that:

Violent women appear in a variety of genres, from classic horror and *film noir* to 1970s Blaxploitation and 1990s road movies. Sometimes violent female characters are malicious villains; other times they save the world from destruction or just uphold the law. In almost all cases, however, somebody will imply that such action, because done by a woman, falls below standards of human decency. This is why we call them all “mean women.” ¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Jeffrey A. Brown, *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroes, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture*, (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 3-19.

¹⁷⁸ Neal King and Martha McCaughey, eds., “What’s a Mean Woman Like You Doing in a Movie Like This?,” in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 1-2.



Ayten, armed and running from the police at a May Day celebration in Istanbul.

This is why the everyday Turk identifies more with the police who are arresting the revolutionary leftist women, rather than the women who are being arrested.

Typically the patriarchal institutions, including the military and police, would treat women as potential sisters, daughters and mothers, but since these women have chosen to be non- or anti-feminine, both in physical appearance and by their political activities as active members of an illegal armed group, they are regarded as (if) othering themselves.

Crossing the normative line thus they are “asking for it,” effectively inverts the patriarchytype of the woman who cannot complain at her abuse when she expresses

her sexuality beyond the bounds in the public arena. Those bounds are defined more or less tightly, for example, the former in the case of the more fundamentalist interpretations of Islam that require the extra domicile woman, to be always and, constantly chaperoned by the male protector.

For feminism, Ayten and the mean woman, with no make-up, baggy clothes, no dresses or skirts, rejecting everything that might mark them as feminine, divorced from the traditional feminine attire, masculinized in behavior through their aggression and physical violence, these are the revolutionary “phallic women.” As such, ask King and McCaughey: “Do they reproduce male domination? Do they contribute to resistance or replication?”¹⁷⁹

“Phallic women” are infact more active in Germany: the Turkish lesbian gang in Berlin is one of the most feared groups among the German youth. Their fierce Amazonian stance for women as well as the civil rights of the Turkish-Kurdish population is both feared and respected by migrants, as well. As lesbians and some as ex-Kurdish Guerrillas, they have carved a unique space for themselves within Kreuzeburg Street, a dwelling place in Berlin for artists and intellectuals—so much so that their presence there was referred to and made visible in *Super-sex*, a film about a sex-hotline catering to Turkish men in Germany, which created a great comic effect and relief for Turkish and the German audiences alike.

Since the “depictions of women’s violence seem more horrific to many people” than

¹⁷⁹ King and McCaughey, eds. “What’s a Mean Woman Like You Doing in a Movie Like This?,” 3.

men's violence, Ayten will lose her gun, her lover and become an anti-heroine: the "cultural standards still equate womanhood with kindness and nonviolence, manhood with strength and aggression."¹⁸⁰ Akin thus stands accused of pandering to the popular. This is one of the reasons Ayten is required to fail ultimately as a Marxist activist, to return to her femininity in the arms of a German surrogate mother. Her ambition to save the world might be noble indeed but it is not natural. In fact, stepping outside of her feminine "nature" had resulted in the death of her lover, not in a celebration of love or life.



Ayten on a rooftop in Kadikoy, Istanbul, where she will hide the gun.

¹⁸⁰ King and McCaughey, eds. "What's a Mean Woman Like You Doing in a Movie Like This?," 2.

Initially, the Ayten character promises us an action hero, but while Thelma of *Thelma and Louise*, Clarisse of *Silence of the Lambs*, and Lara Croft carry a gun and shoot to kill, while the “final girl” in slasher films triumphs by killing the killer, and the Bride of *Kill Bill* chops off heads with her “steel” (sword), Ayten hides her gun from the onset. She will later hide her name as well and become *Rose Fearless* (*Gul Korkmaz*), transforming her into an illegal, a political exile living homeless in Hamburg. She resists the feminizing attempts of her fellow Turkish-Kurdish comrades in Germany. Against the poster-backdrop of Che Guevara and Nazim Hikmet, Turkey’s foremost leftist revolutionary poet, the comrade asks Ayten:

- Do you have money?
- I have about 20 Euros.
- I have a business joint, if you like, you can work for me.
- Oh yeah, what am I gonna do there?
- Service! It will suit you well!

Referring to her beauty, and the sexual support she can offer. Ayten doesn’t answer, instead blowing her cigarette smoke towards him, and asks: “Is Bremen far from here?” Thinking she will go find her mother instead, not knowing she is dead. Ayten borrows one hundred Euros for the trip. In the background the Turco-Kurdish singer, Ahmet Kaya, who died in exile in Germany is playing: “Don’t look for me here mother, don’t ask for me by my name, door to door.”

After failing to locate her mother in the phone book and having searched all the shoe shops in Bremen, Ayten returns empty handed to the comrade who says:

- You owe me money! You have to work for me now.
- What sort of a comrade are you anyhow? For a hundred Euros, you’re

- blabbering like broad woman [*mahalle karisi*]!
- Watch your mouth, you! Obviously you don't know who I am, do you!? [screaming]
 - How would I know who the hell you are?"

Ayten gets up from her seat and screams back. The comrade calls for the footman, to kick her out fast! The footman tries to man-handle her out to which she objects physically and verbally: "I'll see myself out." As she leaves, screaming profanities to them, the camera shows also the photos of Deniz Gezmiş and his fallen leftist comrades.¹⁸¹

When "Marxism and feminism are theories of power and its distribution,"¹⁸² aimed at helping to bring about economic and sexual empowerment, class and gender equality, why then the easy invocation of Ayten's sexuality by the comrade? Woman who are temporarily empowered to help the revolution are quickly stripped of their newfound public place and power when no longer needed. Whether the daughters

¹⁸¹ Deniz Gezmiş was a leader of the 1968 leftist movement in Turkey. Prosecuted by the military court for his activities against the presence of the US Navy 6th Fleet, but opposed to the Soviet as well as American presence in Turkey, Gezmiş was inspired by "romantic communist" Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet and considered Turkey's Che Guevara by some. He was hanged in May 6, 1972, at the age of 25.

See: Can Dundar, *Delikanlım... İyi Bak Yıldızlara*, A documentary film, screened on the 40th anniversary of his death at Atasehir, Istanbul on May 6, 2012, <http://vimeo.com/41666011>.

Gezmiş' favorite poems were recited in this documentary by Tuncel Kurtiz, who plays the Ali character in *The Edge of Heaven* and was a male lead in many of Yilmaz Guney's films. Guney had illegally hid Gezmiş and his friends for several weeks at his apartment in Istanbul before they were hunted down and arrested by the military police. Gezmiş' last words were:

Long live the freedom of the Turkish people
 Long live the noble Marxist-Leninist ideology
 Long live the freedom and brotherhood struggle of Kurdish and Turkish people
 Down with imperialism." (Translation by the author.)
 Gezmiş remains an inspirational and popular figure among Turkish-Kurds in Germany.

¹⁸² Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," in *Signs*, 7-3 (1982): 515-544.

of revolutions in Iran, Rosie the Riveter of WWII, the *Rubblewomen* of postwar Germany, or Ding Ling of the Chinese Revolution,¹⁸³ women are activated and deactivated in accordance with the needs of the male population, governed by men.

Marxist movements, governments and states conflicting with the women's movement and its relationship with female comrades and women in general have proved to be eerily similar to that of capitalist societies and religion: the patriarchal control under Marxist regimes, the commoditization and objectification of women, has continued with little to no change. As once argued by Rosa Luxemburg, from the very beginning, Marxists considered feminists and women searching for personhood, an individualistic and bourgeois activity.¹⁸⁴ The same argument held true for the Marxist women activists during the Iranian revolution, as Halleh Ghorashi explains:

Women's problems would be solved as soon as a classless society was established ...Whywaste time changing the condition of women when one could invest in

¹⁸³ Ding Ling was China's foremost woman author, writing novels about women's sexual awakenings. She was labeled as a "rightist" by Mao for criticizing the Communist Party's exploitation of women and was sent to labor camp for twenty years.

See: Charles J. Alber, *Enduring the Revolution: Ding Ling and the Politics of Literature in Guomindang China* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2001.)

¹⁸⁴ Marxist typically argue against the feminist movement on the grounds that it ignores class issues among women and divides the proletariat.

As mentioned (Chapter II), Rosa Luxemburg was a prominent voice in the leftist movement until she was killed in 1919. Together with her male comrades she created the Communist Party in Germany. In a speech at the Second Social Democratic Women's Rally, May 12, 1912 Stuttgart, Germany, she spoke for women's rights within the class struggle, and against the "bourgeoisie" suffragettes, who she saw as seeking justice and equality "outside of class struggle," calling them "parasite of the parasite of the social body." As MacKinnon explains, "her sympathy lay with "proletariat women" who derived their right to vote from being "productive for the society like the men."

See: Rosa Luxemburg, "Women Suffragettes and the Class Struggle," speech, May 12, 1912, *Selected Political Writings, Rosa Luxemburg*, Dick Howard, ed., 1971, accessed through *Marxists Internet Archive*, December 17, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1912/05/12.htm>.

changing the whole society?¹⁸⁵

Ghorashi and other revolutionary activists thus shunned and even ridiculed the feminist activists at the time. Feminists, on the other hand, see Marxism as a male defined movement:

[Marxists] undervalue women's work and concerns, denigrate women in procedure and practice and in everyday life, and in general fail to distinguish themselves from any other ideology or group dominated by male interest.¹⁸⁶

Ghorashi, like many of her fellow women activists who actively participated in the Iranian revolution, only realized afterwards, in exile, that:

[The] fight for improvements in the condition of women could not be postponed for any reason at all ...[T]he women's movement needed to be taken seriously in its own right.¹⁸⁷

This is still a sensitive area to enter in, for critics and for self-reflective leftists alike, of whom there are not so many. Nonetheless, this inconsistency in the quest for equality has been touched upon in films. One interesting example is that of *Forest Gump*, rarely read as a feminist narrative, but in which it takes a "simple" man, Forest, with common human sense—who happened to be an ex soldier, "a baby killer" as the UC Berkley intellectual-liberals and Black Panther activists call him—to stand up and "protect" Jenny, the main female protagonist, from the physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of the surrounding liberal men around her protesting the war in Vietnam. As often is the case with the women's rights, the issues

¹⁸⁵ Halleh Ghorashi, "From Marxist Organizations to Feminism: Iranian Women's Experiences of Revolution and Exile," *Journal for Study of Religions and Ideology*, 2-6 (2003): 89.

¹⁸⁶ Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: And Agenda for Theory," in *Feminist Legal Theory: Foundations*, ed., D. Kelly Weisber (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 438.

¹⁸⁷ Ghorashi, "From Marxist Organizations to Feminism," 89-90.

surrounding the man's war are more urgent than the woman's needs.

Significantly, Jenny's body is there to be projected upon and to absorb the anger, the very rage the men feel against the war that they are trying to stop. Instead of President Johnson, it is Jenny who gets punched in the face by her comrades. Even though she too is marching to stop the violence of the war, she cannot stop the violence against her intellectual and physical and emotional body and female person. With a swipe of His hand on Her face, she goes from being apolitical activist ala Rosa Luxemburg, to a "dumb blond" which she had come to internalize being one to the point of justification. Thus it will take yet another man to stand up for her personhood, Forest, a simple man of consciousness, an intentionally unintellectual character unwedded to harsh rational and thus open to a more feeling, holistic sense of life, who is capable of basic human dignity and goodness.

Similarly, Ayten's femaleness is always ready to resurface and her beauty to be activated for "service," even in the leftist joint in Hamburg. The comrades in Germany are the ones with the capital to determine the direction of the revolution and the place of women in it, which is that of the subordinate.¹⁸⁸ For these men dealing in power and immersed in the material dialectic, money comes first, so when Ayten is homeless and penniless, they see first and foremost a commodity, which is her sex.

¹⁸⁸ MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: And Agenda for Theory."

Perhaps equally ironic and disturbing is the way in which Ayten rejects her comrade's capitalist-sexist approach towards her when she calls him "a low class broad." Thus exposing her own prejudices about class and gender, as well her internalized rejection of her own sex as a female. Ayten, who is de-sexualized in accordance with the Marxist ideology, must look and act like her male comrade counterparts; she even smokes like one, and she sees herself as one of the men. As with most Marxist movements across the world, this type of "desexualization both empowered women to interact with the other sex"—especially in Islamic societies—"but also led to the denial of their womanhood."¹⁸⁹ Having thus transcended her own womanliness, Ayten's worse insult to her/his fellow comrade is the word "broad," which would make the comrade similar to her mother, who had prostituted herself to pay for her education.¹⁹⁰

While her mother sells love, Ayten's love is her revolution; reflective of the stance and the experiences of many female activists in Marxist movements. There is no room for love or for womanhood, which are deemed bourgeois and individualistic. Desire and sexuality is ignored or postponed until after the revolution. Any sexual coupling they may have will have to be ideology based. That is until Ayten is forced

¹⁸⁹ Ghorashi, "From Marxist Organizations to Feminism," 94.

See also: Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the "Woman Question" in the Revolution of 1978-79," *International Journal of Middle East* 26, 1994, 223-47.

¹⁹⁰ Originally, Marx tried to differentiate between the prostitute and the prostitution; arguing for prostitution to be recognized as labor. Later he and most of his contemporaries concluded that it should be eradicated, as exploitative of women.

See: Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. D. J. Struik (New York, International Publishers, 1964), 133.

In Turkish melodrama, however, prostitutes function as a body outlet for the male fantasy that cannot be found at home, due to absence or the Madonna nature of wife/lover.

into exile in Germany and meets Lotte.

The love story in *The Edge of Heaven* then is the lesbian one between Ayten and Lotte. Rather than yielding to the male pressure, Ayten chooses homelessness, living nowhere. In her homeless, nowhere state a blue-eyed blond damsel comes to her rescue. Lotte is same type of blue-eyed blond Frauleine that Turkish migrant men have been falling in love with and degrading. Akinthus replaces the dark-haired migrant man with an androgynous woman (Ayten). In Akin's films, Turks and Germans do fall in love and they may have sex, but they don't get married. The migrant-host synthesis seems unavailable. In Lotte's case, in fact, love with a Turk will prove fatal.

Death of a Blue-Eyed Blond

"Torture the blonds," Hitchcock once famously said. And he tortured and killed a few, including Tippi Hedren in *Birds* and Kim Novak in *Vertigo*. The master of suspense was a master at shifting the dark emotions of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and desire from the male psyche to a female body. Blondes functioned as the body projection of the masculine desires and fears, sometimes to the point of killing her in order to quell the inner turmoil of the male hero. The blonde's glyph for woman is a sacrificial tool in the male's quest for life. Lotte proves to be the same for the active/masculine Ayten. When upon their first meeting Lotte asks Ayten at the cafeteria where she is coming from, Ayten answers her with a question:

- Do you really want to know?

- Yes.

And Lotte does care. She has a keen interest in other cultures; she has been studying Spanish and, having just visited India for three months, finds her own “Orient” in Ayten. Rescuing Ayten then becomes her personal revolution. Imbued with part Hollywood, lesbian erotica, and part post-war, GermanCinema aesthetics, both mixed in to the melodrama, the film will land Lotte into the dangerously sexual and wonderfully mysterious Ayten/Orient/Istanbul.



Lotte on her way to Kadikoy to retrieve Ayten's gun.

Soon Ayten's life will overtake hers and eventually devour her. After fighting for a political asylum in Germany for a year, Ayten is deported to Turkey and subsequently jailed. Lotte immediately follows her to Istanbul, takes a room above Nejat's bookshop, and begins studying the Turkish legal and justice system. It is

thus through the gaze of a young German woman that Akin presents and criticizes Turkish justice.

Earlier he had touched up on the issue from an educational point of view with Nejat who goes to the police to find Ayten to pay for her education. The police had asked him why he did not pay for a homeless Kurdish child's instead? Now it is Lotte's turn. She and Nejat are looking for the same person in the same city and living in the same house, but do not know it due to Ayten's pseudonym name "Gul" [Rose]. In Germany, Ayten had transformed into Gul the lover, but once in Turkey she goes back to the Marxist Ayten. Lotte is looking for love, looking for Gul in Ayten in the chaos and mystery of the Orient, which she supposes to be "timeless, otherworldly, incomprehensible, and waiting to be discovered by westerners in search of self."¹⁹¹

Love, once in Istanbul, proves to be as unattainable as Ayten is sitting in jail and waiting for her sentencing, which could be up to fifteen years. And the jail (Turkish legal system) proves to be as impenetrable as the walls of the Sultan's harem. Palace guards are replaced by jail wardens. Even her conversations with the German consulate are conducted through secure partition walls, by telephone instead face-to-face in the more intimate setting of an office. Life in the Orient turns out to be quite hard for Lotte, made harder by her mother's refusal to continue helping her, financially or emotionally. Lotte is on her own in Istanbul, to somehow find a way to

¹⁹¹ Mia Mask, "Eat, Pray, Love, Leave: Orientalism Still Big Onscreen," Morning Edition, NPR, August 18, 2010, Accessed August 20, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129254808>.

rescue Ayten and to have her happy ending.

As the outdoors are dangerous for women in general, so the mysterious other Orient is particularly dangerous. This has long been reflected in Western art and media, by American TV shows and Hollywood films from *Road to Morocco* to *Midnight Express*.¹⁹² Having transgressed both racial and sexual boundaries, Lotte's death proves inevitable. Such was the case in Ferzan Ozpetek's *Hamam* (Turkish Bath),¹⁹³ in which an Italian man who first has his homosexuality emotionally healed as he restores a *hamam* in Istanbul and is then stabbed to death after taking a Turkish male lover.¹⁹⁴ Both directors of Turkish origins, Akin and Ozpetek each explore the possibilities of sexual freedom but then make up for the transgressions by killing their characters.

As the Turkish father in Hamburg tells his son in *Kebab Connection*,¹⁹⁵ you can date a German, you can even sleep with a German but you must never marry a German or get her pregnant. The same advice proves to be true for the German. A few hours

¹⁹² Filiz Cicek, "Orientalism in Film and Television," *Muslim Voices*, Indiana University Global Studies Program, November 24, 2008, <http://muslimvoices.org/filiz-cicek-orientalism-film-tv>.

¹⁹³ *Steam: Turkish Bath*, dir. Ferzan Ozpetek, Sorpasso Film, Promete Film, Asbrell Productions, 1997.

¹⁹⁴ Girelli states "that *Hamam*'s construction of Turkishness is embedded in an essentially Orientalist discourse; however, rather than the expression of a bigoted cultural position, Ozpetek's use of an Orientalist code relates dynamically to the experience of dislocation, serving the director's mnemonic strategy by framing and conserving a specific national image." Yet, and perhaps because of it, Ozpetek, chooses to conform to the codes of the Occident in his approach to Orient by the end of the film, by killing the Italian male protagonist with the knife of a Turkish male. See: Elisabetta Girelli, "Transnational Orientalism: Ferzan Ozpetek's Turkish dream in *Hamam* (1997)," *New Cinemas Journal of Contemporary Film*, 5-1, (2007): 23, accessed November 20, 2012, DOI: 10.1386/ncin.5.1.23_1.

See also: Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, Eds. *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, Rutgers University Press, 1997.

¹⁹⁵ *Kebab Connection*, dir. Anno Saul, with contribution from Fatih Akin, WDR, Germany, 2004.

after picking up the gun, which Ayten had hid back when she was running away from the police on the May Day celebration, Lotte ends up dead at the hand of street children. Addicted to glue, they had stolen her bag and with it the gun. High and dazed in the slums one of them points the gun at her and shoots, as if playing. As recently as in *Babel*,¹⁹⁶ love and life in and with the Orient is still a deadly game, especially if you are not heterosexual.



Street children playing with Ayten's gun, shooting at Lotte.

German Mother-in(g) Turkey

Lotte's mother, Susanne, as the calming nurturing figure, in order to shed her "Germaneness" and find her free-spirited, life-enriching femininity, has to go back to

¹⁹⁶ In *Babel*, a character, a young boy in Morocco, who is coming to terms with his sexuality, randomly fires a gun gifted to his father by a Japanese man; one of his bullets wounds an American tourist, a wife who is on vacation in Morocco with her husband.

See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0449467/locations>.

the East, to Istanbul, as she had done a thirty years previously, in her youth, and where she now stays at her late daughter's room above Nejat's book shop.



Nejat and Yeter in a subway in Bremen.

As for Nejat, once in Istanbul he posts photographs of Yeter on the city walls in the hope that someone will recognize her and come forth with information about Ayten's whereabouts, a quest in which he will never succeed. Nejat's search for mother-daughter is metaphoric since his own mother had died young. Dead Turkish mothers represent homeland in their absence. Nurturing is only possible in the motherland Turkey; and the transformation into (one's) nature takes place in Turkey, for both the Germans and the Turks.

In this respect, Akin once again presents Turkey as the Promised Land, whether he intends to or not, as a space for reverse migration. The presence of the German

bookshopkeeper serves to solidify the idea that one is not at home unless one is living in one's land of birth and speaking in one's mother tongue. Nejat, who speaks both German and Turkish, switches from teaching German to selling German books in Turkey, functioning as a cultural ambassador. His home slowly turns into a halfway house first for Lotte, then Susanne, and in the end Ayten also in their transitioning through Istanbul.

Hanna Schygulla (Fassbinder's Maria Braun) plays Susanne, who travels to Turkey to grieve her daughter Lotte's death in Istanbul. Once there, she sits at an old Victorian hotel room, dark as death, and laments the loss of her only child. Afterwards she moves into Lotte's room in Nejat's apartment, where she transforms from being "so German," as Lotte once called her, into a nurturing and loving mother.

Susanne had come to Istanbul many years ago, as she was hitchhiking from Germany to India. In the soils of Turkey, Lotte teaches her mother "from the other side" through her diary. Susanne takes over where Lotte left off and begins to heal and nurture and take care of Ayten. Taking care of Ayten is also what Nejat wanted to do, the reason why he had journeyed to Turkey in the first place but In Akin's Heaven, it turns out to be a mother's love that Ayten had needed. The exilic daughter of a migrant mother, who is fighting to save the less fortunate of Turkey, will find love, nurturing and her own redemption in a German woman: "Everything will be all right once Turkey gets into the European Union," Susanne has said to asylum

seeking Ayten back in Germany, not wanting to host a Turk in her house, especially illegally. “Fuck the European Union!” was Ayten’s aggressive and spirited response, on the ground that they were all colonial countries. To which Susanne had replied: “Maybe you’re just a person who likes to fight.”

By the time Susanne visits Ayten in jail, Ayten’s political aspirations and rhetoric of the European Union as the solution to Turkey’s socio-economic and political problems will have become unimportant. Ayten had sought justice, equality and freedom for all through Marxist ideology, but this brought more death than life, beginning with her father’s political martyrdom, and resulting in her mother’s migration to and ultimate death in Germany—and now her lover, too, was murdered.



Susanne visits Ayten in prison Istanbul after Lotte's death.

All she can do is to utter an apology to Susanne, who comes to visit her in jail,

wanting to help her now. For that is what Lotte would have wanted, she tells Ayten. Ayten repeats herself in agony, speaking through the jail telephone in tears: “I’m sorry... I’m really sorry.”



Susanne and Nejat in Cukurcuma, Istanbul.

Replacing the missing dead Turkish mothers, Susanne now embodies both Germany and Turkey, as home and host mother to Nejat and Ayten. As such, Akin has her guide and nurture Ayten and Nejat as the (German) mother-land (Turkey); which had first expelled and then consumed Ayten’s mother Yeter, like it did Nejat’s mother decades earlier, in its bosom-grave. Nejat, who does not have a female figure in his life, and whose relationship with his father also expelled father had been left unresolved in Germany, finally comes to terms with his father’s actions

through Susanne's motherly presence in Istanbul.

The Books of the Migrant

Looking at the men who are going to the mosque to pray during the *Feast of the Sacrifice* (*Kurban Bayrami*), Susanne and Nejat exchanges stories from the Koran and Bible, which turn out to be the same story of Abraham (Ibrahim), a father asked by God/Allah to sacrifice his son to prove his love for Him. *Bayrams* (holy-days) in Turkey are also time to forgive and heal. Susanne asks where Nejat's father is now as he tells her how his father used to tell him that he would stand even against God himself to save his son from being sacrificed—and comes to a place of forgiveness. Nejat travels further into Turkey to his father's birthplace to find him.



Ali back in Trabzon, crying after reading the book his son gave him in Bremen.

It is there we see Nejat's father Ali shedding a tear as he finishes reading the book, *The Blacksmith's Daughter* (*Die Tochter des Schmieds / Demircinin Kizi*), which Nejat had given him back in Hamburg. Written by a Turkish-German author, Selim Ozdogan, this novel features a female protagonist and explores her relationship with her father.

Ali has yearned for feminine love in his life so much that he paid for it with money, apparently unable to relate to women in a more healthy way—but looking for love in a brothel in Bremen had proved fatal; he had first befriended the prostitute Yeter as a lover-companion, and then killed in a jealous rage, becoming a murderer. Once back in Turkey, in his Black Sea village, he finds a safe and open space to read and ponder upon his own relationships with women. Through the book, from a male author's vision, Ali finally understands the hopes and dreams and aspirations of underrepresented Turkish migrant women workers such as Yeter who traveled to Germany in the 1960s and 70s for a better life. There, in the tears of Ali, the archaic patriarch, is hope for future.

The inclusion of Ozdogan's *Die Tochter des Schmieds* in the film, whose female protagonist leaves her father and Turkish village behind and migrates to Germany to uncertain future, serves as social engineering device, a form of education, and a tool for us to gain insight into the migrant women's lives. With better understanding comes a humanizing empathy for the other. Ozdogan is not alone in his attempt to come to terms with the Turkish German history of its women workers, Another

Turkish-German author Feridun Zaimoglu has “championed these underrepresented and underappreciated women,” specifically as “equivalents to the *Trümmerfrauen* who built up Germany brick by brick after World War II.”¹⁹⁷



Post-War Germany: Rubblewomen (Trümmerfrauen)

¹⁹⁷ KDJ, “Die Tochter des Schmieds,” *Love German Books Blog*, January 4, 2009, (19:08 p.m), accessed August 10, 2012, <http://lovegermanbooks.blogspot.com/search?q=die+Tochter+des+schmi>.

See also: Beverly M Weber, “Headscarves and mini-skirts: Germaneness, Islam, and the politics of cultural difference,” (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 2006), accessed August 10, 2012, <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI3215763>.

This revaluation of the immigrant woman worker past, however, has to be set in the context of the defensive pushback and nationalist, even fascist, reaction underway. The books of the migrants are also opposed by the books of denial and bigotry, inheritors, in Germany, of the ideal of Aryan pure blood. Politician and banker Thilo Sarrazin's 2010, *Germany Is Abolishing Itself* (*Deutschland schafft sich ab*) is a prime case in point.¹⁹⁸ This disturbingly popular work focusing on Germany's Muslim (Turkish and Arab) population and multiculturalism policy described the Turkish migrant women as unintelligent and low class and diluting the overall intelligence of Germany.¹⁹⁹

A conversation is taking place through literature. The books of the migrants are being written for many reasons. In *The Edge of Heaven*, Nejat, with his German literature class lecture on Goethe and the bookshop in Istanbul, further emphasizes the need among Turks and Germans for a better appreciation of one another. The need for understanding was the focus of another popular German book, *The Reader*,²⁰⁰ and its recent high grossing, filmed version, which focuses on the education of an illiterate female SS officer in jail who had committed war crimes with ambitions of upward mobility without remorse. Education and enlightenment do offer at least the hope that it is possible to tackle xenophobia and oppression among and within.

¹⁹⁸ Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, (DVA Dt. Verlags-Anstalt; 20. Auflage, 2010).

¹⁹⁹ "An immigration row in Germany: Sarrazin vs. the Saracens," *The Economist*, Berlin, Sep 1st 2010, http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/immigration_row_germany.

²⁰⁰ Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, Pantheon Books, 1995.

See Also: *The Reader*, dir. Stephen Daldry, The Weinstein Company, 2008.



Ali reading Daughter of the Blacksmith by Selim Ozdogan in Trabzon.

And yet, in *The Edge of Heaven* as in *The Reader*, we find that it is men who are in charge of this education. Akin gives all the knowledge and wisdom to be disseminated to the hands of men: the author of *Daughter of a Blacksmith*—a daughter, incidentally, given no name—the dead philosopher Goethe, the university professor Nejat, the German book shopkeeper. The male is again empowered.

The women in *The Edge of Heaven*, on the other hand, are students, exiles, prostitutes, lovers, and mothers. They want to acquire knowledge and distribute it freely and equally to everyone, but they are not yet the possessors of knowledge. That potential will not be realized until Susanne goes back to Istanbul and looks after the bookshop while Nejat is gone to make amends with his father.

Mobile Mothers

Most Turks, fathers in particular, who left for Germany in 1960s and 70s, continued to and even insisted on subjecting their children to the restrictive repression of the strict Islamo-patriarchal rules. As their children went to German schools and interacted with Germans, the cultural and the generational gap between parents and children widened. This resulted in the now all too familiar double lives of second and third generations: German during the day, at school and work, and Turkish in the evening, at home. Thus the Turkish youth oscillates (between liberated yet shallow in the films) German and Turkish (oppressive yet meaningful) simultaneously.

Although certainly not as repressed as Sibel, essentially because they are male, Nejat and Ali cannot communicate. Ali's tears represent then, both the remorse and redemption for the first generation Turks. In *Head-On* we saw a father and a brother who disown Sibel for wanting to live a life of her choosing. Akin himself has said that the parents need to better understand their children. He takes this notion one step further in *Edge of Heaven* by having Nejat disown his father: both parents and children need to develop a better understanding of and empathy towards one another.

In *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin creates a German mother character passing through the Turkish land who triggers that empathy, understanding and healing. Underscoring the human need for love and acceptance is the accentuation of that need by

uprootedness from one's native land, the wounded soul but open heart that is the migrant condition, the othered that needs the nourishment of human love. Susanne then functions as a *mobile-mother* for both the Germans and the Turks.

This migrant mobility, the nomadic existence of the characters in the film, is symbolized here by shoes; the mother Yeter's feet had taken her from Maras to Bremen where she chooses shoes for her pretense of work. "I would do anything for my daughter," she says explaining her motherly duty, expressed in her perception of her prostitution as a noble sacrifice for Ayten's education. But as it turns out, the money alone is not enough and is certainly not a substitute for a mother's love. Hence the emphasis on the mother's presence in Akins's films.

This need for a mother's love is also evident in *Lola and Billy the Kid*. However, in *Lola*, the Turkish mother sheds her tradition and disappears into the German streets, while the German mother, Ute, mothers Iskender and Frederick while they are in Germany. These mothers move forward with their lives without returning to Turkey. They live and work and at times fall in love with Germans. Germany is their new home. Akin's Turkish mothers in *The Edge of Heaven*, on the other hand, are self-sacrificing and they end up in Turkey, whether dead or alive. This proves to be the case also with the German mother, Susanne.

Collective versus Individual

Ayten, an armed-political-activist-lesbian survives in the end by failing. This is in

accordance with melodramatic formula, deemed functionally necessary since “cultural standards still equate womanhood with kindness and nonviolence, manhood with strength and aggression.”²⁰¹ Sibel in *Head-One* failed similarly, her quest for self discovery took her from her father to a husband, to a partner, and to a daughter, offering but ultimately requiring her to let go of her independence, the true love of her youth. Here, by the end, in *The Edge of Heaven*, Ayten too is physically and emotionally spent (by Lotte’s death), gives up the armed struggle, and repents to be freed from jail (which earns a spit in the face from her disapproving comrades). Her ambition to save the world might have been noble indeed, but the Marxist movement had cost her dearly: her father, mother and lover.

It was Love that was missing in her life and in her political struggle. In the armed struggle there is no room for love and emotions: these are repressed in the name of justice, equality, the greater good, and postponed until after the revolution. Lotte’s death, however, shakes Ayten to her core, resulting in a major emotional and intellectual collapse. She realizes that, without her mother or Lotte, her identification with the collective is not able to sustain her emotionally, spiritually. After the experience again of a mothering, in the form of Susanne, who does not condemn but offers to help her, Ayten’s psychic center shifts from the collective to the individual. She decides to walk away from the armed struggle into the arms of Susanne, leaving behind her Marxist comrades. Germany had claimed her mother, Turkey claimed her lover. She returns to normal life under Susanne’s loving care.

²⁰¹ King and McCaughey, eds. “What’s a Mean Woman Like You Doing in a Movie Like This?,” 2.

Together they form a surrogate mother-daughter relationship, Germany finally nourishes Turkey in the feminine, albeit on Turkish land.



Susanne and Ayten at Nejat's German bookshop in Istanbul.

The Privileged Intellectual Nomad

In the collective conciseness, the men of the Orient do not fare well. This is mostly the case in *The Edge of Heaven* also. Muslim fundamentalist men threaten Yeter and set off the chain of events that results in her death. Ali the divorcee is a drunk and jealous man who ends up killing Yeter. The male Comrades in arms are no different than their sworn capitalist enemy. Not even the boys are innocent, since one of them (accidentally) kills Lotte (one of the very same children that the Turkish judge had asked Nejat to support earlier, instead of Ayten).

Only the privileged intellectual nomad, the educated university professor Nejat has

redeeming qualities. With the help of the mothering of Susanne and his blue-collar cousin in Istanbul, a simple craftsman with Forest Gump qualities, Nejat is able to come to terms with his father's now compromised humanity. Nejat also is the only man untouched by amorous love and loss.²⁰²

The film ends where it begins, by the Black Sea, from which Nejat's surname is appropriated in reverse: "Aksu" (trans. "Whitewater"). He has traveled there to find and make amends with his father. The father does not resurface in the film again, however. A neighboring lady signals the completion of the symbolic patricide in Nejat's quest for self-discovery: "He's gone fishing." As the holder of the active gaze,²⁰³ Nejat's desire to find Ayten in Istanbul had functioned as a classic cinematic narrative, a neo-postmodern Sufi plot (as it was for Cahit in *Head-On*) of his quest of self-discovery. This is not strictly about the person as such, but a triggering device in his/her journey to the divine,²⁰⁴ in this case Heaven. Nejat had entered the film driving through a tunnel; now he stands by the edge of the Black Sea Heaven. His father dwells within its "unpredictable weather," as described by the villager, and his mother's body rests in its hills.

Ayten father's body rests similarly, in Maras in Southeastern Turkey. Through the employment of this symbolic "matricide" and "patricide," the film enables the

²⁰² Originally Nejat's character falls in love with a single mother, whom he meets in the Black Sea village, but Akin edited the scene out. See: *The Edge of Heaven* DVD Extras.

²⁰³ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Other Pleasures*, 19-20.

²⁰⁴ Manijeh Mannani, *Divine Deviants: The Dialectics of Devotion in the Poetry of Donne and Rumi* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 10.

Turkish youth, Ayten and Nejat, to achieve freedom of personhood as adults.²⁰⁵

While there is redemption for Ayten for her transgressions through Susanne's motherly love, Nejat survives morally intact standing on his own. In retrospect, we knew this: his first words in the first scene of the film, which are also the last, were religious: "Blessed *bayrams*." Marxist revolutions opposed religion, but Goethe opposed revolutions. Indeed, these revolutions have killed as many a good people, as they created new ones at *The Edge of Heaven*.



Nejat at the coast of Black Sea, Trabzon.

²⁰⁵ Dominique Russell, referencing Amber Jacob, states that in cinema, matricide "foregrounds the mother as subject and allows for a reading 'against the grain'." In D. Russell, "Reconsidering matricide in Spanish Cinema of the transition: Furtivos [Poachers]," *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas*, 4-1 (2008): 19-33. Also see: Jacobs, "Towards a Structural Theory of Matricide," 19-34.

Conclusion

Ataman and Akin be regarded as privileged intellectual nomads. They operate as individual artists within the collective. As such, their films come to function as part artistic and part social engineering, as well as taking their place in the populist capitalist medium. Akin, in particular, is keenly aware of the entertainment aspect of film as both art and popular genre.

Art and entertainment are not always mutually exclusive, of course. In Hollywood Cinema, where money and glamor are made to march together, this can result in two-dimensional work with archetypal characters that lack accents, nuances of cultural, and ethnic, racial, sexual, and gender identities. There are, it is true, the occasional “incidental characters” created for effect or simple narrative role, such as the “muslim terrorist,” or for comic relief, such as the gay male friend.²⁰⁶ Thus lacking depth, these roles enable, in this case, the Muslim and the gay “other” to gain visibility, but only in a superficial and generally negative light. For some, that visibility might be better than none at all, while others prefer no visibility to such depictions. Yet the tension between the money and entertainment driven Hollywood archetypes and the inclusion of marginal “others” does occasionally produce works of genuine artistic value, for example with the aid of Independent Cinema led by Sundance, Cannes and other more artistically driven independent film festivals supporting alternative renditions prior to the more mainstream marketing of their products.

²⁰⁶ Filiz Cicek, “Orientalism in Film and Television.”

Ataman and Fatih Akin's films embody this tension between art and entertainment, the underground and the popular, a tension that is reflected in the gender structure of their characters as well as in the narrative as a whole. Both these filmmakers are graduates of European and US based film schools, and as such they are artistically driven. They both utilize diverse genres in these three films *Lola and Billy the Kid*, *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*, including classic Hollywood melodrama, and post-war German and New German Cinema, to tell autobiographic tales through their exilic and migrant characters. And they travel in varying directions, in and to, Turkey and Germany.

In 1997, Ataman remained firmly in Germany with *Lola*. His characters are forced to tackle their issues head-on, without going back to their home country for a solution. Ataman's mix of art with utopic social engineering reflects his desire to make the "mute" immigrant visible, to centralize the margins. He does so by simultaneously tackling the stereotypes of German and Turkish cultures, but in a way that complicates the stereotypes rather than perpetuating them. This is achieved by focusing on each character as a parallel three-dimensional story, while maintaining a sense of classical narrative structure—a technique further developed in 2006-07 by Inarritu and Akin, in *Babel* and *The Edge of Heaven*, respectively. Parallel stories create (an)other space(s) within the narrative, not unlike the migrants' third space, in which to explore migrant existence by looking at their daily interactions with one another as well as the German natives. This allows for more realistic and three-dimensional character development. While the starting point is a cliché, the end

point is a person, individual desires and aspirations within the collective, sometimes fulfilled, sometimes repressed by internal and external elements.

In *Lola*, we see migrants at times mimicking the very elements that discriminate against them—the same elements they try to belong to in the case of Bili and Osman. Their complicit and conformist behaviors to prevailing masculinity come from the desire to become visible, as opposed to being invisible by being themselves. As gay rights activist and filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim puts it, “Faggots don't want to be faggots. They don't want to be different. They live in a dream world of glossy magazines and Hollywood movies.”²⁰⁷ As a result, they “mute” part of themselves much in the same way that Murat’s mother is silenced by the patriarchy, which results in repressed emotions expressed as rage, rape, violence, murder, and death.

This level of attentiveness to the individual was a true breakthrough in Turkish-German cinema as it generally operates from the collective’s point of view. It is the focus on the individual that enables Ataman to get away from the binary depiction of Turkish and German Cultures. And it is through the individual that we get to see a more three-dimensional picture of the collective, a collective that at the end of *Lola* consists of Germans and Turks, not one or the other, or one against the other. Going back to Turkey may perhaps be an option for the characters in *Lola*, but there is also a space in Germany in which Turks and Germans can co-exist, a space where, at the

²⁰⁷ Rosa von Praunheim, dir. *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives*, prod. Werner Kließ, West Germany, 1971.

end of the film, even transvestites can come out of the oriental nightclub into the daylight and be visible to all, Germans and Turks, as who they are.

The Turkish mother of Osman, Lola and Murat blends into the streets of Berlin where she finally lives in her domestic, repressed state of ignorance. Osman remains in Berlin, alone in the family apartment to face himself. Murat moves forward with a surrogate German mother at a hotdog stand. Iskender overcomes his racist prejudices against people of the non-Turkish blood, while Ute overcomes her xenophobia and accepts Iskender like a son. Ute represents Germany's past, and Iskender its future. Ataman thus makes peace between the two cultures—in Berlin. The fact that Iskender is homosexual makes it even better. The transvestite performers too find their voice under the victory column.

Not even the dead go back in *Lola*, not Bili, nor Lola who both die in Germany. The dead in migrant films, as in life at times, are often carried back to the land of their heritage for their final resting place. In *Lola*, Bili disappears into the very same river into which Lola and Rosa Luxemburg were thrown. Unlike them, Bili's body is never seen again, but like Luxemburg, Lola's body is found, and buried in Berlin, where s/he was born, not back in Turkey. Her/his cultural identity is honored, however, by a traditional Islamic burial presided over by an imam and attended by family and friends.

In contrast, all of Akin's characters have an impulse to be on the move and a need to

go back to Turkey—in the case of Ali, Cahit and Nejat, to their birth cities. Sibel, Ayten, Susanne and Lotte end up in Istanbul. And for Akin, even the dead are mobile. As in his earlier film *I'm Julie*, bodies are transported between Turkey and Germany, to be buried in their birth countries. While we don't see Lotte's funeral, for the Turkish bodies, death becomes their new and final "home," belonging found in a communal graveyard. Perhaps for Akin, there is more visibility in mobility than stability. His characters are constantly moving, carrying their third space within them—as long as the father is understanding and kind (as Ali's tears indicate that he will be) and the mother is loving and nurturing. They are free to search and re-create new homes wherever they go. Akins' migrants are perpetual nomads with archetypal gender roles.

This desire for visibility to operate from the center to the margins, not the other way around, is apparent in Akins' artful yet populist approach to his scene settings and the building of his characters. He wants to be intellectual but he also wants to entertain, he often remarks; he wants his aunt to like his films as well as the critics. This too is a lesson he learned from Guney and Fassbinder, both of whom wanted to make artful cinema that still appealed to the general public.

As such, *Head-On* follows the melodramatic genre, one with which Akins' aunt—and uncle, as well many of his other relatives—would be familiar. As depicted in *Supersex*, Turkish migrant families of the 60s and 70s in particular would regularly get together and watch the tearjerker melodramas, finding a collective comfort in

the notsohappyendings that befell the films' heroes and heroines. From this melodramatic formula comes the glorification of the sympathetic victim character, Sibel. *Head-On* includes all the usual Turkish melodrama themes of rape, murder, jealousy, and virtue, as well as the requisite hospital and jail settings. Akin's use of genre stereotyping, such as Sibel's suicide attempt in the restaurant, makes the gender stereotypes grander and thus more entertaining.

Also, the melody epilogues that bridge the scenes further accentuate Turkish culture and Turkey as the mythical Promised Land. Akin has stated in an interview that he wanted to create an imaginary space where his two loveable loser Turkish-German characters could escape. As mentioned, however, that imaginary space ends up being the homeland of Turkey, and this idea of "Homeland-Turkey" comes to serve as a space of resistance to German subordination. The option of return is a survival tool that most Turkish immigrants do, in fact, have in Europe. It provides them with an imaginary third space as an alternative to the one they have, in which they can continually re-negotiate their marginal identity, as a German to Turks in Turkey, and Turkish to Germans in Germany. However, that journey back to homeland-Turkey usually doesn't happen in real life.²⁰⁸ Most migrants and their children choose to remain in Germany for various financial and social reasons. Indeed, most Turks who return feel further alienated by native Turks, who call them "German" ("*Almanci*" or "*Germander*").

²⁰⁸ Ayse Caglar, "German Turks in Berlin: social exclusion and strategies for social mobility," *The Journal of the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations*, 21-3, (1995): 309-323.

This inability to return creates a vicious cycle wherein there is little hope of upward mobility in either country. Unlike *Lola*, Akin's ending in *Head-On* says to us that there is no chance of visibility for these characters in Germany other than as victims or criminals, and he offers no realistic alternative for a third space of existence. This feeds into the German media's focus on the perpetually "hyphenated" identity of the Turks, which in itself stresses gender, national, and religious identities at the expense of other forms of identification.²⁰⁹ This is especially so for the women. Thus Sibel, as the oppressed, has her mode of empowerment presented as marriage and motherhood. Still yet, there is one redeeming future: unlike Guney and Fassbinder, Akin is able to create moments of female active resistance and empowerment without having to kill off his main female characters. In contrast to Fassbinder's Maria Braun, who kills herself at the end of the film, Sibel's attempt at suicide is rendered meaningless and, from the onset of the film, removed as an option. In Akin's films, women are needed for love, healing, and nurture.

There is a considerable difference and some progress in getting away from the clichés in *The Edge of Heaven*. Akin puts the melodramatic formula to a better use this time by creating a space and disjointed anti-narrative through which the characters miss and (re-)connect. They have permission to feel, to express the repressed emotions in a transformative and healing way through education, love, and ultimately even religion. This is particularly the case for the male characters, who are not permitted or taught how to process emotions. In *The Edge of Heaven*,

²⁰⁹ Gokturk, "Beyond Paternalism."

Akin takes his characters in stages through three of the most personal and intense emotions a human can experience: love, death, and rebirth. In the process, they are deconstructed, made vulnerable with their flaws exposed, and forced to transform and renew in the safety of the womb of Anatolia/Land of Mothers, Turkey.

Thus Akin centers love as a basic human right. His classical active/male passive/female nexus still exists in *The Edge of Heaven* in Ali and Yeter's dynamic. But there is a moment of recognition in Ali of his shortcomings regarding his relationship with women, and hope for redemption and transformation for the better in his tears. There are also moments of resistance raised by and for women, in particular, in Ayten and Lotte's lesbian relationship. These moments suggest alternative possibilities of being before Akin conforms them with the classical narrative structure.

Conformity is necessary in Akin's case not to alienate the greater audience. Within their homosexual relationship, masculine/de-sexualized/Marxist Ayten and her lover Lotte, who is more feminine/apolitical, mimic the active/passive nexus. The passive female is the one who dies in the end. The active male transgressors of the love relationships, Ayten and Ali, are reformed by the deaths of their lovers and redeemed through the enforced meditative space of prison. Yeter and Lotte had died for their salvation.

Ataman's *transse* character Lola, too, was sacrificed for the salvation of the next

generation, for her brother Murat, who had more interest in the books in the library than in women. Murat/Baki Davrak will grow up in the following two decades and become a professor, like Nejat in *The Edge of Heaven*. This was something important for Akin, to cast actors whom the audiences and the collective cultures of both Turkey and Germany would recognize and identify with, actors who had worked with legendary directors Guney and Fassbinder, who were first to make/tell the stories of the memories and immigrants in Turkey and Germany. And later it was Ataman who broke the victim-oppressor, dominant-subordinate binary depiction of the German-Turks in Cinema. Thus we see that Maria Braun doesn't have to commit suicide for the amnesia of Germany; she can be seen as a mother now. Tuncel Kurtiz, the Islamo-patriarchal oppressive figure, shows remorse and desire for redemption; and Baki Davrak as Murat has come of age, and become an educated enlightened person who is comfortable in his racial Turkish and cultural German skins. Akin's choice of a popular, non-Kurdish actress for the lead female character Ayten is also a calculated one, in order to not burn bridges with Turkish people like Orhan Pamuk as he puts it.²¹⁰ Cinema, art and literature are supposed to build bridges, not burn them.²¹¹

Education, books, and European (Community) enlargement, too, play an important part in coming to terms with life as a migrant and with one's past and future for Germans and Turks alike. In *Lola*, the education is woven into the characters:

²¹⁰ Filiz Cicek, "High Heels and High Hopes: Impressions from Cannes Film Festival," *The Ryder Magazine*, August 2012.

²¹¹ Beier and Matussek, "From Istanbul to New York."

German-Ottoman military collaboration during World War One, Nazi and communist pasts, as well as Islam and Turkish nationalism, and their policies towards homosexuals and women written into the physical and emotional bodies of the men and women.

Akin's social engineering aspirations comes through more clearly in the more literal *Edge of Heaven* as he places books at the center through a university professor and a German shopkeeper. It is through the book as symbol that the misogyny of the Muslim fundamentalist and Ali is tackled. It is through the written word in diary form that Lotte's mother Susanne grows more compassionate. Thus does Akin seek to balance the emotion/heart and the mind/intellect. But even then, both Goethe and Selim Ozdogan is better read and understood in Turkey than in Germany. It is in Germany that Akin's people fall in love, but it is Turkey to which they go (back) to die, physically and metaphorically, and to be reborn through love/emotion and literature/art/intellect. When Ali sheds tears upon finishing *The Daughter of a Blacksmith*, we know that Akin is telling us that through art, understanding, forgiveness, and healing are possible. Women are born with the art of love, underneath modernity and the manmade world. If we want to know the names and the stories of the father and daughter, we have to read the book. We have to show an interest in them, we have to care. Gone are the killer weapons, knives and guns in the end. There is now love and care.

While there is an emphasis on empowering the mother in *Lola*, by taking her out

into streets, Akin's films give mixed messages on misogyny and women's empowerment generally. The temporary room created for the Marxist lesbian in *The Edge of Heaven*, and for the business woman Selma in *Head-On*, only accentuates the importance of mothering, and hence works against that empowerment. This is not to say that motherhood is not hugely empowering identity in itself, but that because Akin's approach is essentialist, ultimately he presents no other possible identities for women. They are cold-mothers, prostitutes, mannish lesbians, who either die or reform, as mothers and daughters. If not, they are left alone by their husbands, like Selma.

With the absence of Turkish mothers, due to both oppression (*Lola*) and death (*The Edge of Heaven*), it is this maternal love that both Ataman and Akin's characters are yearning for. Both directors utilize matricide, symbolizing the inaccessibility of the native land, in order to bring forth the German surrogate mother of the host country. It is her acceptance and love and care that they need. While Ataman has faith and hope in a more sedentary German mother Ute, she is made mobile in *The Edge of Heaven*. Susanne follows the migrants to their roots to nurture them there. As for Sibel, she mothers herself by becoming one, naturally (for Akin), in Turkey.

Amorous love, on the other hand, is equated in all three films with death (of Lola, Niko, Yeter, and Lotte). Each death triggers emotions and shifts that are transformative for the remaining lead characters. Love triggers death, death triggers transformation.

Native to Turkey, born and raised in Istanbul and currently residing there, Ataman, hopes to create a utopic third space in the host country by eliminating the extremes of both the Turkish and German sexism and racism. His is an artistic manifestation of the desire to create a new home and community within the host country. Slowly he turns Ute, the xenophobic and homophobic aristocrat mother, into a sympathetic, loving and nurturing mother.

Akin, too, identifies Hamburg as home, where he was born and raised, more than Turkey, stating that “I am from Hamburg, the city has been good to me.” Nonetheless, Hamburg as hometown and Germany as home seem to be very unstable, in fact quite mobile, for him and his characters. Unlike the first generation, whose residential districts within the city were predetermined by German governments, Akin’s second generational characters are constantly on the move. They are nomads moving from city to city, crossing borders from country to country, as well as racial, gender and religious boundaries, sometimes daily, only to find themselves restless at each stop and contemplating the next. But regardless of what city they start from, they will eventually come to the motherland to find balance and equilibrium.

Like Ataman, Akin too turns to the German mother to bridge the generational, cultural, and gender gap. But unlike Ataman, Akin doesn’t seem to have faith in the German women in Germany. Cahit leaves Maren behind to follow Sibel to Turkey: Sibel loved and nurtured him in life and in prison. Susanne, who her daughter Lotte

characterized as “so German,” meaning rigid and unsympathetic, in her attitude towards Ayten while in Germany, is born again as a loving and nurturing mother in Turkey. Thus Akin chooses to rehabilitate his characters, male and female, outside of Germany. Turkey thus serves as a mother's womb in a Freudian sense, a place of pause and incubation between East and West, before moving on with the next chapter in their lives.

So, while Ataman provides us with a roadmap from margins to the center for a more utopic and egalitarian existence for all races and genders in the host country, Akin gives us the postmodern nomad who is on constant move, with each character moving within his/her assigned archetypal gendered role and mobile-centers with relative ease. As in Birol Uner puts it, “Home is where [the] foot is” —here, in the journey to self triggered by love. So love itself becomes home, in the arms of Anatolia, where Ataman now resides or on the road from Hamburg, where Akin remains firmly ensconced. Home is where their hearts beat.



Director Fatih Akin.

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Filmography

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-glkA1VvFuA>.

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Ali: Fear Eats the Soul/ Angst Essen Seele Auf. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1973. New York City, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2004. DVD.

All That Heaven Allows. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1955. New York City, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2004. DVD.

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Babel. Directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu. 2006. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2007. DVD.

Berlin Alexanderplatz. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1980. New York City, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2007. DVD.

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Bir Yudum Insan Belgeseli-1: Orhan Pamuk: Anilar ve Nobel. Directed by Nebil Ozgenturk. Istanbul, TR: Everest Yayinlari, 2007. DVD.

Celluloid Closet. Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. 1995. California: Reflective Image, Home Box Office, Channel Four and Telling Pictures, 2005. DVD.

City of Lost Souls/Stadt der verlorenen Seelen. Directed by Rosa von Praunheim. 1982.

Crossing The Bridge: Sound of Istanbul. Directed by Fatih Akin. 2005. Hamburg, Germany: Corazón International GmbH & Co KG, 2006. DVD.

Delikanlım... İyi Bak Yıldızlara. Directed by Can Dunder. 2012. Istanbul, Turkey: Kalan Music. 2012. <http://vimeo.com/41666011>.

The Marriage of Maria Braun/ Die Ehe der Maria Braun/ Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1979. New York City, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2003. DVD.

Germany in Autumn/Deutschland im Herbst. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1978. Leipzig, Germany: Kinowelt Home Entertainment, 2004. DVD.

Edward W. Said On Orientalism. Directed by Sut Jhally. 1998. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, UK 2002. DVD.

En Garde. Directed by Ayşe Polat. 2004. Geiseltal, Germany: Bavaria Film International Bavaria Media GmbH, 2004. DVD.

Fight Club. Directed by David Fincher. 1999. Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

In a Year of 13 Moons/In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1978. San Francisco, CA: Fantoma Films, 2004. DVD.

In Julie/Im Juli. Directed by Fatih Akin. 2000. Port Washington, New York: Entertainment One (Former Koch Lorber Films) 2004. DVD.

In Nowhere Land/Hic Bir Yerde. Directed by Tayfun Pirselimoglu. 2002. Istanbul: Mine Film. DVD.

Isyan. Directed by Orhan Aksoy. 1979. Istanbul, Turkey: Arzu Film, 1979. VHS.

My Mother/Anam. Directed by Buket Alakus. 2001. Hamburg, Germany: Wüste Filmproduktion, 2002. DVD.

It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives. Directed by Rosa von Praunheim. 1971. Köln, West Germany: Bavaria Atelier and Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR). VHS.

Kanak Attak. Directed by Lars Becker. 2000. Hamburg, Germany: Concorde Home Entertainment. 2001. DVD.

Katzelmacher. Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1969. Los Angeles, CA: Wellspring Media Inc. 2002. DVD.

Kebab Connection. Directed by Anno Saul, and with contribution from Fatih Akin. 2004. WDR, Germany: Universum Film, 2000. DVD.

Short Sharp Shock / Kurz und Schmerzlos. Directed by Fatih Akin. 1998. Hamburg, Germany: Wuste Filmproduktion, 2001. DVD.

Little Bit of Freedom / Kleine Freiheit. Directed by Yuksel Yavuz. 2002. Berlin, Germany: absolut MEDIEN GmbH, 2005. DVD.

Lola And Billy the Kid. Directed by Kutlug Ataman. 1999. Berlin, Germany: absolut MEDIEN GmbH, 2006. DVD.

Lola. Directed by R. W. Fassbinder. 1981. Munich, Germany: United Artists Classics, 1982. DVD.

Once Upon a Time in America. Directed by Sergio Leone. 1984. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2011. DVD (Blu-ray).

Orlando. Directed by Sally Potter. 1992. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Classics, 2010. DVD. Pictures Classics, 1995. DVD.

Road to Morocco. Directed by David Butler. 1942. Los Angeles, CA: Universal Home Entertainment. 2003. DVD.

Scarface. Brian De Palme. 1983. Los Angeles, CA: Universal Home Entertainment, 1998. DVD.

Secrets of A Soul. Directed by G. W Pabst. 1926. New York City, NY: Kino International. 2008. DVD.

Solino. Directed by Fatih Akin. 2002. Hamburg, Germany: Wuste Filmproduktion, 2003. DVD.

Some Like it Hot. Directed by Billy Wilder. 1959. Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2006. DVD.

Steam: Turkish Bath. Directed by FerzanOzpetek. 1997. Istanbul, Turkey: Kanal D, 2010. DVD.

Superseks. Directed by Torsten Wacker. 2004. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005. DVD.

The Girl with The Red Scarf/Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalim. Directed by Atif Yilmaz. 1978. Istanbul, TR: Cicek Film, 2010. DVD.

The Trek/Yol. Directed by Yilmaz Guneyand Zeki Okten, 1982. Culver City, Istanbul: Gala Film ve Sanat Urunleri. 2002. DVD

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. DirectedbySergio Leone. 1966. Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2001. DVD.

The Pink Certificate. The documentary, BBC iPlayer. Directed by Emre Azizlerli. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00q864h>

The Reader. Directed by StephenDaldry. 2009. Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, 2009. DVD.

*The Sky Above Us./ Und über uns der Himmel.*Directed by Josef von Baky. 1947. Berlin, Germany: Film International, 1950. VHS.

*Die Sehnsucht der /Veronika Voss.*Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1982. New York City, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2003. DVD.

Warning Shadows. Directed by Arthur Robinson. 1923. New York City, NY: Kino Video, 2007. DVD.

You're The One!/ Sensin /Du bist es! Directed by Fatih Akin. 1995. Hamburg, Germany: Wüstefilm, 1995. VHS.

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EDUCATION

PhD **Major:** Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
2001-12 **Minor:** Gender Studies **Minor:** Art History
Dissertation: Gender, Race and Nationalism in German-Turkish Cinema.

MA **Major:** Central Eurasian Studies, Ottoman & Modern Turkish Studies,
1998-01 Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

MFA **Major:** Sculpture, Henry Radford Hope School of Fine Arts, Indiana
1993-96 University, Bloomington, IN.

BFA **Major: Sculpture**, School of Fine Arts, Marmara University Istanbul,
1987-91 Turkey.

EXPERIENCE

Teaching

Art

2011-13 **Adjunct Faculty**, *Art Appreciation*, Indiana University Purdue University
Columbus, IN.

2011-13 **Adjunct Faculty**, *Art Survey & Culture I-II*, Ivy Tech Community College,
Bloomington, IN.
Women in Art, Ivy Tech Community College, Bloomington, IN.

1994-96 **Associate Instructor**, *Introduction to Studio Arts* for Fine Arts Majors
Henry Radford Hope School of Fine Arts, Indiana University
(Drawing, color and 3D design, graphic design, and photography)

Language

2010-11 **Instructor**, Elementary Turkish Online Conversation Lessons, Brigham
Young University, Provo, Utah.

1998-2000 **Instructor**, *Introduction to Turkish*, Indiana University, Near Eastern
Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

2000-2003 **Instructor**, *Introduction to Turkish*, Indiana University, Central Eurasian
Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Film

2007-08 **Faculty**, *Gender and Transnational Cinema*, DePauw University Women's
Studies Program, Greencastle, IN.

2008 **Instructor**, *Through the Film Lens: Gender and German-Turkish Cinema*, an
original course selected by Collins Living Learning Center students and

faculty among approximately 200 proposal submitted by graduate students and faculty, Indiana University.

2006 **Associate Instructor**, *Gender and Turkish Cinema*, an original course selected by Collins Living Learning Center students and faculty among approximately 100 proposal submitted by graduate students and faculty, Indiana University.

Gender

2006-12 **Adjunct Faculty**, *Gender, Sexuality and Popular Culture*, Online Course through Continuing Studies Department, Indiana University.

2007-08 **Faculty**, *Introduction to Women's Study*, DePauw University Women's Studies Program, Green-Castle, IN.

2003-06 **Associate Instructor**, *Gender, Sexuality and Popular Culture*, Gender Studies Department, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Political-Science

Spring 2010 **Consultant**, *Current Issues in Turkey: Secularism and Religion, Women's and Human Rights, Kurdish and Armenian Questions*, IUPUI Overseas Studies, Turkey.

Film-making

2011-2016 **Artistic Director: *Eco-Warrior: Gold & Gods, River of Love, Gone with the Mountain***. A three part documentary film that focuses on environmental issues and activism in three countries: Turkey, India and the USA.

2003-04 **Director, Art Director, Co-Script Writer**, *Sevgili Murat/Dear Murat*, The Turkish Film Project, Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Grant.

Museum

1991 **Sculptor intern**, Antalya Archeology Museum
Excavation work at Roman Theater in Side, Antalya, Turkey.

1990 **Sculptor intern**, Istanbul Archeology Museum Restoration Department, Restoring Ancient Greek, Assyrian, Hittite and Roman artifacts.

Feminist Art Project

2011-13 **Regional coordinator for Indiana**, Institute for Women & Art at Rutgers University, New Jersey.

Journalism

2010-2012 **Contributing Editor**, writer and graphic designer, *The Ryder Magazine*, Bloomington, IN,

<http://theyrder.com/wordpress/2012/09/09/high-hopes-and-high-heels-2/>.

Media Consultant

- 2003-05 **Antrak**, a monthly Turkish magazine about Turkish and World Cinema, Istanbul, Turkey.
- 2000-02 **Tombak**, a monthly Turkish art and antique magazine, Istanbul, Turkey.

Reporter

- 1999-00 **Pazatersi: Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete**, a monthly Turkish Feminist Magazine, Istanbul, Turkey.
- 1989 **Nabız**, covering art and music for a monthly Turkish magazine for nurses.

Host

Eco-Report, A weekly news program about environment and sustainable living at WFHB, Bloomington, IN.

Producer

- 1998 **CATS-Area Arts TV**, covering IU International Students events, Bloomington, IN.

Podcasts

- 2008 **Orientalism in Film and Television**, in Muslim Voices: Voices and Visions of Islam from Global Perspective, Indianan University, Bloomington, November 24th,
<http://muslimvoices.org/filiz-cicek-orientalism-film-tv/>.

Photography

- 2006-09 **Art: Berlin Love Parade**, use of digital photography as the main medium.
- 2004-06 **Art: Inscribing Tradition on Female Bodies**, use of digital photography as the main medium.
- 2004 **Photojournalist: "In This World"**, for my weekly column in *Manset* Newspaper.

Graphic Design

- 2010 **Poster: Museum of Broken Relationships Exhibition**, Sofa Gallery, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2010 **Poster: 5nd Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, The Lodge 101, Bloomington.
- 2009 **Poster: Women Exposed Art Exhibit 2009**, Bloomington.
- 2008 **Poster: 1st Annual Cans International Short Film Festival**, Bloomington.
- 2004-06 **Art: Inscribing Tradition on Female Bodies**. I modified my photographs for this project by using various graphic design programs and tools before exhibiting them as photographs and/or projecting them as digital images.
- 2002-07 **Poster: German-Turkish Film Festival**, Bloomington.

Poster: *Collins Living -Learning Center, Gender and Turkish Cinema Film Project*, Bloomington.

Poster-advertisement: *Turkish Film Series*, Bloomington.

Set Designer

1999-01 **Musical Art Center**, designing and making various ballet and opera stage sets under supervision, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Event Organizer

Creating and Curating Fund and Awareness Raising Art & Film Events for Including Non Profit Organizations

2012 **7th Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, Bloomington, IN.

2012 **Trashion-Refashion Show**, Center for Sustainable Living, Bloomington, IN.

2011 **Bloomington-Katmandu**, TMBCC, Bloomington, IN.

2010 **6th Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, for The Middle Way House, Bloomington, IN.

2010 **Museum of Broken Relationships**, The Sofa Gallery, IU, Bloomington IN.

2010 **5th Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, for The Middle Way House, Bloomington, IN.

2009 **4th Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, for The Middle Way House, Bloomington, IN.

2008 **1st Annual Cans International Short Film Festival**, Bloomington, IN.

2007 **Guest Speaker**, arranging for Professor Hamid Naficy, who is an expert on Iranian and Immigrant Cinema to come and give a talk titled, "Depiction of Women in Iranian Cinema and moderating the Q & A session after his talk, DePauw University.

2007 **Film Screening Event**, arranging the screening of the Iranian film, *The Day I Became a Woman* and moderating the Q & A session afterwards with Professor Hamid Naficy, DePauw University.

2007 **Guest Speaker**, arranging for feminist activist poet bell hooks to come and talk to my Introduction to Women's Studies course students, DePauw University.

- 2007 ***Women on Women***, the First Film Festival in Berlin that features 10 short and 10 full length films directed by women depicting women's stories, Berlin, Germany.
- 2006-07 ***German-Turkish Film Series***, monthly film screenings at *Runcible Spoon Cafe*, attended by 20-30 people, Bloomington, Indiana.
- 2006 **Gender and Turkish Cinema Film Project**, one full length and one short student films screening attended by 200 people, The Cinemat, Bloomington, IN.
- 2004-05 ***German-Turkish Film festival***, month long film screenings attended by 40-50 people at The *Cinemat*, Bloomington, IN.
- 2002-04 ***Turkish Film Series***, weekly film screenings attended by 30-40 people, International Student Center, Bloomington, IN.

Registered Nurse

1987-90 Marmara University Hospital Intensive Care Unit, Istanbul, Turkey

Guest Lecturer and Visiting Artist

- 2009 **Migrant Prostitutes in Berlin**, IU Gender Studies Department
- 2007 **Foundations of Feminist Art**, IUPUI Women's Studies & Art History Departments, Indianapolis.
- 2006 **Islam in the Wake of 9-11**, Harmony School, Bloomington, Indiana.
- 2006 **Honor Killings and Islam**, IUPUI Women's Studies Department, Indianapolis.
- 2005 **Gender, Nationalism and Hybridity in Turkish Sci-fi film *Gora***, pre-screening, The Cinemat Movie House, Bloomington, Indiana.
- 2005 **Fantastic Turkish Cinema**, Harmony School, Bloomington, Indiana.

Presenter

- 2006 **Gender and Nationality in Turkish-German Cinema**, International Conference on Migrant and Diasporic Cinema In Contemporary Europe at University Oxford University Lincoln College, England.
- 2006 **Tensions Between Art, Feminist Activists and Islam**, Creative Action: Gender and The Arts Conference, Women's and Gender Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
- 2005 **Turkish-German Cinema: *Lola And Bilidikid***, American Comparative Literature Association Conference, March 11-13, Pennsylvania State University.
- 2005 **Gender and Turkish Melodramas**, International Communication Association Annual Conference in New York, May 26-30.
- 2005 **Reverse Glocalization? Marketing a Turkish Cola in the Shadow of a Giant**, *co-presenter*, International Communication Association Annual Conference in New York, May 26-30.

- 2004 **Letters to Sarah: Analysis of E-Mail Responses to an Online Editorial**, *co-presenter*, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Convention.
- 2003 **Providing Digital Language Support**, *co-presenter*, in Emerging Technologies in Teaching Languages and Cultures Conference, Monterey, California.
- 2002 **Playing His/Her Game: Berna the Bad Girl Tarkan the Pop Singer**, **The Kinsey Institute**, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2001 9th Annual Comparative Literature Department 50th anniversary conference series, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Scholarship

- 2008 *"Lola and Bilidikid,"* Film Review, *Scope*: Online Journal of Film and TV Studies, Institute of Film and TV Studies, University of Nottingham, Portals Special Issue, issue 11, June 2008, http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/filmreview.php?issue=4&id=118§ion=film_rev&q=filiz+cicek.
- 2007 "Reverse Glocalization? Marketing a Turkish Cola in the Shadow of a Giant," in, *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research*, Volume 1: No1 (c), 2007.
- 2005 "Thoughts on Secularism," Women's Affairs Office Newsletter, Indiana University.
- 2005 "Letters to Sarah: Analysis of E-Mail Responses to an Online Editorial," *New Media and Society*, Volume 7:No. 4, 2005.
- 2003 "Providing Digital Language Support", in *Emerging Technologies in Teaching Languages and Cultures*, ed. by Yoshiko Saito-Abbott, Richard Donovan, Thomas F. Abbott, vol. 2&3, Larc Press, San Diego State University, 2003.
- 2001 "Silent Women of Pamuk/Pamuk'un Sessiz Kadınları," a criticism of the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk's female characters, published by Turkish bi-monthly literary magazine *Mizan*, Istanbul, 2000.
- 2000 "From Non-existence: Feminist Art from Past to Present/Hıçlıktan Varlığa Kadın Sanatı/Feminist Art," an interview with feminist artist Judy Chicago published in *Cumhuriyet Art Journal*, May 28, 2000.

Journalistic Articles:

- 2012 "High Hopes and High Heels; Impressions from Cannes Film Festival," *The Ryder Magazine*, Bloomington, June 14.

- 2012 "Trashion REFASHION," Cover Story, *The Ryder Magazine*, Bloomington, March 14.
- 2011 "Monika Treut's Gender Warriors," Cover Story, *The Ryder Magazine*, October 14.
- 2011 "BloomingtonKatmandu," Cover Story, *The Ryder Magazine*, Bloomington, May, 11.
- 2011 "Women Exposed-6," *The Ryder Magazine*, Bloomington, April 11.
- 2010 "Museum of Broken Relationships," Cover Story, *The Ryder Magazine*, Bloomington, May 14.
- 2009 "Muslim Women in the Media" in *Muslim Voices: Voices and Visions of Islam from Global Perspective*, Indiana University, Bloomington, March 24
<http://muslimvoices.org/muslim-women-media/>.
- 2008 "Jesus, Moses, Muhammad and Buddha," *Taraf Daily Newspaper*, Istanbul, March 13th, www.taraf.com.tr
- 2006 "A Journalist Shot Dead in Turkey: Hrant Dink," *Manset Daily Newspaper*, Istanbul, January 27, Istanbul, Turkey.
- 2006 "Death of a Legend: James Brown," *Manset*, Istanbul, January 7.
- 2006 "Is EU Ready for Turkey?," *Manset*, Istanbul, December 17.
- 2006 "Post-election America," *Manset*, Istanbul, November 17.
- 2006 "What Does the US Midterm Elections Tell Us?," *Manset*, Istanbul, November 14.
- 2006 "An Orange Colored Day: An Autumn Tale," *Manset*, Istanbul, October 25,
- 2006 "Orhan Pamuk Is a Bright Writer but He Doesn't Capture The Hearts of Turks," *Manset*, Istanbul, October 18.
- 2006 "The Pope and Islam, Bush and Democracy," *Manset*, Istanbul, September 27.
- 2006 "5th Anniversary of 9/11 and America," *Manset*, Istanbul, September 12.
- 2006 "Berlin -London - Chicago: Diary of a Flight Under Bomb Threats," *Manset*, Istanbul, August 30.
- 2006 "Madonna/Whore Complex in Turkish Melodramas," dedicated to Turkish

- feminist writer- actress Duygu Asena who died on July 30th 2006, *Manset*, Istanbul, August 2.
- 2006 "Oxford is a Nice City, with Its Asian Immigrants Serving...", *Manset*, Istanbul, July 20.
- 2006 "Listening to a CHE Song in a Kreuzberg Café," *Manset*, Istanbul, July 9.
- 2006 "World Cup: Watching Football as Nationalism," *Manset*, Istanbul, July 2.
- 2005 "Che Guevara's Legacy," *co-author*, *Indiana Daily Student*, Bloomington, <http://www.idsnews.com/subsite/story.php?id=32113>
- 2003 "Problems in Representation," response article, *Indiana Daily Student News*, Bloomington, May 22, <http://www.idsnews.com/story.php?id=16793>
- 2000 "International Students Cope With Culture Shock," IDS, Bloomington, June 1, <http://www.idsnews.com/news/2000.06.01/campus/2000.06.01.shock.html>
- 2000 "Making the Venture Abroad," IDS, Bloomington, July 31, 2000, <http://www.idsnews.com/news/2000.07.31/campus/2000.07.31.venture.html>.

ART & EXHIBITIONS

Permanent Installations

- 2009 **The Kinsey Institute**, three pieces, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2008 **The Kinsey Institute**, one piece, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2005 **The Kinsey Institute**, two pieces, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2005 **Terry M. Dworkin Private Collection**, two pieces, Bloomington.
- 2004 **Gender Studies Library**, one piece, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 **Solo Exhibition**, GenderQueer/QueerGender Conference, University of California Santa Barbara, California.

Group Exhibitions

- 2011 **Bloomington-Katmandu**, TMBCC, Bloomington, www.bloomingtonkatmandu.com.
- 2011 **Your Art Here**, 6th Street Billboard, April-May, Bloomington.

- 2011 **6nd Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, The Lodge 101, Bloomington.
- 2010 **Museum of Broken Relationships Exhibition**, Sofa Gallery, Bloomington.
- 2010 **5nd Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, The Lodge 101, Bloomington.
- 2009 **Eros in Asia: Erotic Art from Iran to Japan**, The Kinsey Institute, Bloomington.
- 2009 **4nd Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, The Lodge 101, Bloomington.
- 2008 **Continuity and Change: Islamic Tradition in Contemporary Art**, Williamsburg Art and Historical Center, New York City, NY.
- 2007 **Expressive Bodies: Contemporary Art Photography from the Kinsey Institute**, The SoFA Gallery, Bloomington.
- 2007 **3rd Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, Art Hospital, Bloomington.
- 2006 **Intersections: Locating Acts of Courage**, National WCA and NWSA Art Exhibition, juried by feminist artist Yolanda Lopez, Joyce Gordon Gallery, Oakland, CA.
- 2005 **2nd Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibition**, Gallery North, Bloomington.
- 2005 **8th International Open** - Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL.
- 1998 **Current Art**, Güncel Sanat Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey.
- 1995 **All Campus Faculty Art Exhibition**, one figurative bronze piece, Editions Limited Gallery of Fine Art, Bloomington.
- 1994 **Mathers Museum Special Exhibition**, one figurative bronze piece, Alliance of Bloomington Museums competition, Bloomington.
- 1992 **Art and Artist of Modern Turkey**, group show, two pieces, Istanbul.
- 1991 **Young Talents Show**, selected by jury, one permanent piece, Istanbul.
- 1990 **Open Air Exhibition**, three structural metal pieces, Istanbul.

1989 **Developments in Turkish Plastic Arts**, three metal pieces, Istanbul.

AWARDS AND GRANTS

2006 **Exchange Student Scholarship**, Free University, Berlin, Germany.
2004 **Fulbright-Hays Groups Project Abroad Grant** - Turkish Film Project.
2002-03 **Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship for Persian** - Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington.
2003-07 **Gender Studies Fellowship** – Gender Studies Department, Indiana University.
1998-02 **Fellowship award** - Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University.
2001 **Travel Grant** - College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University.
2000 **Teaching Aid Grant** - Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University.
1993-96 **Fellowship award** -School of Fine Arts, Indiana University.
1995 **Fellowship Award** - for I.U. Summer Program in Florence, Italy.
1994 **Special Award** - The Alliance of Bloomington Museums, Indiana.
1992 **Second Place** - selected by jury, Young Talents Show, Istanbul.
1991 **First Place in BFA Thesis Show** - Marmara University, Istanbul.
1987-91 **Scholarship** – Marmara University School of Fine Arts, Department of Education, Ankara, Turkey.

LANGUAGE

Turkish - native language
English - fluent
French - research language
Ottoman - research language
Persian - research language
German - research language

MEDIA EXPOSURE

Radio- TV

2011 **WFHB**, Classical Spot interview for Women Exposed Benefit Art Exhibit.
<http://www.wfhb.org/search/node/Classical+spot>

2011 **WFHB**, BloomingOUT, LGBTQI News & Public Affairs interview for Women Exposed Benefit Art Exhibit, Bloomington, April 14th and April 21st <http://www.wfhb.org/news/bloomingout>

2010 **WRTV Indianapolis**, “Exhibit Provides Solace To Broken Hearted,” Indiana News Story, Indianapolis, www.theindychannel.com.

2010 **WFIU/NPR**, “Museum of Broken Relationships Showcases Souvenirs Of Heartbreak,” by Yael Ksander, June 1, Bloomington, <http://indianapublicmedia.org/arts/showcasing-souvenirs-heartbreak/>.

- 2010 **WFHB**, "Art That Mends Hearts -Museum of Broken Relationships," with Chad Carrothers, Bloomington.
- 2010 **IDS News**, "International Touring Exhibit Reveals Broken Hearts," by Allison Tyra, Bloomington,
<http://www.idsnews.com/news/story.aspx?id=75850>.
- 2006 **CATS TV**, an interview about *German-Turkish Film Series*, Bloomington.
- 1998 **Channel 8 Wish TV**, "Earthquake in Turkey Affects Local Students," an interview on the earthquake that killed over 20 thousand people, Indianapolis.

Newspapers and Magazines

- 2011 **The Ryder Magazine**, "BloomingtonKatmandu," by Filiz Cicek, Bloomington, May, 11.
- 2011 **TraveliN Magazine**, for Central Indiana, "International Gallery Exhibit Held Locally" on Bloomington Katmandu Art Exhibit by Lisa Morrison, Indianapolis, Spring 2011, www.travelindianamagazine.com.
- 2011 **The Ryder Magazine**, "Women Exposed-6," by Filiz Cicek, Bloomington, April 11.
- 2011 **Herald Times**, "Women 'expose' themselves at weekend art show," by Katherine Coplen, Special to the *H-T*, April 28,
<http://www.heraldtimesonline.com/stories/2011/04/28/scene.qp-8459583.sto>.
- 2010 **Herald Times**, ""The heart was made to be broken." — OSCAR WILD - Emotional purging via artistic preservation- Museum of Broken Relationships, a traveling exhibit, visits IU's SoFA Gallery," by Ashley Albrecht Special to the *H-T*, Bloomington, May 23.
- 2010 **Bloom Magazine**, "Arts/Entertainment – At SoFA Gallery, Museum of Broken Relationships," Bloomington, June-July Issue,
www.magbloom.com.
- 2010 **The Ryder Magazine**, "Museum of Broken Relationships," Cover Story, Bloomington, April- May Issue.
- 2009 **The Herald Times**, "Art Exhibit Benefits Middle Way House," by Mercedes Rodriguez on 4th Annual Women Exposed Art Exhibit, Bloomington, March 28, <http://www.heraldtimesonline.com/stories/2009/03/28/news.qp-6948864.sto>.
- 2007 **Indiana Daily Student**, "Women 'expose' their art," by Michelle Manchir,

Bloomington, January 25.

- 2007 ***The Scene, Herald Times***, "Women Exposed Show III-Art Exhibition and Live Music," Bloomington, January 25,
<http://calendar.bloomingtonscene.com/?act=evdet&eid=4498>.
- 2007 ***The Ryder***, "Expressive Bodies, The Kinsey Exhibition," Bloomington.
- 2006 ***Bizim Gazete***, "The Unrecognizable Left," by Ali Er, The
piece focuses on the parallels between the democratic party in America
and leftist parties in Turkey, Istanbul, October 3, <http://www.tgc.org.tr/>.
- 2006 ***Herald Times***, *Off The Wall: Stories Behind The Art: Filiz Cicek*, by Chris
Howell, weekly magazine, *The Scene*, Bloomington, April 20.
- 2006 ***Indiana Daily Student***, "New Film Series Explores Nationality, Race:
Cinemat to Show German Turkish Issue Films," by Michael-Lyn McBride,
Wednesday, Bloomington, April 5,
<http://www.idsnews.com/news/story.php?adid=search&id=35044>.
- 2004 ***Herald Times***, "Both Side Ready For Challenges ...Filiz Cicek 9551st (and
final) person to register as an absentee voter in Monroe County," by Katy
Murphy, front page, Bloomington, November 2, 2004.
- 1998 ***Herald Times***, "Earthquake Hits Turkey," an interview about collecting
donations for the earthquake victims, *Herald Times*, Bloomington.

Newsletters

- 2005 ***Gender Studies Department Newsletter***, "Filiz Cicek: Inscribing the
Female Body," by Cindy Stone, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2005 ***Women's Affairs Office Newsletter***, "Filiz Cicek: Exploring New Territory
With Art," by Collen Riley, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2005 ***Woman Made Gallery Spring Newsletter***, "'Fornication', a piece by Filiz
Cicek from the 8th International Open Exhibition," by Beate Minkovski,
Spring issue, Chicago, IL.