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Violence, Sexuality and the Family: Identity 'Within and Beyond Turkish-German Parameters' in Fatih Akın's *Gegen die Wand*, Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* and Anno Saul's *Kebab Connection*

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Violence, Sexuality and the Family: Identity 'Within and Beyond Turkish-German Parameters'[1] in Fatih Akın's *Gegend die Wand*, Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* and Anno Saul's *Kebab Connection*

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This essay investigates the interaction between violence, sexuality, gender and the role of the family in the construction of Turkish-German identities in Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* (1999), Fatih Akın's *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and Anno Saul's *Kebab Connection* (2005). Rob Burns argues that Turkish-German cinema is moving away from themes of oppression with a specific focus on personal experience and is instead becoming more transnational in its content and less politically and socially engaged. Jim Jordan similarly claims that the 'between two worlds' paradigm, which has commonly been used to describe a sense on the part of Turkish-German *Gastarbeiter* and their offspring of being torn between the influences of their Turkish and German cultural spheres, has become outdated and unhelpful. However, through detailed narrative and character analyses I argue that the three films examined here indicate that the formation of a Turkish German identity appears to be a far more complicated process for the youngest generation of Turkish-Germans than it has been for their predecessors. I demonstrate that the 'between two worlds' paradigm can still be useful in defining the generational and familial conflicts affecting this generation and suggest that the continuing importance of specifically Turkish-German social issues shows that a move towards transnational filmic identities is only in its early stages.

Introduction

In his article 'Turkish-German cinema: from cultural resistance to transnational cinema?' Rob Burns (2006) argues that Turkish-German cinema is moving away from the themes of oppression, victimhood and cultural resistance with a particular focus on personal experience, as seen in the majority of *Gastarbeiter* films of the 1970s, and is instead moving towards a transnational, post-ethnic cinema where problems of ethnic difference and engagement with political and social issues are receding into the background of a good, entertaining story. But is this really true? Jim Jordan (2006) makes a similar case in 'More than a metaphor: the passing of the two worlds paradigm in German-language diasporic literature', stating that the original image of the migrant worker as living 'between two worlds' is now out-dated and unhelpful. Although the concept was at first endorsed by Turkish-German writers, its use nowadays is problematic since it assumes that German and Turkish cultures are fixed,

[1] Burns 2006: 127.

unchanging entities with 'locally rooted, self-contained system[s] of shared practices, rituals and beliefs' (Göktürk 2002a: 248). Today, however, it is readily accepted that cultures are becoming more fluid as the post-migrant population becomes more diverse, that is to say, people no longer think of themselves as between cultures, but as a complicated mixture of factors including gender, generation, class, ethnicity and nationality. The two articles raise many questions about identity with regard to the Turkish-German population currently living in Germany and to Turkish-German cinema. Are Turkish-German directors really moving away from films about Turkish-German experience, i.e. is the focus on multi-cultural experience rather than a specifically Turkish-German one? How does the question of a Turkish-German identity fit into the bigger picture of a German national identity and German national cinema? Georg Seeβlen (2002), for example, argues that: 'Von einem "deutschen Kino" zu reden, ist nicht der Mühe wert'. Therefore, can we even talk about a German or Turkish-German cinema anymore or should we refer to a transnational cinema instead?

In order to answer the questions raised by Burns's and Jordan's articles and to consider the extent to which we can talk about Turkish-German, German or transnational cinemas today, it is first necessary to investigate exactly what is meant by the term 'transnational'. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (2006: 1) understand the term as referring to 'the global forces that link people or institutions across nations'. Thus, in terms of a transnational cinema, the idea of autonomous national cinema is being replaced by the more general notion of a global network of cinemas which learn from and influence each other through 'the flows of cultural exchange' (Ezra et al. 2006: 2). This 'cultural exchange' is facilitated by both the advances made in technologies – which allow films to be made and distributed farther and wider, to homes and cinemas, in video, DVD and digital formats – as well as increases in the flow of capital and trade across national borders in general. Furthermore, the mixture of techniques, styles and themes used by directors the world over highlights the increasing difficulty of trying to define cinema by nationality, particularly when films are dubbed rather than subtitled so that traces of the original language are removed. It is likely that a film will include contributions – from actors, directors, producers and funding bodies – which emanate from many different regions of the world, making it virtually impossible to pin-point one specific national film origin (Göktürk 2002b:

214). Hence, just as the notion of discrete nations and cultural purity becomes ever more questionable, so too is the idea of national cinema open to a degree of flexibility and indeterminacy, as borders between countries effectively begin to disappear.

In summary, transnational cinema is a global cinema which strives to cross national borders both in terms of production and reception and no longer assumes or expresses a specifically national identity, but rather brings different communities and cultures together through a 'global cine-literacy' (Ezra et al. 2006: 3). This is the term coined by Ezra and Rowden to express the idea that cinema is steadily displacing literature in terms of consumption and recognition as the space in which dialogues about national and international identities are taking place.

Cinema, then, would appear to be an apt site to investigate the debate around and the portrayal of personal and collective identities. In this respect, it is particularly interesting to note Ezra and Rowden's description of transnational cinema as being 'most "at home" in the in-between spaces of culture' (Ezra et al. 2006: 4), since this implies that films, however transnational, can still be recognised as having connections to various national cinemas to some extent. This may be due to factors such as setting, storyline or genre but since the films are not rooted in one particular nationality they are neither fully 'local' (to one country) nor 'global', in the sense of being nationality-free. This calls to mind the 'between two worlds' paradigm mentioned above, which saw Turkish migrants strive to define their own identity and find a position for themselves in society in terms of one nationality or culture. Their difficulties arose because they often felt an affinity to both their country of origin and their new *Wohnland* (Kolinsky 2002: 210). Indeed, although many *Gastarbeiter* had planned to return to Turkey after a few years of working in Germany, the fact that they had started families and a new life in Germany made it difficult for them to do so, especially as their children grew older and had no desire to leave.

It is the second generation of Turkish-Germans, then, which is thought to feel particularly torn between the country in which they grew up (Burns 1999: 745), this time Germany, and the Turkish culture in which they were brought up within the family home: 'members of the second generation have a Turkish and a German background and define their identity by drawing on both cultures' (Kolinsky 2002: 214). However, for the younger generation of Turkish-Germans living in Germany today I believe the situation regarding identity formation is far more complicated than either Burns or Jordan suggests. Indeed, even the continued use of the hyphenated term 'Turkish-German' which has come to represent 'dislocation and displacement' (Bhatia 2002: 55), highlights just one of the complicated issues associated with the identity of this generation today, despite them not necessarily having had direct experience of migration themselves.

In order to show this complexity in greater detail I intend to analyse here three very different modern Turkish-German films, namely Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* (1999), Fatih Akın's *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and Anno Saul's *Kebab Connection* (2005). They are all Turkish-German films in the sense that the three directors draw on Turkish and German influences in their storylines, characters and dialogues. Each of the films looks at the experiences of young Turkish-German protagonists who grow up in Turkish families within German society. Furthermore, the directors were all born to Turkish families with Akın (Beddies 2007) and Saul growing up in Germany and Ataman born and raised in Turkey (Clark 2006: 560), yet setting his film in Berlin.

Lola + Bilidikid centres around Murat, a teenager who is struggling to come to terms with his own sexuality after entering the world of his newly-found, long-lost brother – the transvestite, Lola. Murat must learn to find and express his own identity and sexuality despite the expectations placed upon him by his Turkish family, Lola's macho boyfriend Bili, and a group of neo-Nazi German youths. After a failed suicide attempt and a stint at a psychiatric clinic, Sibel, in *Gegen die Wand*, desires to lead an independent life in Germany away from the constraints of her strict Turkish family. This quest leads her to marry the equally unstable Cahit, who will be acceptable to her family because of his Turkish nationality, yet still allow her the freedom to experiment with her own sexuality. That is, until they begin to fall in love. The comedy *Kebab Connection* centres around aspiring film-director Ibo's life when he discovers his German girlfriend is pregnant, much to the dismay of his Turkish family.

According to Burns's model of two distinct phases of Turkish-German cinema, the first era from the 1970s to the 1990s focussed on the oppression of Turks within German society. A large number of these films also centred around the 'popular fantasy' (Göktürk 2000: 69) of liberating women from the oppression they suffered within their patriarchal Turkish families – a depiction which seemed to be a common feature of both German and Turkish directors' films. It therefore seems apt to investigate the interaction between violence, sexuality, gender and the role of the family in constructing Turkish-German identities within these three contemporary films, as these issues still provide the main areas of tension within all of the stories. Exploring them will enable me to determine whether the 'between two worlds' paradigm has become outdated with regard to these films and whether Turkish-German cinema has moved beyond such national categorising and is, in fact, part of a trend towards transnational cinema, as Burns and Jordan suggest.

Identity and the Family

'The family occupies a key position in the society and culture of Turks in Germany' (Karakasoglu 1996: 161) and all three of these films depict patriarchal Turkish families living in Germany. The parents in each family are first generation *Gastarbeiter* who retain their original Turkish culture and religion within the family home. This means that the father is the head of the family, making the decisions and setting the rules for the individual members and family unit as a whole. Any older brothers either share this role with the father or take it over if the father dies. The mothers are portrayed as passive housewives who are controlled and oppressed by their husbands and mainly confined to the family home. Their lack of contact with the outside world means they have weak German language skills and little knowledge of German society and culture, which could be seen as one way of ensuring the 'honour' of the family is preserved. The notion of honour works to make sure both the family and communal units 'remain loyal and conform to the group norms' (Tan et al. 1996: 140). It is thought to be upheld primarily by the behaviour of the women, who are expected to retain their virginity before marriage and conduct themselves 'with socially appropriate modesty' (Karakasoglu 1996: 161).

The children in all of the films have grown up in Germany and speak both German and Turkish and it is this generation and their quest to find an identity which encompasses elements of both their Turkish cultural background and their German social environment on which the films focus. I will investigate the role of the family in the construction of identities both on a personal and a collective level by analysing the relationship between the values of the Turkish family and the expectations of the German society in which the families now exist.

On the surface, Ibo's family in *Kebab Connection* appears to represent the stereotypical Turkish family as described above. Ibo's father and uncle both try to exert their authority over the other family members and even disown Ibo as a son and nephew when they perceive him to have brought shame on their family by impregnating his non-Muslim girlfriend and creating a modern, Kung-Fu inspired advertisement for his uncle's kebab shop. Yet the film actually makes a joke out of this Turkish cultural tradition by turning the idea of honour and disownment into something humorous. Indeed, the uncle's disowning of Ibo is very short-lived and he takes him back almost immediately. This is in contrast to the serious and emotional scene in *Gegen die Wand* where Sibel is disowned by her family who burn photographs of her and threaten to kill her in order to preserve their family honour. In comparison to this realistic and dramatic scene, the disownment scenarios in Saul's film appear petty and funny. Indeed, the comedic aspect of the *Kebab Connection* scenes is achieved, firstly, through the quick resolution of the family conflict (the uncle realises that, despite his reservations about them, Ibo's adverts are actually successful and popular with the younger generation) and secondly, because Ibo had never really 'dishonoured' his family in the strict sense Sibel had with what is perceived as her promiscuity. Hence, the use of comedy within the film actually works to undermine the traditionally prescribed gender roles of the family members and consequently we see both the father and the uncle as controllable and, at times, laughable, characters.

Furthermore, the formerly passive and oppressed Turkish mother figure of the *Gastarbeiterkino* (Burns 2006: 133) is now portrayed as possessing some power, since she is able to influence her husband and initiate action, rather than simply following his decisions and commands. Indeed, Ibo's mother is able to convince her husband to go and reconcile his differences with Ibo and talk him into winning back Ibo's girlfriend, Tizi (after the couple split over different attitudes towards her pregnancy) despite her husband's demand: 'Sag du mir nicht was ich tun soll!'. Thus, we see a possible complicating of gender roles where Turkish women are no longer subject to 'double othering' (Göktürk 2000: 66), that is, being reduced to the status of 'subaltern' both as a migrant and as a woman. Furthermore, in a complete twist of the expected norms, Ibo's father is actually shown to respect Tizi, after she has shouted at him, despite the fact she is an unmarried, non-Muslim, German woman. Humour in the film is in fact generated by the complete reversal of expected behaviour by the male and female characters as established by older generation Turkish-German films such as Tevfik Baser's *40m² Deutschland* (1986). In rejecting such images of the past, *Kebab Connection* is forging the way for a new cinematic identity for Turkish-German cinema based on personal identities which are no longer inextricably linked to pre-designated gender and familial roles.

Comedy is also used effectively to highlight the disparity in family values between German and Turkish cultures. In contrast to the apparent unity of the Turkish family, Tizi's German family is shown to be completely fragmented. Indeed, the collective identity of the family in Germany is shown to be less important than in Turkish culture where 'the family contributes to the stability of established value systems' (Karakasoglu 1996: 161). Yet, the stability of these value systems in a 'host' society which does not necessarily uphold the same values is put into question when generational conflicts arise in both families, emanating from the clash of German and Turkish cultural and behavioural expectations. Just as Tizi's mother does not want her daughter to be let down by what she assumes will be Ibo's lack of parenting skills as a Turkish man, so Ibo's father does not want a non-Turkish, non-Muslim grandchild, which he would perceive as bringing shame upon his family. Yet, neither Tizi nor Ibo have any problems with the other's cultural, religious or ethnic origin until their families become involved. In fact, the couple's relationship only develops into a problem for their parents when it becomes serious, that is to say, when they are going to have a baby together. Moreover, the film positions the conflict between the star-crossed lovers' families in a much wider framework than just relating it to a Turkish-German context, by reminding the audience of the universality of the problem. The use of quotations from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – the ultimate tale of disapproving parents – for Tizi's audition to stage-school, indicates that the problem of parents objecting to their children's lovers dates back centuries and is not limited to one set of nations, religions or cultures. However, I would argue that the parents' reactions to the news of Tizi and Ibo's baby suggests that although present day society – as symbolised by the parental generation in this film – may be trying to change their attitudes towards multiculturalism, for the time being, tolerance of difference between cultures is only on the surface, since underneath there still exists a tension between the different cultures which prevents them from accepting each other.

None of the teenagers in *Kebab Connection*, whether from Turkish, German or Greek families,[2] has a problem with his or her cultural background and all are quite happy to be friends with each other. It is the members of the older, parental generation who have the prejudices and perpetuate stereotypes of the other cultures. This exemplifies Amartya Sen's claim that many of the problems associated with a multi-cultural society stem from the 'damaging and divisive' idea of 'plural monoculturalisms' (Harkin 2006), where people are defined by others due to one characteristic such as their race, religion or sex, rather than perceived as a mixture of various characteristics and qualities. The apparently happy ending of the film where all of the characters come together to celebrate Ibo and Tizi's wedding, even sharing their different national foods with their rivals, implies it is possible to overcome such prejudices. That is, until we discover that this scene is actually just another of Ibo's advertisements for his uncle's kebab shop, thus suggesting that a multi-cultural society – where personal and collective identities are not based on such restrictive categorising and stereotyping – though a possibility, is still not a *serious* reality yet.

In *Lola + Bilidikid*, Murat's family is a patriarchal Turkish family with his older brother, Osman, at the head since their father died. Osman oppresses his younger brothers and their mother in an effort to exert his authority, even throwing Lola out of the home and the family when she brings the shame of being a homosexual and a transvestite upon them. In contrast to Ibo's mother in *Kebab Connection*, Murat's mother is slave-like in appearance and behaviour, even washing her teenage son in the bath tub. She speaks no German, does exactly as she is told by her eldest son and has no personal freedom or individual identity outside of the confines of her role as mother. Here, then, we see an expectation placed on members of the family unit, according to their gender and age, to fulfil specific roles which they have not necessarily chosen for themselves.

Like his mother Murat also begins the film under the control of his brother, never daring to express his individuality. The family unit has always protected Murat and he has never had to live independently since everything has been done and decided for him by his mother and brother respectively. Although he has had contact to German society through school, he has never been able to explore that part of his cultural experience due to the restrictions placed upon him by his Turkish background. Indeed, Osman even takes Murat to a prostitute when he is just 15 years old to ensure he fulfils the role Osman has designated him, that of a macho, sexually active and dominant male. In conforming to such gender-based roles the collective identity of the family is upheld again as being more important than the personal identity of its individual members. This makes it necessary for individuals to suppress parts of their identity which do not conform to the expectations of Turkish culture, such as Murat's developing awareness of his own homosexuality. Although Murat refuses to sleep with the prostitute Osman finds for him, he also does not tell him about his sexual encounter with a boy in the toilets on his school trip. This is because Murat is aware that Osman would consider homosexuality to be shameful, since it does not fit in with his pre-designated familial role of a masculine heterosexual. Just as in *Kebab Connection*, then, the film suggests that a personal identity which might be described as truly individual is incompatible with the culturally prescribed identity of the Turkish family.

At the end of *Lola + Bilidikid* there is hope of a change to this situation for Murat and his mother when the final tie to their restrictive family unit is suddenly severed. They leave their family home and Osman within it after having discovered that he was, in fact, Lola's murderer. This is the first time we see the mother even leave the house and in a defiant motion she pulls off her headscarf (a symbol of her Turkish cultural roots) and throws it to the ground. This liberating gesture symbolises her rejection of further confinement, suggesting she is willing to shed her role as an oppressed Turkish woman. However, Murat quickly picks up the headscarf as if denying her this freedom. For him the idea of finding and expressing his own individuality is a frightening and unsettling prospect – one for which he is obviously not yet ready. It is not surprising that Murat fears independence since he has seen Lola attempt to break away from her familial identity and die as a consequence. Thus, although this final scene does open up an opportunity for Murat to explore other dimensions of his

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[2] Another dimension is added to the film's reflection on generational conflict through the figure of the Greek restaurant owner whose son 'shamefully' turns vegetarian.

identity if he *chooses* to, his initial reaction in rescuing the headscarf and clinging to his Turkish identity, suggests this is a step into the unknown he is not willing to take.

Sibel's Turkish family in *Gegen die Wand* is also patriarchal and restrictive. Sibel's mother is reminiscent of Turna from *40m² Deutschland*, that is to say the stereotypical passive female victim who only speaks Turkish, comes second to her husband and son, and does not retaliate or protest against this role. This, then, is how Sibel would be expected to be if she followed her family's cultural traditions and married a Turkish man. Sibel is trapped by the rules and expectations of her family and has to be seen to conform so she can maintain contact with her mother. If not, she would be disowned by her family 'since the standing of the family and the esteem in which it is held is presumed to depend above all on the blameless behaviour of its female members' (Tan et al. 1996: 140).

However, having grown up in Germany she would like the freedom other young German women have to express themselves. Her love for her mother prevents her running away so, instead, she creates a lie and a 'Turkish persona' in the presence of her family to disguise her real intentions: partying, drinking and sleeping with German men. Therefore, at home Sibel is quiet, respectful and obedient, even serving the men coffee when Cahit comes to ask for her hand in marriage, while they decide on her future for her. As the film progresses she attempts to find her own identity as an individual in German society, but in fact swings between her Turkish and German identities, trying in vain to combine the two. For example, she sleeps with various men of her choice but then threatens them with her Turkish husband when she does not want to see them again: 'Wenn du mir zu nah wirst, bringt mein Mein dich um'. She uses parts of each culture and each identity (young, single German or married, Turkish wife) as they fit her needs at the time. Yet, is her inability to combine the two indicative of her own confusion about her identity or rather the general difficulty of having and upholding Turkish culture and traditions in modern German society?

When they do find out about Sibel's promiscuous lifestyle, her family burns all of the photographs they have of her, showing that because she has lost the family honour she is no longer accepted as its member. This is certainly one of the most violent and disturbing parts of the film even in comparison to the gruesome physical violence shown elsewhere. It is therefore a very negative portrayal of Turkish family life. Just as in *Kebab Connection* and *Lola + Bilidikid*, where individuality is seen to upset the family unit, the family retaliates by disowning and forgetting any individual who does not conform to its identity roles in an effort to protect the honour of the remaining family members. The importance of the collective identity of the family over and above the personal identity of its individuals is exactly what Sibel rebels against. Indeed, she wants to exert her individuality and have a personal life and identity away from her family which includes aspects of her German identity. Why, then, does Sibel end up going full-circle and forming her own family in Turkey?

In order to answer this question it is helpful to consider another Turkish-German individual in the film, Cahit, since he appears to represent the character Sibel could develop into if she, too, became as 'Germanised' as him. As Cahit has no family in Germany he has the freedom to live and do as he pleases and has made a choice to reject all aspects of his Turkish identity in order to establish a life as a German citizen. Cahit speaks only German and has forgotten a lot of his Turkish; he listens to German and English punk music and earns money by working in a bar as an empty-glass collector. Yet, life appears to be very unstable for Cahit as he seems to be trapped at the lower end of the social scale in a dead-end job and living in a 'pig-sty'. Unlike the *Gastarbeiter* films of the 1970s, however, such as Günter Wallraff's *Ganz Unten*, which clearly pointed the finger of blame at Germans and German society for the inferior treatment of Turks in Germany and explicitly showed Germany as a 'hellish reality of discrimination and exploitation' (Burns 2006: 130), here it is unclear why Cahit has such a 'bad' life. Indeed, we are given no obvious indication of whether it is the fault of German society or his own doing as an individual regardless of his ethnic background. Thus the focus of the film has moved away from a critique of German society and onto the inner conflict of the individual with regards to his or her identity. This identity conflict is caused by the apparent impossibility of combining a German and Turkish identity, since they are so divergent. Where Turkish identity is shown to be rooted in the family and its restrictive rules and roles, German identity is equated with the individual and a personal freedom which causes instability and uncertainty. This conflict is shown by the fact that Sibel and Cahit seem to change the extent to which they feel more German or more Turkish as their personal lives become more complicated. That is to say, they cannot achieve a balance between a German and a Turkish identity, but shift between the two until eventually the instability and incompatibility of the 'two worlds' becomes unbearable and a choice must be made.

Hence, Sibel and Cahit are not so much suspended 'between two worlds' as forced to choose one over the other, as if the two cultures are two distinct and fixed ways of life which are unable to change and blend. Sibel chooses to move away from the 'German' life that Cahit leads since the consequences of true individuality and liberty prove to be too unstable for her. Instead she forms a new, family-oriented life in Turkey. This means she must abandon her love for Cahit in order to conform to her role as girlfriend and mother – a life and identity which appears to be less dangerous and less self-destructive than that available to her in Germany.

All three films, then, highlight the fact that there is a generational divide between the youngsters of today who have grown up in Germany and their Turkish parents. Indeed, the family, as Georg Seeßlen (2002) indicates, has become the 'Schau- und Kampfplatz' of cultural tensions between the generations and the sexes. Jim Jordan (2006: 497) warns against reading 'the shift away from the two worlds paradigm […] as a matter of transition between generations', citing the Turkish migrant writer, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, as an example of a *Gastarbeiter* generation Turk who looks beyond nationality and ethnicity in her writing about identities. However, in relation to the films studied here I would suggest that the role of the family and generational conflict, as caused by differing attitudes towards traditions and cultures, actually do appear to be some of the main obstacles to identity formation for the individual, as supported by Fatih Akın's comments on his film *Gegen die Wand*: 'For me actually it is about generation conflict – my parents have another attitude, another education, another background than I have. And that's the same whether you are Muslim or Catholic, this generational difference' (Mitchell 2005).

Indeed, the children in all three films seem to look beyond race, gender and ethnicity when forming relationships and their identities, that is to say how they define themselves and their origins, whereas their parents appear to perpetuate the stereotypical view of Turks living in Germany and of German attitudes towards them, as set up in the original Turkish-German cinema of the 1970s to the 1990s. The younger generations are seeking their own identities based on their personal freedom to choose how Turkish or German they feel. In *Kebab Connection* nobody is forced to decide who they are or where they come from at the end of the film. In fact, the film encourages fluid notions of cultures rather than thinking of them as fixed, separate entities. But it also highlights the fact that this is not yet the predominant view, thus suggesting that Jim Jordan's argument that the 'two worlds' paradigm has lost its relevance in today's multicultural society is somewhat premature.

The German-Turks in *Gegen die Wand* and *Lola +Bilidikid*, on the other hand, are still having to decide which culture they want to belong to – as if cultures are unchanging and rigid entities incompatible with one another – and learning that although they may *feel* a mixture of both, it is impossible, within the confines of the Turkish family at least, to *live* a mixture of both. A choice has to be made: either become Turkish and follow the traditional male/female, dominant/oppressed roles or become German and be disowned by the family forever. It is being faced with this choice to decide on one culture over another, however, that leads to an identity crisis and violent action, as I will now explore.

Identity, Sexuality and Gender

Another major theme which runs through all three films is the way in which sexuality affects the identities of the Turkish-German protagonists both from their own point of view and from others' perspectives of them. That is to say, the extent to which each individual feels they are able to express or must suppress their sexuality as part of their identity within each of the two cultures. In breaking away from the restrictive family environment many of the characters strive for the opportunity to explore and express their sexuality. This section will investigate the extent to which identity is actually changed, shaped or influenced by cultural expectations of sexual behaviour and whether the expectations differ across the generations, focusing first on females and female sexuality, then on the image of the male and male sexuality and finally on gender equality.

As a young, single female, Sibel in *Gegen die Wand* feels her sexuality is part of her identity both as a woman and as a German citizen. We see this through her obsessive attempts to convince Cahit to marry her, in order that she may have the freedom to experiment sexually with other men. In this film sexual freedom is seen as part of German or even Western culture and is what seems to distinguish a German woman from a Turkish one. For example, Cahit's German 'girlfriend', Maren, is shown to have sex for fun and lust, rather than love. Her sex is violent and dominating, symbolising both her strength and independence as a German woman. As a Turkish woman, however, Sibel is unable to express her sexuality and, therefore, this part of herself as an individual, which is exactly what she craves to do. Instead, she must conform to Turkish cultural traditions and play the 'honourable' wife and mother who is sexually pure and innocent until marriage. By choosing to marry the 'Germanised' Turk, Cahit, Sibel believes she has found the key to her sexual freedom, keeping her parents happy by marrying a Turkish husband but really only living with him as a roommate whilst exploring her sexuality elsewhere. Cahit and Sibel both see sex as something to do for fun, as appropriate to the German side of their identities. That is until they fall in love with each other, when having sex would seal their marriage and the Turkish part of their selves, which they both want to reject. This is shown when the couple eventually do sleep together in the film's final section, set in Turkey. Sibel is already in a serious relationship with another man so she must meet Cahit secretly 'wie mit einem Liebhaber in einem Hotelzimmer' (Zaimoglu 2004). In this way the pair can meet as if they are German lovers and forget they are legally husband and wife thus denying the Turkish side of their identities, which would not allow for Sibel's sexual dominance or Cahit's submission to this. Of this couple, then, Sibel is the one with the sexual power, deciding if and when to have sex with Cahit and only ever on her terms. This is in complete contrast to the sexually dominant role Cahit would be expected to play as a Turkish husband in the eyes of Sibel's Turkish brothers – who admit to having casual sex with foreign women outside of their marriages whilst having sexual intercourse with their Turkish wives predominantly for procreation – and shows yet another attempt by this pair to explore and try out different aspects of themselves as multicultural individuals.

In some ways Sibel finds more freedom in Turkey than in Germany where she is trapped into being a sex object and, paradoxically, a Turkish woman. In Germany, she finds herself defined by her role as a lover over and above everything else. Although it is initially her choice to have the freedom to sleep with men as she chooses, we see her eventually reach a point where she no longer wants to be tied to this new role and actually takes refuge in her role as Cahit's Turkish wife to escape this, telling Niko 'Ich bin eine verheiratete turkische Frau' whose husband will kill him if he bothers her again. Thus, she is forced to choose between a role as a Turkish wife or a German 'whore' since she seems unable to combine the two in either German or Turkish society.

It is interesting that either way Sibel is trapped into a confining role in Germany, as this effectively reverses the idea of Germany as the 'promised land' of opportunity which initially attracted Turkish migrant workers in the 1970s with offers of work and money. Now, Germany is shown as 'hellish' – a place of violence, imprisonment, drink and drugs, suicide, tattoos and sex. In succumbing to the 'moral depravity' (Burns 2006: 129) of Germany, Sibel's sexual experimentation actually leads to her and Cahit's downfall, causing him to kill one of her lovers to defend her reputation. This, then, consolidates the view of Germany as a dangerous environment filled with temptation and risk to the individuals who live within its culture.

Turkey, by contrast, is shown as the country of stability where Sibel can form a stable relationship and family with an apparently loving boyfriend. However, we never actually see her new partner, suggesting perhaps that he is insignificant to her sexually and emotionally. Perhaps Sibel does not really love him, but craves the stability and family-oriented life he can offer to her, 'the mediocrity' of which, as Daniela Berghahn rightly points out, 'will keep her alive' (Berghahn 2006: 155). However, on further inspection, Turkey is no less threatening or constricting than Germany as Sibel can neither live her dream of sexual and social independence here, nor can she live with the unstable Cahit, the man she really loves. Whilst the majority of the scenes in Turkey are interior shots, even the outside scenes are filmed at night in dark, dimly lit streets which offer little shelter or safety to a lone woman. Sibel is also brutally attacked by Turkish men in the streets and raped at a bar, reinforcing the image of the Turkish man as authoritarian and misogynistic and the Turkish woman as a helpless victim. In this way Sibel's decision to move to Turkey is symbolic of her decision to settle into her Turkish feminine role of wife and mother.

This indicates that the need to choose between cultural identities restricts the opportunities of individuals to express all sides of their personalities, including their sexuality. Without the possibility of being able to form an identity based on an amalgamation of both cultures, the individual suffers by having to suppress parts of his or her own identity in order to conform to the relevant social norms of the particular environment he or she is in. Yet, in restricting certain aspects of herself, Sibel begins to implode. It is exactly at the points in her life where she feels most 'trapped' that she becomes suicidal, as if the pressure to repress her sexuality or other aspects of her personality, in order to conform to the social norms of the environment she is in, causes her to self-destruct.[3]

If in *Gegen die Wand*, sex is intimately linked to the culture and personal freedom of the female characters, the same can in fact be said of the men in the film. Turkish males, such as Sibel's brothers, are shown to be macho and misogynistic, boasting about their sexual conquests with women outside of their marriages in an effort to appear adequately masculine to their male friends and relatives. They seem to view women as sexual objects for their own pleasure, rather than sexual equals and see the sexual role of the woman within marriage as one of reproduction. This view is also reflected in the comic episode in *Kebab Connection* where Ibo's father speaks to him as a child about being allowed to sleep with German girls but not to impregnate them. The father imparts such advice to the young Ibo because, in his view, having a baby with a German girl would bring shame on the family: it removes the possibility of having an 'honourable' Muslim mother for his grandchildren, replacing her with a 'dishonourable' *Ungläubige* who was not sexually pure before marriage.

Both films reinforce the image of Turkish males as sexist and dominating men, whose sexual freedom is symbolic of their overall power within their family and social environment. However, yet again, the comedic elements of *Kebab Connection* work to deconstruct the traditional view of Turkish couples as consisting of a dominant, sexually potent male and a passive, sexually innocent female. The fact that Ibo's father talks to him about sexual relationships before he is even old enough to understand them is humourous because it subverts the notion of Turkish families following tradition and a strict upbringing from generation to generation. Moreover, it is not that Ibo is ashamed of having a baby with Tizi that causes the rift in their relationship, but rather that he feels too young and unprepared for his role as father. Furthermore, instead of living up to Tizi's mother's assumption that he, as a Turk, will leave the parenting of their child to Tizi, Ibo learns how to help her with the baby and proves himself to be dedicated to his new role. The fact that Ibo's actions completely contradict his father's wishes, both in creating a child with Tizi and in assuming an active role as father to the baby, indicates that the younger generation's view of sex within and outside of marriage and also of the familial hierarchical

[3] See below for more detail on self-harm and suicidal tendencies.

structure, is different to that of their parents. In fact, it is just such views of marriage and the roles of males and females within it, as held by the Turkish parental generation in the films, which Sibel and Cahit are also trying to challenge with their sexual relationships in *Gegen die Wand*, although with less success.

In *Lola + Bilidikid,* Bili's identity is based around his typically macho male image. He fulfils the image he thinks others have of him – that he is a butch, aggressive male – rather than staying true to himself and his feelings for Lola. In fact, he is embarrassed to be gay and to have Lola as a boy/girlfriend in front of his friends and family: 'Ich kann doch nicht meine Kumpels treffen, seit sie von dir wissen'. This is because his sexuality has been defined by Turkish concepts of male-male sexuality where homosexuals are the people who are penetrated, *not* the men who penetrate. In fact, Bili even tells Lola she must have an operation to remove her male genitals so they can be happy together 'wie Mann und Frau'. Yet, Bili would not have the operation himself, 'weil ich ein Mann bin und du nicht'. Unlike Western-style gay sexuality 'based on ostensible sexual equality, as opposed to age or gender role difference' (Clark 2006: 559), Bili categorises his own sexuality based on gender roles and does not think of himself or define himself as being gay, as shown by his advice to Murat: 'Das Leben von Schwulen ist kein Leben, […] Solange du nicht ihnen deinen Arsch hinhältst, ist alles OK. […] Ein Mann ist ein Mann, und ein Loch ist ein Loch, egal wo man's reinsteckt. Klar? […] Sei kein Loch'.

In contrast to Bili's traditional idea of masculinity, however, Lola has actually been the braver of the two (a stereotypically masculine trait) by actively accepting her sexuality and openly living as a homosexual. This, despite all the problems associated with working as a transvestite and living as part of a gay couple, problems such as torments from skinheads, oppression by Bili and rejection by her own family. She is striving for a more westernised sexual identity which would see her accepted as Bili's equal, while Bili, by denying his homosexuality, is effectively living a lie and upholding the traditional prejudices and stereotypes which Lola and the other transvestites and homosexuals in the film would like to break in order to live freely and happily within society.

This film, then, is as much about homophobia as it is about racism and the oppression of women. Lola appears to suffer on all three counts as she is threatened by radical-right teenagers for being of Turkish origin and her own brother for being gay and a transvestite. Referring to herself in the feminine form, she is also treated as an inferior 'woman' by Bili, who wants them to live: 'wie ganz normale Leute' as opposed to 'diesen deutschen Schwuchteln'. The film can thus be read in more than one way: at a Turkish-German level – since so many of the issues raised in the film stem from Lola's attempts to combine aspects of German and Turkish culture into her own identity and Murat's first steps towards this; and more generally as a film about prejudice which transcends national boundaries. Either way, the complex composition of identity is portrayed, but it is particularly evident in the Turkish-German context where differences in social norms and expectations between the two cultures, as established by previous generations, impede the individual's desire to express both sides of his or her background, as exemplified by Lola's inability to simultaneously work as a transvestite, live as a gay man and have an equal footing with Bili in their relationship whilst he still holds the view of himself as the dominant male.

However, the film does depict happiness and success on all three fronts too and therefore suggests that issues of prejudice can be overcome. Interestingly, it is the characters who make a choice *between* their German and Turkish identities who find happiness in their lives and relationships. For example, the two Turkish transvestites who work with Lola in the group *Die Gastarbeiterinnen*, Sehrazat and Kalipso, end the film happy, positive and ready to start a new life as Turkish women in Germany (Clark 2006: 571). The film's ending suggests they can live as transvestites and speak Turkish, despite living in Germany, with seemingly little difficulty, as they feel accepted and comfortable with their sexuality there, unlike Lola, who has always been made to feel inferior and abnormal. Perhaps one reason for this is because Lola has an emotional link to certain members of her family whereas Sehrazat and Kalipso do not. In fact, the pair never even mentions their families. It seems they have been able to break away from the confines of the familial atmosphere and create a life and identity based on their own personal choices and wishes, that is, to dress as women rather than men. Furthermore, they are also able to break with the expected social norm of speaking German, choosing instead to speak in their Turkish mother-tongue despite living and working in Germany.

Equally, Iskender and Friedrich, as a gay couple, actually find love and happiness together by overcoming the obstacle of Friedrich's mother to prove their relationship is genuine and can work. Again, the family (although German this time) seems to be a barrier to personal and sexual freedom. Iskender breaks the Turkish view of homosexuality by openly admitting that he is gay – despite being a macho hustler like Bili – and forming a solid and loving relationship with Friedrich. The couple treat each other as equals despite their obvious disparities in wealth, status, cultural background and age. In this way, the film actually challenges traditional views of homosexual identity based on gender roles by showing a successful relationship which breaks all of the rules. Christopher Clark describes the characters in *Lola + Bilidikid* as representing 'transness' which he defines as 'a moment of in-betweenness, a liminal status that may represent a point in a process of transformation from one category to another, and/or which may be(come) a new category itself' (Clark 2006: 556). Yet I believe it is exactly because the characters refuse to be confined to such a marginal, transitory position that they, in fact, break out of their 'transness' by choosing for themselves a more fixed identity. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the happiest characters in the film all make a choice either to speak German and fully integrate into German society, like Iskender, or to only speak Turkish and not integrate into German society, like Sehrazat and Kalipso. Because they make a personal decision they find stability in their own identities. However, because Lola and Bili try to find a compromise between the two worlds for the sake of others, including their families, friends and each other, they fail. This is similar to the repeated failure of Sibel and Cahit in *Gegen die Wand* to combine their 'two worlds' and shows again the difficulty which still exists in trying to form a Turkish-German identity in modern society.

In contrast to the conflict between sexuality and culture in the film, the boundaries between sexuality and gender in *Lola + Bilidikid* have been blurred suggesting that sexual identity resists 'easy labeling' (Kuzniar 2000: 5). The physical attributes of gender do not necessarily correspond to the emotional or mental state of the individual, so it is not as easy as categorising people as either male or female based on their physical appearance since they may not feel as masculine or feminine as they look. For example, although physically born a man Lola is happy to dress up and play the part of a woman on stage for the pleasure of other men. Yet, she is reluctant to 'really' become a woman as doing so would mean that her male identity, to which she still feels some connection, would be lost. Yet for Kalipso the decision is easier – in choosing to commit solely to her female identity, despite her male physicality, she finds a stability and contentment that Lola lacks. However, this does come at the price of losing her male identity, which Lola is unwilling to do. Here again we see Lola struggle and fail to combine two different elements of her identity, this time her male and female sides. The constraints of her two different cultures to conform to gender roles within the family and sexual relationships make true individual expression impossible for her, as she is trying to please too many people other than herself. The film suggests that it is up to each person to determine the extent to which they identify themselves as being of a specific gender or sexuality, if at all, and that this will be different for each individual. Hence, in portraying a range of different sexual preferences, gender and transgender characters the film reminds viewers 'that sexual difference is not always something one can see' (Kuzniar 2000: 5), decide or define.

Furthermore, *Lola + Bilidikid* also mixes typically feminine melodramatic moments with elements of typically male thriller action to create a genre which 'echoes the content of the film […] queerly challenging the audience's expectations of genre conformity' (Clark 2006: 563). Alice Kuzniar would place *Lola + Bilidikid* in the category of 'Queer Cinema' because 'queer', as a term, 'does not function generically as a fixed identity category but rather as an evolving concept that plays itself out on an experimental field' (Kuzniar 2000: 258). It opens up a 'plethora of identificatory sites' (Kuzniar 2000: 6) between being gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, just as the film does itself. Indeed, unlike the binary oppositions of *Gegen die Wand*, 'in Ataman's film we find a number of such blurred boundaries: male/female, gay/straight, transvestite/transsexual, and, perhaps most significantly, Turkish/German' (Clark 2006: 558). Hence the film challenges the idea of static and unchanging cultures and identities by showing a range of different sexual identities between the two poles of submissive, glamorous Lola and violent, macho Bili. Murat moves between both extremes (Clark 2006: 565) at first by working with Bili and earning money from selling his body and later 'becoming' Lola in order to trap the three teenagers Bili assumes have killed the real Lola. His failure and unease in both roles reinforces the idea that an individual's sexual identity is linked to his or her own personal identity and cannot be shaped by anyone else. This is why not only Murat but also Sibel in *Gegen die Wand* have such a difficult time in trying to 'discover' their own identities. They have had to play a role for the sake of their families – which suppresses part of their own sexuality – for so long, that the truth about who they really are is questionable.

Rob Burns argues that the emergent transnational cinema is a 'new male-oriented cinema' which marginalises women. At first, with the exception of Sibel in *Gegen die Wand,* the three films do seem to portray a predominantly male focus. However, looking at them more closely reveals that despite the use of male characters to propel the storylines along, the issues raised are not solely male-oriented and indeed affect women just as much as men. The treatment of Lola at the hands of her family, boyfriend and the skinheads in *Lola + Bilidikid* is very much representative of oppression and prejudice in general, applicable not just to transvestites and homosexuals, but also to women and children growing up within the confines of a strict family or community which does not accept deviation from the perceived norm or equality of the sexes. Moreover, the female characters in all three films are certainly not restricted to 'the role of escape route for oppressed or endangered male characters' (Burns 2006: 142). Although Sibel initially saves Cahit from his depression by marrying him, she is also the cause of his act of murder, whilst, as mothers, the women in *Lola + Bilidikid* are unhelpful in every way to their sons. Tizi too, in *Kebab Connection*, is prepared to bring up her baby alone without Ibo, if necessary, while Ibo has his film-making to give him a sense of direction and purpose if his relationship with Tizi were to end. Thus, the strength of both the male and female characters in each of the films shows an equality of the sexes not previously seen in the *Gastarbeiter* films.

Yet, we also see the continual struggles and difficulties each of the couples portrayed has to overcome in order to make their relationships work between the push-and-pull of Turkish and German cultural traditions and expectations. So, this is not a 'male-oriented' cinema then, but a cinema made mainly by Turkish-German males who are attempting to integrate modern, western values into portrayals of old-fashioned Turkish upbringings; a cinema which is challenging the fantasy, highlighted by Göktürk, of the 'liberation of poor Turkish women from enclosure, oppression, subordination or even prostitution' (Göktürk 2000: 69). After all, gender equality in Germany and the West has been a point of cultural identification for many years whereas it was the main marker of difference between German and Turkish culture in the early Turkish-German films of the 1970s/80s. For unlike girls it seems to have been easier for Turkish boys growing up in Germany 'to appear compliant with Turkish norms and nevertheless taste some of the freedoms German society has to offer' (Karakasoglu 1996: 162). I would suggest that these films express an experience of this as well as the struggle to find an adequate male identity, one which allows men to treat women as equals while still asserting their masculinity and meeting the expectations of their families.

Gegen die Wand and *Lola + Bilidikid* show that sexuality is an important aspect of identity and both expose the problems of expressing that identity in a society where the individual does not conform to the 'norm'. This suggests that there is still an element of Turkish-Germans being 'between two worlds', yet this time it is not just a divide between German and Turkish culture, but between generations of parents and offspring too. This mixture of generational and cultural conflicts results in the individual having to choose between these worlds in order to overcome the feeling of division which results from this. *Lola + Bilidikid* does suggest that not conforming to expectations can bring happiness: i.e. in the state of 'transsness' between the 'two worlds' where individuals can choose to be as German or Turkish, male or female, gay or straight as they feel. The film is, therefore, not suggesting that old, traditional, Turkish homosexual identities be replaced with German-speaking, 'Western-style' gay sexuality (Clark 2006: 572) but that all such identities be available to everyone. The film opens 'up a queer array of possible sexual and cultural identities' (Clark 2006: 572) encouraging choice of sexuality and expression of individuality, not conformism. Yet, the implication is that this is only possible with the removal of the influence of the older generation in upholding traditional views of sexual and gender roles.

Identity and violence

All three films deal with the topic of violence in very different ways and each has a different agenda for doing so. In this section I will analyse the use of different types of violence in each of the films, relating it to the portrayal of conflict and the expression of crises of identity. I will be looking at three main areas of violence, self-harm, violence against others and comical violence, with the aim of understanding to what effect violence can be used in Turkish-German or transnational cinema.

In *Gegen die Wand* Sibel symbolically rejects her Turkish identity through her acts of self-harm. Cutting her own wrists is her attempt to escape the restrictions placed on her by her Turkish family. Later in the film she swings in the opposite direction and attempts to 'kill-off' her German identity by goading three Turkish men to attack her on the streets of Istanbul. It is interesting to note that even the way she self-harms in each situation is linked to the identity she is trying to reject at the time. That is to say, in Germany Sibel takes an active role in harming herself and is the one who makes the cuts into her own flesh. In Turkey, on the other hand, she takes a more passive approach and becomes the recipient of violent acts at the hands of others. Although she verbally encourages the men to hurt her, she is not the one making the stab wounds. Hence, Sibel's para-suicides can be seen as transitional phases from one identity to another,[4] where each attempt is an act to destroy her former identity rather than necessarily an attempt to die outright. This is made explicit in the scene after Cahit's arrest when Sibel is in her bathroom and attempts to cut her wrists again. Instead of allowing herself to die she picks up some bath towels and wraps them around her injuries to stem the blood flow. In fact, as Gerrilyn Smith points out: 'many women who self-harm say that they do so in order to make it possible to live; to relieve the painful states of consciousness they feel so that they can cope with other aspects of living' (Smith 1999: 13). This, then, is Sibel's symbolic move away from a German identity and into a new Turkish identity, which she consolidates by moving out of Hamburg and away to a new life in Istanbul.

Moreover, the brutal attack Sibel suffers at the hands of the three Turkish men in Istanbul is not only another form of para-suicide (Mitchel 2005) but also a rejection of her sexual identity. She sees her sexuality as having caused Cahit to commit murder and ultimately ruined both of their lives, for Cahit has been sent to prison and she has been disowned by her family. She provokes an attack on her by men who are physically stronger than her and outnumber her, knowing they could very well kill her at a point when she is at her lowest, depressed and alone in Turkey. This rejection of

[4] Self-harm can also be referred to as 'para-suicide' and is just one of a number of names for this phenomenon, including, 'deliberate non-fatal act', 'self-mutilation' and 'symbolic wounding'.

her female sexual identity is a last-ditch attempt to forge an independent identity, emphasised by the fact that she has short hair at this point. The long, flowing and symbolically feminine hair Sibel had in Germany has been completely cut away along with that part of her identity. Indeed, this appears to be an attempt to blend in with the men she meets in Turkish society, which is also shown by the company she keeps, for we do not see her talking to any Turkish women in Istanbul other than her cousin, Selma, a figure who suggests that the only way to achieve independence in Turkey, sexual or otherwise, is to become a businesswoman and give up all hopes of a family or to be a man. Since neither option is open to Sibel she is forced to reject her sexual identity and take on the only other female role available to her – that of Turkish mother.

The violence Sibel induces throughout the film is fundamentally linked to her own lack of self-worth and shows her confusion at who she is and her frustration at not being able to be who she ideally wants to be. That is to say, as a Turk she must marry and conform to the traditional female roles of wife and mother, but as a German her sexual freedom takes her further and further away from falling in love and forming the stable, committed and loving relationship she unconsciously craves and needs. This explains her resolve to devote herself to her Turkish identity in Istanbul at the end of the film when she chooses to settle down with her new Turkish boyfriend and commit to her family there. Her continual oscillation between the two extremes of her identity throughout the film suggests that she is fighting a losing battle in trying to forge an identity which encompasses aspects from both Turkish and German cultures. Ultimately she is forced to choose between the two in order to break the cycle of self-harm.

At the beginning of *Gegen die Wand* Cahit also tries to commit suicide by driving head-on into a brick wall. Gavin Fairbairn makes a distinction between self-harm and attempted suicide, stating that: 'whether a given act is a suicide depends not on whether the individual ends up alive or dead, but on whether in acting, death was what he wished for and intended' (Fairbairn 1995: 60). Unlike Sibel, then, it appears that Cahit really did intend to die, for as his doctor in the mental health clinic points out: 'Es gab keine Bremsspuren'. He does so because he has hit rock-bottom – he has lost his wife, is in a poorly paid, boring job and lives in a dump – as a result he, too, has lost all sense of self-worth. Fairbairn would call this a 'no hope suicide' which is 'perhaps the most common reason for suicide, at least in western societies' (Fairbairn 1995: 126). This type of suicide stems from 'an extremely unhappy or unfulfilling life with little likelihood of change so that the suicider decides that he would be better off dead than living the life he seems destined to live' (Fairbairn 1995: 126). Cahit has already rejected his Turkish identity by rejecting Turkish culture. He now only speaks German, has a German 'girlfriend' and has forgotten a lot of his Turkish, yet he has not found a suitable position for himself in German society either. Thus, he has found himself 'between two worlds', despite having chosen Germany over Turkey. As he seems to have little or no control over the way he is perceived by others, he sees suicide as his only escape since ending his own life is one thing he does have control over: 'when men feel unable, for whatever reason, to exert power over their own lives, when they are put into situations which force them to be passive, some men begin to self-harm. […] Research on male suicide shows a similar pattern' (Smith 1999: 16f.). Here again, then, attempted suicide is seen as a way out of an unwanted identity for good, yet, rather than ending in death, as desired, it provides Cahit with the opportunity to start a new life and create a new identity.

However, Cahit's new identity is a forced and uncomfortable one, which leads to another crisis. For when he meets and marries Sibel, he is required to play a role he has already rejected, that of the Turkish husband. Thus, we see his inner struggle to combine elements of his Turkish and German identity. This inner battle ultimately ends when he finally explodes by lashing out and accidentally killing Niko – one of Sibel's lovers. I would actually read this act of murder as another suicide attempt in two ways. Firstly, in striking Niko, Cahit is really venting the frustration he feels at himself and the situation he is in, that is, caught between two identities which he has not chosen for himself and feeling unable to obtain the life he desires, including the full love and attention of Sibel. Secondly, in killing Niko, Cahit is ultimately ending his own life as he knew it, since he will be sent to jail and forced to start afresh with a new identity on his release. Indeed, on being freed from jail Cahit is bathed in an ethereal bright, white light as if being re-born into the world. Similarly, when Sibel is rescued by a taxi driver after being stabbed, the scene ends with the same white light engulfing the screen as if to signify she has been saved and can start a new life from here on. Thus, these violent acts against the self allow the perpetrators to 'kill-off' their old identities in preparation for reinventing themselves with new lives and identities thereafter. In this way, self-harm and suicide can actually be seen as extreme reactions to an identity crisis which is related to a feeling of being trapped 'between two worlds' – not just the two worlds of Germany and Turkey but also of the 'old' and the 'young', that is to say, the world of the parents and the family and the world of the young individual. It is the overlapping and intersecting of the different cultures *and* different generational goals and expectations that complicates the issue of identity and leads to the confusion and emotional turmoil of the young Turkish-German individuals in the film.

Violence is also used in *Gegen die Wand* to portray certain aspects of Turkish culture and Turkish identity in a negative light. Indeed, the majority of the Turkish males in the film are shown to be violent, aggressive and authoritarian towards women and each other, such as the three men who beat up Sibel in Istanbul, the gang of Turkish men in the Hamburg nightclub who beat up Cahit, and Sibel's brother who threatens to kill her to protect the honour of the family. These episodes all add up to give a negative, violent portrayal of macho Turkish men and a bleak vision of Turkish culture.

In *Lola + Bilidikid*, violence is also shown to be a particularly masculine trait linked to the male ego, but is not necessarily associated primarily with Turkish men and culture. Indeed, there is also the threat of violence from German skinheads, with Murat's class trip to the Olympic stadium and its Nazi-era architecture reminding the audience of the terrible consequences of racially motivated and homophobic violence in the National Socialist era in Germany (Clark 2006: 568). This is especially emphasised at the end of this scene when the three radical-right teenagers kick Murat and urinate on him in a uniquely graphic fashion for this film. The same three teenage skinheads pose a similar violent threat to Lola, as they continually torment her on her way home from the bar where she works as a transvestite dancer. It is never made explicit, however, exactly why they have chosen Lola as their specific target. Is it because she is gay, a transvestite or Turkish? Why is she their sole victim and not the other members of *Die Gastarbeiterinnen*? I would suggest this ambiguity is intentional, showing the complex nature of personal identity in modern society and the impossibility of categorising people into specific groups. Lola, for example, could be branded as Turkish, Turkish-German, Muslim, homosexual, transsexual and so on, yet the extent to which she would subscribe to these categories, if at all, is impossible for anyone to measure except Lola. By linking and blurring the boundaries between the themes of racial and sexual discrimination, the film is working, in Burns's terms, at a transnational level, encompassing German, Turkish-German and global issues as well as highlighting the complex and multi-faceted nature of individual identity.

Unlike the other two films the violence portrayed in *Kebab Connection* is exaggerated and comic, inserted to make the film 'cool' (Burns 2006: 146) rather than adding any implicit meaning to the storyline. In fact, all of the violence is actually contained within Ibo's adverts, that is to say, it is restricted to a film within a film, so is even less realistic or disturbing. Although it is graphic, just as it is in *Gegen die Wand*, it is also deliberately over-the-top and humorous, just like the rest of the film. Thus, the use of violence is not so much associated with the individual or collective identities of the characters, but relates to the film's own identity. Indeed, the mixture of genres the film references such as kung-fu, gangster, comedy and melodrama might actually be said to add to its transnational identity, matching the film's overall theme of multiculturalism. Just as the individual characters within *Kebab Connection* resist being categorised by one aspect of their identity, so too does this film resist categorisation into one film genre. By experimenting with the use of different popular filmic and music genres, the writer and director have a greater variety of ways to express themselves and their mixed cultural identities and influences: 'Die dritte Generation […] ist nicht mehr sprachlos. Sie benutzt die Kunst und die Formen der populären Kultur um das Leben in zwei Kulturen auszudrücken' (Seeßlen 2002).

I would suggest, however, that the use of comedy and the repeated references to advertising and film-making leads to an artificial and unconvincing representation of German society as a happy multi-cultural site. For every time Ibo constructs a new advert the audience is reminded of the artificiality of the film they are watching and with its many humourous yet unrealistic scenes, such as Ibo's switching of his empty pram for a pram which contains a real baby and the subsequent loss and dramatic rescue of this baby, any hope of conveying a serious message to the viewing public the film might have is lost. This is an experimental film (echoed by the experimental nature of Ibo's adverts – his range of genres, characters, visual and sound effects etc) which combines genres and characters from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, religions and age groups but only to entertain and amuse its audience, not to portray a realistic and believable situation. *Kebab Connection,* then, is a hopeful, utopian vision of a multicultural society, not a real situation which exists at present.

All three films then use violence in very different ways to highlight potential identity issues and crises. In *Gegen die Wand* the motif of self-harm is used to great effect to symbolise the inner turmoil caused by questions of identity in regard to cultural origin. The 'impossible' task of defining oneself by one culture leads to having to make a choice between the two – Turkish or German. There can be no happy compromise. Violence is also used in both *Gegen die Wand* and *Lola + Bilidikid* to portray Turkish males as authoritarian, macho misogynists. The two films suggest that the problems of assimilation of Turks and German-Turks into German society are not solely caused by that society itself, but rather emanate from prescribed roles within Turkish families which do not necessarily fit with the German social life the youngsters wish to have. In complete contrast to this realistic, tense and emotional portrayal of violence, is the violence in *Kebab Connection*. Here, it is used in a light-hearted way to entertain and to highlight the fact that the conflicts of older generations within society are out-dated and resolvable. Moreover, the mixture of film genres and nationalities within the film give it a multi-cultural, transnational identity which makes it hard to categorise. If the dialogue were not in German, the film could have been made and set anywhere in the West. Nevertheless, none of the films fit the category of a 'post-ethnic cinema' where 'problems of ethnic difference, if not erased from the cultural imaginary altogether, recede even further into the background' (Burns 2006: 143). Whether inadvertently or not, the identity crises shown on screen in these films and the conflicts between cultures (both resolved and unresolved) add together to provide a picture of present day problems which can be traced back to ethnicity and a clash between different cultures.

Conclusion

Looking at the question of identity in relation to the themes of the family, sexuality, gender and violence within the three films highlights the complicated nature of this issue. The importance of the role of the family and generational conflict, caused by differing attitudes towards traditions and cultures within the family, has been shown to play a major role in controlling the identity formation of the individual. Thus, the youngest generation of Turkish-Germans is shown to be struggling with an identity crisis which could be understood as even more complicated than that of the generations which preceded it. This crisis is caused not only by the differences which exist between the two cultures but more predominantly by a rift between their own lives, preferences and feelings and that of their parents. In this sense, Jim Jordan's argument that the 'two worlds' paradigm has lost its relevance in today's multicultural society is unconvincing since the term can actually be seen to shift towards a meaning which usefully captures a divide between two generational rather than two cultural worlds – a parental generation which attempts to simplify the world into a series of binary oppositions which they then expect individuals to choose between in order to conform to one group or another and a younger generation which tries to amalgamate various aspects of different cultures, beliefs, traditions and desires into a lifestyle and identity which is appropriate to each individual.

Despite the generational divide which exists in *Kebab Connection,* the film can be seen as a universal story which incorporates a mixture of gender, race and age issues and filmic genres and could, thus, be described as 'transnational' in its message and style. It is not about Turkish-German experience specifically, but sets up a utopian vision of universal harmony between people of different cultures. Saul's film works with fluid notions of cultures which are not fixed, separate entities but rather interconnected parts of a global web, which is ever changing and could even be seen as part of a transnational cinema which looks beyond national and cultural borders in terms of topic, genre and production.

Gegen die Wand, on the other hand, is more specifically focussed on the Turkish-German experience of identity crisis and oppression, due to the patriarchal family system. It works with binary oppositions in order to make characters choose between categories of identity such as German or Turkish, mother or whore, successful in love or successful in career. That is to say, it offers neither a compromise nor a happy ending. The Turkish-German characters in the film are unsure of where they belong, feeling they have to choose between a German and a Turkish identity[5]. One of the reasons why they cannot be happy is that the world of their parents and the world of

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[5] Or as Der Spiegel puts it: '*Head On* is about East-West conflicts among *Turks*' [my emphasis]. See: Dürr et al. 2005.

their German peers colide. This represents not so much the 'between two worlds' paradigm, then, as the choice of one world over another.

Finally, *Lola + Bilidikid* has a specifically Turkish-German focus in that all of the characters are either Turkish or German and the dialogue is half German, half Turkish. It suggests that forming an identity is not just about nationality and ethnicity, but also sexuality. The film reminds the audience that 'binary oppositions such as male/female or German/Turkish are constructions on shift-sand' (Göktürk 2000: 74) and that personal identities need, therefore, to be continually re-evaluated and negotiated, not determined by pre-existing categories which are based on cultural or parental expectations of gender roles.

Rob Burns describes *Lola + Bilidikid* as a film which thinks 'within and beyond Turkish-German parameters' (Burns 2006: 127) and I believe this is true of all three films. But, like the Turkish-German films of the 1970s I would say they are all part of a 'cinema of the affected' too, as they focus on very personal experiences rather than offering general, stereotypical, everyday stories and events. As Akın said of *Gegen die Wand*: 'those characters aren't typical. They aren't representative of the general Turkish minority in Germany. But the conflict is representative' (Mitchell 2005), where the conflict, as we have seen, extends beyond cultural difference and into a generational split between the parents and their children.

What an analysis of the three films has brought to light in particular is the individual's difficulty in finding a suitable place within society when his or her cultural background, sexuality or gender does not conform to the expectations of society at large. Two of the films, *Gegen die Wand* and *Lola + Bilidikid*, appear to show that a compromise between the two cultures and across the generations is still extremely difficult if not impossible, whereas *Kebab Connection* suggests that both cultures are more flexible than this and that the strength and adaptability of the younger generations of Turkish-Germans does make compromise and a transnational identity, which encompasses influences outside of both cultures, possible. This mixed message from the films indicates that the problem is still unresolved, but that things are perhaps moving closer to a solution – and towards transnationalism. Indeed, the films themselves – with their 'eclectic mix of cultural and cinematic traditions' (Berghahn 2006: 154) from the gangster movies and melodramas of Hollywood to the Turkish arabesk tradition in *Gegen die Wand* – can be seen as part of a move towards a transnational filmic identity for the new Turkish-German cinema, which itself forms part of a broader German cinema[6] whose international appeal results from its portrayal of conflicts of transnational importance.[7]

In conclusion, I would therefore agree with Rob Burns that Turkish-German cinema is changing and becoming more transnational, but I would argue that this process is only in its early stages and that the specific problems of Turkish-German identity are still at the forefront of present day films. The process is too complicated to allow for the rejection of metaphors such as the 'between two worlds' paradigm as 'regressive clichés and stereotypes' as Jim Jordan suggests (2006: 498): these films show it still to be a useful model in some cases. However, they reveal that individuals rarely feel equally split between the two cultures, but have, rather, more affinity with one than the other at different stages in life and even choose one over the other, when the feeling of being torn becomes too much to cope with. It is a feeling expressed by one daughter of mixed-marriage parents living in Germany in a study undertaken by E. Kolinsky in 2002 (211f.): 'My own life makes it clear that it is never, at no point in time, half-and-half. There were phases when I was 90 per cent German in my orientation, and other phases when I was 90 per cent Turkish. This is not static or defined for good. I have learned to vary my cultural orientation'. Furthermore, just as identities are impossible to pin down to one category due to each individual's own 'complex web of cultural allegiances' (Jordan 2006: 496), so the same can be said of the films in this study, for as Akın puts it: 'Germans try to categorize films: in a comedy, you just laugh and in a drama, you're not allowed to laugh. I don't believe in that, sometimes we laugh and cry in the same hour' (Mitchell 2005).

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[6] Indeed, Fatih Akın sees himself as 'Vertreter des deutschen Films'. See: Aust 2007.

[7] For example: Der Untergang, Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2005 – which was nominated for best Foreign Language film at the Oscars in 2005 – and Das Leben der Anderen, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006 – which won the best Foreign Language Oscar of 2007.

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Biodata

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