



**Blurring or Shifting Boundaries? Concepts of Culture in  
Turkish–German Migrant Cinema**

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This paper aims to explore the developments of different concepts of culture in Turkish–German Migrant Cinema before and after German Unification. Key questions addressed will be:

1. How do these films express cultural differences and to what extent does this representation follow traditional concepts of culture?
2. How is the interconnectedness of cultures articulated and how far does this relate to current notions of interculturalism and transculturalism?
3. Which are the key differences of former migrants' cinematic representations in pre- and post-unified Germany?

Unlike common perceptions, this paper will argue that most films, including productions by celebrated directors such as Fatih Akin, continue to draw on traditional concepts of culture that break with the strong transcultural perspectives voiced by the same directors. While there is a development from rather separatist multicultural and intercultural representations in Turkish–German cinema before Unification towards more interconnected transcultural portrayals in post-Unification films, many contemporary productions maintain monocultural perspectives. All this seems to follow trends originating from German Cinema about migrants but there is also evidence that a traditional concept of 'Kanak' culture developed in and disseminated via Migrant Literature and Cinema has made its way into German film.

#### **1. From monoculturalism to transculturalism**

Before analysing a wide selection of Turkish–German films, this essay would like to explore different concepts of culture that seem to be of major relevance for a better understanding of cultural representations in contemporary Migrant Cinema before and after Unification. As German philosopher Wolfgang Iser reminds us, notions of culture

are not just descriptive concepts but operative concepts. Our understanding of culture is an active factor in our cultural life. [...] If one tells us (as the old concept of culture did) that culture is to be a homogeneity event, then we practice the required co-ercions and exclusions. We seek to satisfy the task we are set – and will be successful in doing so. Whereas, if one tells us [...] that culture ought to incorporate the foreign and do justice to transcultural components, then we will set about this task, and then corresponding feats of integration will

belong to the real structure of our culture. The 'reality' of culture is [...] always a consequence too of our conceptions of culture (Welsch 1999: 4).

Welsch introduces here the basic distinction between a traditional concept of 'Volkskultur' and a notion of transculturalism, which could be located at the opposite ends of a cultural spectrum. Using this as a basis, this essay would like to refer to multiculturalism and interculturalism as categories to be found between these two poles. All four concepts are significantly different, although Welsch and Graham Huggan (2006: 58) tend to stress a strong continuity between traditional concept, multiculturalism and interculturalism, while Heinz Antor (2006: 30f.) and Werner Delanoy (2006: 239) regard interculturalism and transculturalism as complementary. All four scholars reject in principle the Herder-inspired concept of 'Volkskultur' which governed 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century German nation-building and which should be regarded as essentialist, homogeneous and separatist in its close link to the notion of 'Volk'. Johann Gottfried Herder stresses the latter in his earlier writings when arguing:

Alles was mit meiner Natur noch gleichartig ist, was in sie assimiliert werden kann, beneide ich, strebs an, mache mirs zu eigen; darüber hinaus hat mich die gütige Natur mit Fühllosigkeit, Kälte und Blindheit bewaffnet; sie kann gar Verachtung und Ekel werden (1967[1774]: 45).

The short passage summarises a double-sided concept, which concentrates on a culturally and/or racially 'pure' and superior Self in opposition to an 'impure' and inferior Other, and which was certainly as important for European colonial discourse as it was for German National Socialism. While all this is not representative of Herder's work,<sup>1</sup> Welsch is right to claim that such a traditional model is 'not only wrong but dangerous' in its paradigm of assimilation and exclusion, and that in an increasingly global environment 'it is important to imagine cultures outside of the opposition of own and other cultures' (1997: 69). This implies that the 'Volkskulturkonzept' does not end with the extreme nationalism

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<sup>1</sup> Roughly ten years later, in his major *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784-91, 15 volumes), Herder stresses the concept of humanity and as such a genuinely transcultural notion. Consequently, it is no surprise that current research tends to categorise Herder as a precursor of contemporary concepts of culture and historiography (see Gaier 2007 and Proß 2007). Welsch does, unfortunately, not include this other dimension in his discussion of cultural theories. However, it remains important to consider that conservative Herder researchers as well as political activists have repeatedly used the earlier statements to strengthen their nationalist claims.

demonstrated in two World Wars, although decolonization, massive immigration of non-European workforce in the 1950s and 1960s as well as the alternative culture proposed by the 1968 movement might have contributed to a growing public acceptance of greater diversification in Europe.

By stressing the need for a peaceful coexistence of different cultures within a society, the concept of multiculturalism establishes, in particular after World War II, a relative distance to Herder's principles of purity and homogeneity. However, the insistence on clearly definable cultural borders and on a perception of individual cultures as autonomous, self-sufficient and coherent remains problematic (see Welsch 1997: 70), and the focus on coexistence rather than on interaction does not address the new challenges of intercultural communication. In this context, it might be worth stressing that tendencies to self-enclosure in an 'imagined community', to draw on Benedict Anderson's famous discussion of nationalism (1991), cannot be regarded as a one-dimensional pattern only applicable to people from the so called host countries. Turkish-German directors have repeatedly highlighted this in their portrayal of Turkish guest workers searching for orientation in a supposedly original and authentic Turkish community, and recent research on Kemalist nationalism, which shaped official Turkish discourse from Atatürk and the military regimes of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to contemporary governments, confirms the socio-historical foundation of such patterns of behaviour.<sup>2</sup> In short, the social impact of nationalism and racism in Turkish-German relations on screen has to be assessed with regard to the socio-cultural context and particularly the link to institutional power in both the host country and the country of origin. In this framework, it is worth noting a shift from biological to cultural racism but it is also important to consider that the latter can be as essentialist and separatist as the former.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Zeydanlıoğlu/Rings (2003) and Zeydanlıoğlu (2007) vis-à-vis an ongoing mythification of the Turkish Army as defender of 'democracy' against 'corruption, the rise of Islam, and excessively competitive, unstable, and petty politics' in Danopoulos/Zirker (2006: 8).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of neo-imperial cultural racism replacing biological racism see Hardt/Negri (2000: 189ff.). A recent example of cultural racism is provided by a leading article in *Der Spiegel* 48/2006 ('Die Entdeckung der Vernunft') within which the author Matthias Schulz explains Occidental progress as a result of binary oppositions ('westlicher Wissensdurst contra östliche Glaubenskraft', 193), oriental stagnation ('im Morgenland blieb alles beim Alten', 192) and oriental

The controversy about different concepts of culture increases when contemporary notions of interculturalism are linked to Herder's 'Volkskulturkonzept'. Welsch's key argument is that, despite or precisely because of the interactive dimension, intercultural notions tend to put too much stress on cultural difference (1999: 2). A potential example could be provided by Bolten's definition of intercultural communication as interpersonal interaction between members of 'different' groups that 'distinguish' themselves as regards their archives of knowledge as well as verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal forms of their symbolic action (see 1993: 18, 24). These differences in knowledge and language appear as a result of people's 'dissimilar' life experiences, including various constructs of the Self and the Other as well as meta-images (20). For Huggan, such a focus on dissimilarity implies a 'back-door to cultural essentialism' (2006: 58), while Antor stresses that contemporary forms of interculturalism have abolished the idea of cultural oppositions and focus instead on a dialogue that intends to cross boundaries (2006: 29). Delanoy goes one step further when stressing that intercultural learning theorists have always shown a strong interest in 'cultural interdependence' and 'transcultural phenomena' (2006: 239). This theoretical discussion is of major relevance for the analysis of cultural representations in contemporary Migrant Cinema because there seems to be a tendency towards Huggan's portrayal of interculturalism in films from the 1970s and 1980s (see Bohm's *Yasemin*), while more recent productions show tendencies that could be categorised in the way Antor or Delanoy suggest (e.g. Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*).

Depending on the definition of interculturalism, 'transculturalism' can be declared as a radical break with three older and rather separatist notions of cultures (see Welsch 1999: 3), or as a significantly different concept that finally blurs the boundaries of individual cultures (Antor 2006: 30), or as the final consequence of a focus on intercultural dialogue (Delanoy 2006: 239). This paper supports Antor's perspective and acknowledges that transcultural notions focus on the interconnectedness of our increasingly global environment and on interactions and exchanges that contribute to the development of a pool of global cultures

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totalitarianism within which Egypt's ancient economy is portrayed as an early form of the Soviet planned economy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (200). With regard to cinematic representations of Turks as Oriental Others, such dichotomies are of major relevance.

potentially facilitating cultural choices.<sup>4</sup> This would imply that the question of human agency versus collective structures has to be revisited and possibly revised. Contemporary Turkish–German directors like Fatih Akin have identified growing chances for individual choice and development embedded in transcultural positions when commenting on their own films, e.g. *Crossing the Bridge*. In how far such claims can be confirmed by the actual film texts will need to be seen within and beyond the following discussion. It also remains questionable whether the recognition of multiple and transgressive identities as part of a process of growing hybridization can be regarded as some kind of omnipotent solution to culture conflicts. The fact is that footprints of monocultural concepts are widely visible and, up to a certain degree, mentalities remain governed by them. Numerous examples of the British tabloid media’s coverage of German–British encounters in international football could be given as European examples. Worth mentioning is also the frequency in British TV of WWII movies that follow traditional notions of culture, and many more examples will follow from the analysis of Turkish–German Cinema. In this context, it might also be interesting to ask what model is here to stay: the monocultural or the transcultural approach? While there is more than enough evidence for an enhanced process of cultural hybridization, there are also many examples of a growing integration of hybrid texts (in particular music and films) into neo-capitalist models that strengthen industries of a particular (usually Western) cultural hemisphere. By degenerating into a fashionable object of consumption, hybridity might not only loose its destabilising potential but enhance traditional boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Also, the apparently never ending attraction of monocultural perspectives is in itself a historical phenomenon that breaks with current notions of linear and progressive developments from monoculturalism to transculturalism. Different examples include the paradigmatic change from Arab to Catholic Spain (1492), from Ottoman Empire to an extremely nationalist Turkish Republic and from Weimar to German

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<sup>4</sup> While Huggan (2006: 58f.) claims a strong direct link between growing transculturalism and individual choice, this essay would argue that Ritzer has sufficiently proven the opposite in a major number of transcultural business cases (*McDonaldization of Society*, 1993). There is certainly a tendency towards cultural choice and a correlation to transcultural aspects but the gap between the rhetoric and factual limit of choice are worth interrogating, and each individual case will have to be assessed in its own right.

<sup>5</sup> See Kien Ngu Ha (2005) for a capitalist instrumentalisation of hybridity.

National Socialism. Despite their numerous dissimilarities, they all seem to indicate a cyclical return to monocultural essentialism, homogeneity and separatism in periods of major crisis and a more or less desperate search for orientation. Precisely this existential search for a new collective identity might help to understand the reconstruction of monocultural perspectives in contemporary Turkish–German Migrant Cinema and Literature.

## 2. Representations of culture in pre-unified Germany

Turkish–German Migrant Cinema in the narrow sense, to be understood as cinema by (former) migrants about their own or their families' experiences, starts some time after the 'guest worker' era (1955–1973) in the 1980s and follows high-profile directors of the New German Cinema, such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Helma Sanders-Brahms and Werner Schroeter. In other words, the foundations had been laid in the 1960s and 1970s, ranging from the 'Oberhausener Manifest' (1962) with its famous rejection of the preceding German Cinema, the 'Kuratorium junger deutscher Film' (1965), which opened up new funding possibilities at regional and federal level, and a number of key films focussing on the life of guest workers in a hostile capitalist and/or racist society, including Fassbinder's *Katzelmacher* (1969) and *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974), Sanders-Brahms' *Shirins Hochzeit* (1975) and Schroeter's *Palermo oder Wolfsburg* (1980). Some connections between the take off of the Migrant Cinema and the bottoming out of the New German Cinema have already been noted.<sup>6</sup> There remains, however, major room for improvement when it comes to the analysis of such links. Göktürk's interpretation of both streams as part of a 'cinema of duty', which supposedly 'ties' film-makers dependent on German funding 'to sorrowful stories about being lost between two cultures' (2002: 250), is clearly an over-simplification. While funding tendencies should not be underestimated, Göktürk's argumentation neither addresses the enormous diversity and fundamental social critique of the New German

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<sup>6</sup> See Göktürk 2000: 332 and 2002: 249ff.; also Rendi (2006: 82). Some scholars date the New German Cinema from 1962 until 1987 (to end with Wim Wenders *Der Himmel über Berlin*) while others would prefer to mark the end with Fassbinder's death in 1982 for reasons outlined in Rings (2000: 52ff.).

Cinema (mainly funded from the same sources as early Migrant Cinema), nor the economic alternatives open to migrant directors,<sup>7</sup> never mind the socio-cultural background of most first generation migrants that led to significant cultural clashes, which directors might have found worth interrogating.

In line with most New German Films, and in particular with preceding work about guest workers by Fassbinder, Sanders-Brahms and Schroeter, Tevfik Baser's reputable *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* (1985) and *Abschied vom falschen Paradies* (1988) feature outsider-protagonists in profound isolation, incommunication, existential fear and their inner fight between rebellion and subordination. A combination of alienation and melodrama techniques, well known from Fassbinder's *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974) and *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (1979), is employed to frame them in their personal impotence and failure within a hostile environment.<sup>8</sup> However, in Baser's films, the two female protagonists Turna and Elif are alienated mainly because of the highly distorted Turkish environment artificially established and maintained in Germany by their guest worker husbands. All this follows Herder-inspired concepts in so far as the two women, and with them the viewers, are confronted with an extremely enclosed homogenous and separatist notion of Turkish culture.

Particularly in *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*, first generation Turkish migrants and Germans are coexisting rather than interacting, and the clear separation seems to be a consequence of extreme patriarchal and inhuman behaviour from the Turkish side. This perspective is represented by Dursun, a Turkish guest worker who cultivates the image of a 'pure' Turkish culture in need of protection against corrupting German influences. In this clear setting of cultural hierarchies, within which an imagined archaic Turkey occupies the moral high ground and contemporary Germany becomes a symbol of modern sin, Dursun goes to the extreme by locking his new wife Turna into the small flat (40 square meters) where she will have to stay until her husband's death nearly a year later. Dursun justifies his behaviour with the excuse of protecting Turna, but in later remarks it becomes clear that

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<sup>7</sup> Şerif Gören produced his *Polizei* (1988) in Turkey while Sinan Çetin got significant private sponsorship for *Berlin in Berlin* (1993).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of outsider-protagonists in the New German Cinema see Elsaesser 1994: 283ff.



this is in particular a desperate attempt to protect his personal honour against imagined foreign threats. After all, Turna's supposed loss of honour in the case of direct contact with an immoral German surrounding would immediately reflect on Dursun's incapacity to protect his family.<sup>9</sup> During her long imprisonment, Turna's mood changes from anger to existential fear and panic attacks, and her repeated begging to be taken out for a walk leads Dursun to make promises that are never kept. Consequently, Turna's encounters with German neighbours are limited to a few short interactions with a child from one of the blocks of flats in the backyard opposite her 'prison'. However, this exchange can only work through the window and via sign language, and it is disturbed by the child's mother who seems to reject such communication. Even shorter is Turna's occasional personal encounter with neighbours in her own block of flats who keep a critical distance to her assumed Otherness, which is stressed on one occasion by Turna's traditional Turkish clothes and on another by her – at first glance – rather hysterical behaviour. Since Turna does not speak German and the neighbours cannot understand Turkish, there is little chance to explain and possibly overcome differences that cannot be reduced to cultural dissimilarities, but have to be seen in the wider context of human reactions in extraordinary situations (see emotional behaviour after husband's death). It should, however, also be noted that there is no visible attempt from the German side to understand and communicate with Turna. In this sense, it could be argued that Turna's suffering is not only a consequence of the mistreatment by her husband but also, up to a certain degree, of a fundamental disinterest from her German surroundings. A statement like 'tagsüber erleidet sie Deutschland, nachts ihren Mann' (*Film-Dienst* 1986: 396) does not, however, address the main problem which remains her imprisonment by her Turkish husband. This imprisonment makes her a victim of grossly misunderstood patriarchal family structures within which women are degraded to objects of male possessive desires, and it stops her from getting to know the country she and her husband emigrated to. Consequently, Baser, who was born in Turkey but migrated to Hamburg in 1978, concentrates on the way Turna was 'sold' to Dursun, on her labour and

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<sup>9</sup> The idea that a superior civilisation could be damaged by close contact with an inferior culture, just like a virus from an ill person can damage a healthy body, is reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European colonial discourse and nation-building, which significantly inspired Atatürk's Turkish nation-building in the 1920s. See Zeydanlıoğlu/Rings (2003).

on her sexual exploitation by her husband. In this context, the supposedly Turkish-inspired rituals at home, which culminate in a healer's visit to help her get pregnant, are a highly alienating and culturally displacing experience. Symbolically and physically, Dursun blocks the door to the outside world, even after his death in an epileptic attack when Turna has to use all her strength to move his body so that she can finally leave the flat. Whether this solves her problems or not remains doubtful, as the film ends with her going down empty stairs, a symbolically dense anticipation of her isolation and lack of communication in the new world ahead.

Baser's *Abschied vom falschen Paradies* (1988) reveals at first a similarly separatist view of the two cultures. The protagonist is again a Turkish woman who finds herself mistreated by her Turkish husband. However, unlike Turna, Elif kills her husband when he tries to rape her, and the sentence (manslaughter) takes her to gaol for several years. Quite in opposition to Turna's imprisonment at home, gaol gives Elif a chance to discover a life outside the arbitrary male violence and in interaction with other people. Maybe because her contact is usually limited to German women rather than men, Elif manages to make new friends relatively quickly and to integrate into the society of prisoners. The main problems threatening this rather harmonious relationship again come from the Turkish side, be it via the family of her dead husband seeking revenge, be it via her own relatives represented by her brother, who cannot accept a 'murderer' and a 'whore' as part of his family. After her release, Elif also has to fear expulsion to Turkey as well as a second and probably much tougher sentence by a Turkish court, which might not accept the imposed German sentence. In this sense, prison becomes a 'false paradise' that does not solve Elif's problems but it certainly facilitates her steps into self-emancipation. For the first time in her life, she is allowed to dress up for visitors in the way she wants and she can express her feelings for another male prisoner outside of the patriarchal norms that had governed her previous married life. The film ends with her release from prison, a situation that she feared so much that she even attempted suicide. In short, Baser leaves it open if Elif's worst fears will come true or if there is hope for a self-determined life outside prison. With regard to the threats from the Turkish side, the film clearly confirms the cultural boundaries re-constructed in *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*. This is also stressed by the exclusive use of Turkish language for as long as the women are governed by their husbands and family. However, in terms of

intercultural dialogue and exchange, Elif's new German surroundings in prison seem to offer real alternatives to female enclosure and mistreatment in Turkish diasporic family structures. Not by coincidence, Elif only manages to learn German during her time in prison. The question is still in how far the astonishing intercultural solidarity of women in gaol and the evil portrayal of the Turkish diaspora can be accepted as believable constructs (see *Film-Dienst* 1989: 271).

In the same year as *Abschied vom falschen Paradies*, this notion of interculturalism was developed further in *Yasemin* (1988) by Hark Bohm, who was already well known in intellectual circles for his participation in the New German Cinema, in particular as an actor in films by Fassbinder and Alexander Kluge, but also as director of *Nordsee ist Mordsee* (1976) and as co-founder of the 'Filmverlag der Autoren', a key production company for many New German Films. However, wide-spread national and international recognition only followed *Yasemin*, a movie that won the German Film Prize in Gold and has been extensively used in German as a foreign language classes ever since. If teachers focus their attention on the first part of the film this is indeed justified because it elaborates on a very open and dynamic intercultural exchange with transcultural tendencies based on the personal experiences of Bohm's son with a second generation Turkish girl. At the centre of the film is the young Turkish-German Yasemin who presents a very playful and uncomplicated way of dealing with non-corresponding socio-cultural norms. On one hand, she remains fully integrated into the Turkish culture carefully maintained by her parents and their family whom she tends to meet with cheerful friendliness and respect, often close to the boundaries of their tolerance but never stepping outside their mental horizon in a way that would lead them to loose face. On the other side, Yasemin is extremely open to her German surroundings which is stressed by her integration at school and in a judo club, her conversations with her German friend and, finally, in her relationship with Jan as soon as he demonstrates genuine affection. The dynamic-carnevalesque nature of her role play is probably best exemplified in the scenes in which she quickly adapts her physical outfit to changing cultural environments (e.g. for school she shortens her skirt and gets rid of the long pullover) and in her easy transfer on the dance floor, from individualist western disco style to oriental-inspired traditional Turkish dance. All this could be regarded as an expression of her multiple identities: Yasemin represents a group of young second-

generation migrants who feel both Turkish and German at the same time. As a hybrid, she wants to bridge these two non-corresponding and partially conflictive dimensions by exploring border areas. Such 'Third Spaces' (Bhabha 1994) can be found in her school and, particularly, in her judo club which provides a similar symbolic dimension for interaction, exchange and vitality as football many years later in Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) and Jafar Panahi's *Offside* (2006).<sup>10</sup> In intercultural terms, Yasemin's German boyfriend Jan plays overall a much less honourable role although he appears similarly open-minded, and his love for Yasemin leads him to learn some Turkish with the help of a dictionary.

Unfortunately, in the second half of the film, Böhm's movie glides into the neo-colonial trap common for contemporary popular cinema,<sup>11</sup> which is quite obvious when the alarmed Turkish community becomes the only obstacle to Jan's and Yasemin's relationship. In particular, the radical transformation of the friendly father figure into a criminal who wants fundamentalist relatives to deport his daughter to Turkey seems a bit over the top. Similarly unbelievable is Jan's complete ignorance about Turkish principles of honour and the lack of communication between the quick-witted Jan and Yasemin when it comes to understanding their cultural framework.<sup>12</sup> There are clear parallels to *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*, not only in the re-construction of a traditional concept of 'pure' Turkish culture in need of protection from a corrupting German environment, but also in the behaviouristic patterns governing the defence mechanisms that lead to Yasemin's imprisonment. In Böhm's film,

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<sup>10</sup> Very beneficial could be a comparative investigation of intercultural, transcultural and intracultural dimensions of sport, because the supposed blurring of class and gender boundaries in boxing has recently been a major topic in German films, including Züli Aladag's *Elefantenherz* (2002) and Catharina Deus *Die Boxerin* (2005). Further explorations could start from the vast literature about the *Rocky* films starring Sylvester Stallone.

<sup>11</sup> The one-sided Western-liberal approach seems to be governing popular cinema about migrants as internationally successful British comedies like O'Donnell's *East is East* (1999) and Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) confirm. However, there are also important exceptions to the rule such as Ken Loach's *Ae fond kiss* (2004). Paul Laverty's script impressively depicts here the cultural divide between second generation Pakistani Casim and Irish Catholic teacher Roisin by exploring different culture concepts rather than blaming conflicts exclusively on the fundamentalism of an imagined Oriental side.

<sup>12</sup> The film plays in Hamburg-Altona where Jan should have come repeatedly into contact with people of Turkish origin, and Yasemin is always accompanied by her cousin Dursun to the Judo class. See also Kühn (1995: 50).

the solution is an adventurous rescue operation by Western-liberal hero Jan who frees his girlfriend in the very last minute from a group of Oriental criminals. Göktürk summarises this gender-related pattern in the statement: ‘Turkish women – especially the young and beautiful – can only be liberated by saving them from their repressive men’ (2002: 251). However, this sounds rather like an echo of Spivak’s phrase about ‘white men [having to save] brown women from the terror of brown men’, which has to be put back into the colonial context the Indian author is referring to.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the romantic love story between Jan and Yasemin follows neo-colonial hierarchies that re-construct the superiority of Western liberalism over a barbarian Oriental society as well as the Western duty to intervene in order to protect the victims of that other culture. All this reminds the viewer of Western images of a culture clash originally explored in Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), and precisely because of this connotation it links up far less to the ‘Romeo and Juliet’ narrative<sup>14</sup> than to a contemporary knight story featuring the romantic love of an Occidental hero for an Oriental princess under threat, and there are many elements that would support such an interpretation: Yasemin’s rescue on the back of Jan’s motorbike echoes the traditional image of an aristocratic lady’s rescue on the back of a horse, Jan’s presentation outside of Yasemin’s window resembles ‘Minnesang’ traditions, and the liberal-individualistic life-style that Jan and Yasemin are both aiming at reminds the viewer of the romanticism governing contemporary love stories.

To summarise the tendencies in German and Turkish–German Cinema before Unification, there is clearly no evidence for a radical shift from a ‘Volkskulturkonzept’ to transculturalism as Göktürk seems to imply when arguing that the sheer ‘mobility of migrants [...] opens up [...] a “third space” of transnational translation’ (2002: 248). Instead, the films by Fassbinder, Sanders, Baser, Schroeter and Böhm confirm that traditional concepts based on ethnic membership and binary oppositions between Turkish migrants and German ‘hosts’ survive migration. The cinematic examples discussed reveal that the Herder-inspired traditional concept of culture is not necessarily linked to the German side. There seems rather to be a shift that could be dated to the middle of the

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<sup>13</sup> Spivak (1999: 206f.) discusses here the abolition of traditional Hindu widow sacrifice in India as a result of the intervention by British colonial authorities.

1970s, until which representatives of a German 'Volkskultur' are portrayed as the main obstacles for a peaceful life together, followed by a focus on xenophobia, racism and self-enclosure by Turkish nationalists. This paradigmatic change appears to be a response to clearly differentiable socio-political developments: after sharply increasing numbers of guest-workers,<sup>15</sup> German xenophobia reaches culminating points in the context of two recessions (1966/67 and 1973), which correlates with hostile articles in the print-media of the time<sup>16</sup> and with an exploration of German hostility in Fassbinder's *Katzelmacher* (1969) and *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974). However, once the 'Anwerbestop' is achieved (1973), the oil crisis has come to an end (1974) and there is evidence that most guest workers will be staying in Germany, politicians and film makers start concentrating on the potential problems of integration arising from the foreign workers' cultural background.<sup>17</sup> The main offenders seem to come now from a Turkish patriarchal environment as in *Shirins Hochzeit* (1975), *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* (1985), *Abschied vom falschen Paradies* (1988) and *Yasemin* (1988). The last two films particularly enhance this tendency with a focus on intercultural efforts from the German side repeatedly 'sabotaged' by a 'barbarian' Turkish diaspora. This includes principles of vendetta and forced repatriation, with the latter also being a recurrent leit-motif in German children's literature.<sup>18</sup> However, in all cases, the stress is to be placed on 'main' offenders because the female protagonists are in the end

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<sup>14</sup> See Göktürk (2002: 251) for such a link.

<sup>15</sup> This is a consequence of the economic boom but also of the radical stop of immigration from East Germany after the erection of the Berlin Wall (1961).

<sup>16</sup> See for example the *Spiegel* article from 30<sup>th</sup> July 1973: 'Die Türken kommen - rette sich wer kann'. The focus on Turks correlates with easily recognisable physical as well as religious differences of most Turkish guest workers arriving in West Germany. Also, since 1971 Turkish immigrants and their descendants form the biggest ethnic minority (see Klöpper 1985: 13).

<sup>17</sup> A new media focus on difficulties of former migrants to start a new life in Germany or in Turkey confirms this tendency. See for example the articles 'Langer Weg zum deutschen Pass' (Wernicke 1989) and 'Zurück in die alten Zwänge' (Thelen 1987) in *Die Zeit* for a criticism of German bureaucracy and wide-spread Turkish rejection of 'Deutschländer' (Turkish guest workers returning from Germany).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Annelies Scharz' *Hamide spielt Hamide* (1986), a novel that concentrates on second generation Hamide's highly emancipatory theatre play, organised and defended against Turkish parents by her German teacher, and on her relationship with a German boy. Such developments are not at all acceptable for her Turkish parents who force her to join them when returning to Turkey. Similarly, Ingrid Kötter's *Kopftuchklasse* (1989) stresses an impressive act of

victims of violence and humiliation from both sides. This is particularly obvious in the case of Shirin who moves from an [unscrupulous](#) Turkish patriarch as potential husband to a capitalist ‘hire and fire’ system in Germany and finally to violent German pimps. Unlike Göktürk, this study nevertheless stresses that the victims are by no means always or exclusively female. *Katzelmacher* and *Angst essen Seele auf* are obvious counterexamples in their portrayal of Greek Jorgos and Moroccan Ali as male victim-protagonists, but the suffering of male guest workers in *Shirins Hochzeit* and *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* should not be underestimated either. Sanders-Brahms makes this clear for the viewers when Shirin goes into the shared accommodation of male migrants where groups of sad and exhausted men are exposed. When trying to comfort Shirin in the wake of her first job as a prostitute, the German pimp is certainly right: ‘Von denen ist kein Ärger zu erwarten’. Dursun also leads a frustrated marginal existence with a daily life consisting of work, TV and animal-like sex in a sad household with only one aim worth working for: a child that Turna is about to give birth to. Full of hatred against a German environment that he was never able or willing to understand, let alone accept, he is responsible for the deep isolation of his home and for the increasing self-enclosure of his wife. However, he has neither the intellectual capacity nor the strength to cross the boundaries of a Turkish-inspired ‘Volkskulturkonzept’, which ultimately contributes to his own psychological and physical destruction. As a pattern-building animal that has lost most of his agency, he continues to be a key example of a successfully ‘programmed mind’ in Hofstede’s sense (2001), which means that the social criticism of *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* does not end with Dursun’s binary construct of guest workers versus Germans, and even less with a ‘latente Fremdenfeindlichkeit’ from the German side.<sup>19</sup>

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German solidarity with second generation Hatice when all girls in her class start wearing head-scarves in order to avoid her being excluded from a football match because of her head-scarf.

<sup>19</sup> See *Film-Dienst* (1986: 397). Against this, it could be argued that the portrayal of German indifference appears as an expression of general anonymity, self-interest and lack of communication because Dursun and his neighbours seem to follow similarly restricted and potentially self-destructive patterns of life that form obstacles to deeper interpersonal interaction. Not by coincidence, Baser has chosen a home in a big grey block of flats where hardly anybody can be seen to communicate with each other, be it on the balconies or in the corridors. The view is limited to the backyard, and there is only a minor part of a street visible where Turna is confronted with a prostitute waiting for customers.

### 3. Cultural boundaries in Migrant Cinema after Unification

Increasing immigration, rising nationalism and growing xenophobia culminating in numerous anti-racist attacks<sup>20</sup> form the historical context of cinematic production shortly after German Unification, particularly within the recession years from 1991 to early 1994 and in East Germany where the population was not familiar with mass migration.<sup>21</sup> While German children's literature has substantially drawn on these developments, e.g. by interrogating the brutality and criminal character of skinhead milieus,<sup>22</sup> German cinema has tended to marginalise them. In how far this can be linked to an anticipated censorship by the 'Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle' and German funding bodies or to direct political pressure remains unclear but there are directors and critics who confirm such a connection. One example is Mansour Ghadarkhah, the director of *Auge um Auge* (1992), who claims that his film about the fear of asylum seekers after Hoyerswerda was prevented from entering the Berlinale for political reasons.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the main argument for the lack of interest in films like *Auge um Auge* might have been, it can be assumed that a direct visual display of East German racism in the cinema of the time might not have been given full support by public engineers of German Unification, be it at local, regional or national level. Also, the acceptance of national taboos would not be new,<sup>24</sup> and it would correlate with the fact that, due to relatively high production costs and the dependence on comparably few distribution channels, politically undesirable films are easier to suppress than literature and most other media. Consequently, it might not be surprising that the most popular production featuring

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<sup>20</sup> Examples are the assaults by skinheads against guest workers and asylum seekers in Hoyerswerda/Saxony (14/10/1991), more than 14 different neonazi attacks in 1992 (e.g. in Saal near Rostock and Berlin-Marzahn) and a major arson attack in Solingen (1993).

<sup>21</sup> For the differences in migration patterns see Bade/Oltmer (2007: 159ff.).

<sup>22</sup> See for example Marie Hagemann's *Schwarzer, Wolf, Skin* (1993) and Ingo Hasselbach's *Die Abrechnung. Ein Neonazi steigt aus* (1993). Because of fear of assaults the author of the first novel used a pseudonym.

<sup>23</sup> See Oldenburger Stachel (1996: 6). *Auge um Auge* deals with Hadi and Mona's visual memory of the torture they experienced in their dictatorial country of origin, a past that comes to life when the whole block full of asylum seekers is threatened by German skinheads. The director is of Iranian origin.

<sup>24</sup> In feature films, the Holocaust was probably first brought to a significant German audience by the New German Cinema and then to a mass audience by the American series *Holocaust* in the late 1970s, which means a 20 to 30 years delay in the cinematic discussion.



Turkish diaspora in the period of growing neonazi activity was Doris Dörrie's light-hearted comedy *Happy Birthday, Türke* (1992). This detective story based on Jakob Arjouni's famous Kayankaya-series entertains the viewer with a tragic-comical 'mise en scène' of an underground milieu governed by drug traffic and prostitution, and the subsequent killings that lead to corrupted German policemen and greedy drug traders of Turkish origin all receiving their deserved punishment. The film clearly contributes to the stabilisation of bourgeois norms, despite some rather critical remarks about cultural boundaries.<sup>25</sup> Another exception that confirms the rule of cinematic silence is Sinan Çetin's *Berlin in Berlin* (1993), a drama about the failure of peaceful multicultural co-existence. However, the accidental killing of a Turkish husband in the film bears no relationship to the politically motivated killings in the context of the production, and while the plot elaborates on cultural differences (e.g. as regards photo shooting and guest rights) it does not draw on right wing activities or asylum seekers' issues of the time, which remain taboos.

Only the second half of the 1990s becomes a period of extremely significant production in Migrant Cinema, both in terms of quantity and quality, which correlates with a second generation successfully completing film studies degrees and leaving college with a major interest in the continuous outsider-status of their Turkish-German diaspora. Examples for this are Kadir Sözen (*Kalte Nächte* 1995, *Winterblume* 1996), Ayşe Polat (*Ein Fest für Beyhan* 1994), Buket Alakuş (*Martin* 1995), Aysun Bademsoy (*Mädchen am Ball* 1995) and Seyhan Derin (*Ich bin die Tochter meiner Mutter* 1996).<sup>26</sup> The years 1997 and 1998 are then even more important, if one were to date the beginning of a new German Migrant

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<sup>25</sup> Quite similarly, in post-war German Cinema, *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (Helmut Käutner 1956) breaks the long silence as regards German militarism and bureaucracy with a parody of exaggerated forms of nationalist obedience, which allows the film to end with a reconciliation of 20<sup>th</sup>-century German aristocratic and bourgeois values.

<sup>26</sup> In particular, Sözen's *Winterblume* can be regarded as an early example of transculturalism in its focus on the human tragedy of a family split and finally destroyed by mechanic bureaucracy and scrupulous profiteers. Unfortunately, the extremely romanticised and melodramatic portrayal of an imagined Turkish community as the only hope for human life remains one-sided and unbelievable. Although the film tries to avoid cultural binaries, it is marked by an extremely harmonious construct of a Turkish family, a new Turkish friend from a building site in Istanbul, an old Turkish woman and her nephew, and finally a friendly Turkish waiter in an Austrian pub, who all join the protagonist's fight against German and Austrian bureaucracy. The traditional Turkish music that accompanies the bus of migrants on their way to Germany is also symbolic for the link of human liberation to Turkish solidarity.

Cinema, because with Thomas Arslan's *Geschwister – Kardesler* (released in November 1997) and Fatih Akin's *kurz und schmerzlos* (October 1998) there is a juxtaposition of two leading directors and significantly different styles of a Turkish–German 'Cinema of Métissage' (Seeßlen 2007: 9).

For more than a decade, Akin repeatedly surprised his audience with collage-style productions and a rather emotional use of film quotations, within which frequent changes of perspectives, moods and locations remain characteristic (see Löser 2007: 5). A good example is his first long feature film *kurz und schmerzlos*, which combines 'the gangster film aesthetic à la Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*' (Göktürk 2002: 254) with the social criticism of ghettoised marginality already successfully portrayed in Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) and, later on, in Ariel Zeitoun's *Yamakasi – Les samouraïs des temps modernes* (2001). Akin's film offers a psychographic profile of the pluricultural friendship between Gabriel, a second generation Turk who is looking for a different life after his time in jail, Costa, a second generation Greek who lives from car robbery and other petty crime, and Bobby, a little criminal with an obsession to become a big gangster. The extreme poles are marked by Gabriel's wish for integration into society by finding a regular job and Bobby's drive for entering into an imagined great underworld inspired by gangster movies. In these very different quests for happiness, Turkish, Greek, Serbian and/or German cultural backgrounds do not seem to play a major role, but it is rather the life experiences (e.g. Gabriel's time in gaol), the habits (Costa's success in petty crime) and the influence of mass media (for Bobby in particular films with Al Pacino) that are most important. The common interest in the life philosophies of young outsiders, who manage to overcome their ethnic backgrounds quite effortlessly, links *kurz und schmerzlos* to *La Haine* and *Yamakasi*. However, Akin's film goes one step further by highlighting ways out of the traditional binary of pluricultural ghetto versus white centre that governs the French productions. Instead of permanent confrontations with national police or politicians from the power centre, *kurz und schmerzlos* offers potential bridges via Turkish–German relationships that start embedding the three protagonists into their German surrounding. Unfortunately, this notion of transculturalism stops with only an indication of such a potential, and there is no elaboration on the roles these German Others might be able to play in the development of the protagonists' characters. Certainly, Gabriel's sister Ceyda dumps her boyfriend Costa in

order to start a serious relationship with a German guy, while German Alice dumps Bobby because of his childish gangster-style behaviour and starts a more promising affair with Gabriel. However, both Alice and Ceyda's new boyfriend remain rather marginal figures, which is partially due to their exclusion by the pluricultural group that prefers to keep the Germans out of their decision-making processes. A clear example is given by Ceyda and Gabriel as they talk Turkish in Alice's presence when the existential question of vendetta for Bobby's murder comes up. Another example is Ceyda's incapacity to protect her boyfriend from her brother's assault. Just like in *La Haine*, *Yamakasi* and in Arslan's *Dealer*, the underdogs ultimately remain in their enclosed communities, in particular because they tend to put loyalty towards ghetto-friends before trust in other people or in their own decisions, and even close family members (e.g. Ceyda) suffer from that. Gabriel's failure to achieve his objectives is a good example of the problems associated with such a mentality.

All this links up to the ghetto culture proudly elaborated on in Feridun Zaimoğlu's *Kanak Sprak* (1999[1995]), which has been a very popular book amongst Turkish-German directors and which also underpinned the script for Lars Becker's film *Kanak Attack* (2000) written by Zaimoğlu. There is no doubt that most of the 24 testimonial narratives selected and introduced in *Kanak Sprak* draw on a concept that defines second- and third-generation German Turks as part of a new oppositional 'Kanak' culture, rather than as people 'in-between' with the potential to bridge traditional differences. When describing his interviewees as part of a 'Liga der Verdammten' that has to resist 'kulturhegemoniale Ansprüche' (see Zaimoğlu 1999: 17), the editor refers to individual self-portrayals such as Akay's:

Wir sind hier allesamt nigger; wir haben unser ghetto, wir schleppen's überall hin, wir dampfen fremdländisch, unser schweiß ist nigger, unser leben ist nigger, die goldketten sind nigger, unsere zinken und unsere fressen und unser eigener stil ist so verdammt nigger, dass wir wie blöde an unserer Haut kratzen, und dabei kapieren wir, dass zum nigger nicht die olle pechhaut gehört, aber zum nigger gehört ne ganze menge anderssein und andres leben (ibid. 25).

However, the direct parallel that Zaimoğlu tries to establish between his interviewees and the North American black-consciousness-movement seems clearly as blatantly wrong as his attempt to regard their mentality as a solid foundation for the creation of new emancipatory

identities. While black-consciousness has been a movement across the traditional boundaries of age, gender and class, Zaimoğlu's interviewees are predominantly young males (13–33 years old), most of whom seem to live from 'petty crime', casual work and/or unemployment money. The fact that Zaimoğlu explicitly excludes Turkish–German intellectuals as well as the absolute majority of Turks in regular employment might make some sense with regard to his interest in allowing 'Kanaken' to speak, an aim that films like *Dealer, kurz und schmerzlos* and *Kanak Attack* certainly share. It does, however, allow neither for such voices to be placed at the same level as the black-consciousness-movement, nor for them to be misjudged as representative of the Turkish–German diaspora.<sup>27</sup> Assuming Spivak (1999) is not wrong in her assessment that subalterns cannot speak but are frequently misrepresented as autonomous speakers, e.g. by privileged writers and directors, it should also be questioned in how far Zaimoğlu's 'Nachdichtung'<sup>28</sup> of individual voices from the Turkish–German underworld can realistically represent that underworld or only a grossly distorted and romanticised version of it. Even more problematic is the fact that Zaimoğlu and his interviewees are not developing a new culture concept but are going back to traditional notions of culture, within which an extremely diverse and hybrid community is reduced to a 'Volkskultur' of 'Kanaken'. This essentialist and homogenous vision of the diaspora, which remains completely subordinated to male perspectives in its framing of women as 'Loch', 'Blaskapelle' and 'Stuten' (S. 125, 126, 23), is certainly as wrong and dangerous in its paradigm of assimilation and exclusion as the colonialist and nationalist visions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that Zaimoğlu and his interviewees oppose because of their hegemonial and racist dynamics. In *Koppstoff* the author has later on amended a female dimension in order to correct the correlation of traditional gender and culture construct in *Kanak Sprak* but he has failed to deconstruct the artificial ethnic identity developed in his earlier work.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Even less convincing are Zaimoğlu's arguments for the exclusion: his opinion about the intellectuals' lack of 'gesellschaftliche Sprengkraft' is clearly as debatable as his categorisation of integration efforts as a 'mutation' 'zum netten Kollegen "Ali", den man mal nach Feierabend zum Stammlokal mitnimmt' (ibid. 18).

<sup>28</sup> The term is used by Zaimoğlu himself (1999: 18).

<sup>29</sup> See Ernst's interpretation for details of the reproduction of hegemonial gender discourse in *Kanak Sprak* (2007: 185). Unfortunately, Ernst fails to see that the deconstruction of dominant ethnic

Unfortunately, the ghetto-‘Volkskulturkonzept’, as portrayed in *Kanak Sprak*, *Kanak Attack* and recently also in Züli Aladag’s *Wut*, continues to attract viewers in cinemas and TV, probably because it is easily misunderstood as expression of the ‘authenticity’<sup>30</sup> of a cultural minority in a society in which people of Turkish–German origin continue to be marginalised, even two decades after German Unification. While official sources admit their outsider status with reference to severe deficiencies in German language and social behaviour, failure at school, high unemployment and conscious withdrawal from education and the employment market,<sup>31</sup> there is little evidence for a radical change in education policy as a way forward to address the problems of second and particularly third generation migrants. All this might help to explain fundamental differences in the cinematic portrayals before and after German Unification: from the integration efforts characteristic of the period after the ‘Anwerbestop’ and the oil crisis in the last decades of the old German Federal Republic, the focus has shifted again to differentiation and demarcation. Only this time the films tend to feature younger people with migrant backgrounds as active subjects trying to negotiate their position, rather than accepting given identity constructs and tacitly suffering social injustices. While this in itself is a valid approach and an enrichment, the portrayal of Turkish–German diaspora as a homogenous ‘Kanaken–Volkskultur’ remains grossly misleading and in its exclusion of Others (of German and Turkish origin) as hegemonial as the heavily criticised majority culture. At least in this respect, *kurz und schmerzlos* remains a positive exception to the new ghetto-mainstream-fiction, since it does not marginalise non-corresponding and conflictive notions within the ghetto culture portrayed. This way it allows for the ghetto to be considered as another ‘imagined

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discourse comes with the (re-) construction of a different ethnic binary and with corresponding patterns of exclusion. With regard to its change of agent, this is mainly an inversion of roles in which the cultural monologue has been handed over to a small and retrospectively homogenised group of Kanaken.

<sup>30</sup> See Zaimoğlu’s self-justification for his homogenization of the interviewees’ oral texts: ‘Bei dieser “Nachdichtung” war es mir darum zu tun, ein in sich geschlossenes, sichtbares, mithin “authentisches” Sprachbild zu schaffen’ (1999: 18).

<sup>31</sup> In *Sprache und Bildung türkischer Jugendlicher in Deutschland* the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2002) admits that 40% of Turkish-German children leave school without a certificate and roughly the same percentage does not find an apprenticeship training position. Unemployment is according to the same source at 23% roughly twice as high as national average and many children and young adults have already given up any hope of joining mainstream society.

community' and might ultimately lead the critical viewer to develop a more differentiated view outside the binary 'white centre' – 'ghetto periphery'.

Akın's later films vary between an even stricter separation of cultures and a more open approach. The immediately following and much more popular feature films *Im Juli* (1999) and *Solino* (2002) are, however, examples of a more separatist approach despite the transcultural dimensions opened up in the first part of the films. As such, *Im Juli* begins as a film about an intercultural relationship between dreamy 'Studienreferendar' Daniel from Hamburg, who is actually the object of desire of German Juli, and a Turkish girl named Melek ('angel'), who already has a Turkish boyfriend called İsa. Not knowing about him, Daniel follows Melek to Istanbul by car, and this is the main topic of the road movie–fairy tale–comedy that presents a sharp break with the gangster film genre developed in *kurz und schmerzlos*. Akın certainly plays with the viewers' stereotypes when re-constructing some cultural clichés for the purpose of deconstruction,<sup>32</sup> but overall cultural identities do not play a major role. Melek remains framed in Daniel's gaze as an exotic-erotic object of desire, there is no serious attempt to elaborate her or other exotic females (e.g. Luna) as self-determined (rather than instinct- or male-driven) individuals, and the film ends on a very conservative monocultural note: the Turkish couple Melek–İsa remains together and the two Germans, Juli and Daniel, finally find true love together. In short:

Daniel's quest remains thoroughly restorative. He does not become a European cosmopolitan, and there is no suggestion of any relationship across cultures with any of their potential tensions. [...] Where *kurz und schmerzlos* leaves problems of identity conflict, *Im Juli* circumvents them completely (Jones 2003: 89).

Similarly restorative remains Akın's *Solino* (2002), the story of an Italian guest worker family that opens up the first 'Pizzeria' in Duisburg after the father's negative experiences in a German coal mine. A rather grey, cold and anonymous Duisburg is here contrasted with the family's small picturesque native town called Solino, which reminds the viewer of

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<sup>32</sup> Probably the most obvious example is the portrayal of Melek's Turkish-German boyfriend İsa as a dark-clothed dangerous criminal who attacks desperate Daniel and hides a corpse in the boot of his car. Only much later, in the interrogation set up by an apparently merciless Turkish border patrol, the film reveals that İsa is just trying to fulfil the final wish of an uncle who died in Germany but wanted to be buried in Turkish soil, a new situation to which the border police reacts by celebrating the family hero.

the 'Bella Italia' image repeatedly constructed in German films of the 1960s and 1970s, and that is also used to name the pizzeria.<sup>33</sup> As in most migrant films, the first generation parents remain embedded in a guest worker environment with Rosa, the mother, resisting any form of intercultural contact and finally returning to her village as a fatally ill and worn out woman. Her husband Romano might have affairs with German women but there is no evidence of any serious relationship and his driving force remains his greed. It is up to the two children, Gigi and Giancarlo, to open up to their German surroundings, and their mutual interest in Jo, the German neighbour, as well as Gigi's friendly exchange with the owner of a photo shop are examples of this. However, ultimately, the two brothers mirror their parents by either going back to their cultural roots or ending up isolated: Gigi returns to Solino to help his mother and to start a happy new life with Ada, an Italian girl from the village. His egocentric and jealous brother Giancarlo, who is to blame for Gigi losing both Jo and his career as a film maker, becomes a frustrated and lonely outsider, just like his father Romano.

The partially quite funny design of cultural encounters in *Im Juli* and *Solino* confirm that restorative portrayals are not necessarily linked to a particular genre, with dramas setting the standard for Migrant Cinema before German Unification and hybrid genres as well as comedies, such as *Meine verrückte türkische Hochzeit* (Holtz 2006), gaining ground afterwards. All three films also break with the sharp class boundaries re-erected in *Kanak Attack*, *kurz und schmerzlos* and *Wut*. Instead, *Im Juli*, *Solino* and *Meine verrückte türkische Hochzeit* either circumvent social classification completely (Melek's and İsa's backgrounds are not elaborated) or focus on average people with migrant backgrounds (from Italian–German working class up to small Turkish–German entrepreneurs). However, what can be seen at the end is a strong sense of cultural belonging that leads to ethnically pure relationships (*Im Juli*, *Solino*) or to an extremely rigid form of mental 'ghettoization' which proves to be a major obstacle for hybrid relationships (*Meine verrückte türkische Hochzeit*).

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<sup>33</sup> Römers rightly criticises the Bella Italia cliché which remains unbelievable even within the film's plot: 'Wenn es Gigi so leicht fällt, in Sueditalien seine Erfüllung zu finden, welche Frustrationen trieben dann 20 Jahre zuvor seine Eltern in die Ferne?' (*Film-Dienst* 2002: 23).

In clear contrast to Akin, Thomas Arslan, born in Braunschweig as son of a German woman and a Turkish guest worker, draws heavily on the traditions of a European 'Autorenkino' of French inspiration. His quotidian universe composed of laconic gestures and dialogues with little joy and observation rather than action is particularly reminiscent of Robert Bresson's work.<sup>34</sup> A key example is Arslan's Berlin-trilogy, consisting of *Geschwister – Kardesler* (1997), *Dealer* (1999) and *Der schöne Tag* (2001), in which an observing camera focuses on the everyday life of second generation Turks in Berlin. The first part features three siblings (Ahmed, Leyla, Erol) with different cultural approaches ranging from integration to ghettoization, *Dealer* portrays the stagnation of drug dealer Can's dreamlike reality between criminal activity and hope for a new 'normal' life, and *Der schöne Tag* leads the viewer through one day in the life of quiet but self-confident and ambitious Deniz. While Erol and Can could be categorised as representatives of a ghetto-culture who draw on similar patterns as the three underdogs in Akin's *kurz und schmerzlos*, the elaboration of a convincing transcultural protagonist in *Der schöne Tag* brings significantly different notions into the Berlin trilogy and marks a new approach that currently competes with the 'Kanaken-Volkskulturkonzept'. Partially quite comparable to Bohm's protagonist Yasemin, Deniz moves very dynamically and at first glance effortlessly between positions that represent traditional notions of Turkish and German culture. One extreme is certainly marked by her mother, who understands German perfectly but keeps speaking Turkish even when her daughter addresses her in German. Language is, as such, not directly shown as a barrier for communication (although it might become one) but as an expression of the cultural patterns the characters prefer to identify themselves with. This becomes clear when the mother tries to help Deniz in her existential search for perspectives in life by proposing traditional Turkish gender roles which she has fully internalised. For her, married life has always been and will remain a 'Partnerschaft' governed by 'Verantwortungsgefühl [...] für die Kinder und für die Beziehung', i.e. a relationship based on reason rather than emotion. While it could be argued that this view is hardly more than a

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<sup>34</sup> The parallels are particularly obvious with regard to Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), *Mouchette* (1969) and his late master-piece *L'Argent* (1983). For a brief but convincing overview of Bresson's films see *Strictly Film School* 1999-2002.



cliché of contemporary Turkey which other films have successfully deconstructed,<sup>35</sup> it is still her image of Turkey, based on her own life experience and in particular on her marriage with Deniz' father. On the other hand, there is Deniz' extremely egocentric but disoriented and insecure German boyfriend Jan, who tends to run away from social, professional or emotional commitments and hides his lack of courage behind clichés. Considering that in his selfishness and cultural ignorance he correlates closely with Yasemin's boyfriend, also called Jan, in the first part of Böhm's film, Arslan's choice of name might not have been arbitrary. However, in *Der schöne Tag* neither egocentrism nor disorientation appear as exclusively German qualities, and the parallels between Deniz' Jan and the disoriented Turkish-German youngsters living near Deniz' block of flats are rather astonishing. With regard to the immediate attraction between Portuguese-German Diego and Deniz, it should be stressed that the film favours relationships among migrants because many of them seem to be open enough to digest non-corresponding and potentially conflictive attitudes. This facilitates their ability and willingness to understand other hybrids in a dynamic and ever-changing world, a phenomenon that Arslan links to their shared archives of knowledge as well as experiences of cultural alienation. However, the arrival of Diego's girlfriend leaves things open and with it also Deniz' 'Diskurs über Lebensperspektiven und -einstellungen' (*Film-Dienst* 2001: 19).

A couple of years after Arslan's paradigmatic change to a focus on transculturalism, which in some respects was shadowed by Buket Alakus' first feature film *Anam* (2001),<sup>36</sup> Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (2003) and *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007) offer a similarly

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<sup>35</sup> See here in particular Kutlug Ataman's film *Zwei Mädchen aus Istanbul* (2005, *iki genç kız*) which confronts traditional and emancipated roles via the rebellion of female protagonist Behiye. As usual, this is portrayed as a generational and gender conflict (Behiye has to fight against her parents and her brother) but also as a class issue: for Behiye's rich new friend Handan from Etiler, a luxurious part of the town, life outside traditional boundaries seems to be the norm while for Behiye it means a desperate rebellion without guarantees for success.

<sup>36</sup> Turkish cleaning woman Anam (Turkish for 'mum' and 'my love') portrays together with her colleagues from work, German Rita and black African Didi, a similarly strong transcultural energy as driving force in the search for Anam's son. Up to a certain degree, this is a film about strong women (never mind the cultural background) and it offers an open exchange with cultural clichés, in particular with the head scarf (which the protagonist wears as long as she – and not her husband – wants it), drugs (as a universal threat particularly for young people without regard for cultural boundaries as mirrored by Anam's son and German girlfriend Mandy) and the low social dimension addressed (cleaning women of different cultural backgrounds).

convincing ‘mise en scène’ of protagonists remaining ‘outside of the opposition of own and other cultures’ (Welsch 1997: 69).<sup>37</sup> In *Gegen die Wand*, it is not a coincidence that the Turkish–German protagonists Sibel and Cahit are introduced by their suicide attempts rather than by violence against members of a different culture: Sibel cuts her wrists as a symbol of rebellion against the totalitarian patriarchy at home which completely suppresses her individualism, while alcoholic and lonely ‘Müllmensch’ Cahit drives his car full speed against a wall – hence the title of the film – in order to escape his own misery caused by the death of his beloved first wife and his social decline ever since. As such, the film concentrates considerably on human destinies that are not bound to a particular culture. Although Sibel could be regarded as a victim of her Turkish family, her wish to escape parental tutelage is more universal. Also, there is no Western hero in the style of Böhm’s protagonist Jan around to ‘rescue’ her, and Sibel is certainly at the beginning a far too extreme character to be successfully assimilated into a liberal-bourgeois environment, be it of German, Turkish or any other cultural origin. Instead, both Cahit and Sibel reflect mentalities that are incompatible with ‘bürgerliches Kalkül’ and ‘emotionale Absicherungen’ (Lederle 2004: 29), and precisely because of this they get together without any interest in a binding relationship. The transcultural orientation of the film is furthermore stressed by Sibel’s rejection of the capitalist alternative offered by her sister, the business woman Selma in Istanbul. Unlike *Shirins Hochzeit*, *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* and *Solino*, *Gegen die Wand* does not associate capitalist alternatives with a German but rather a new Turkish way of life. All this opens the viewers mind to the ambiguity of contemporary Turkey as both traditional (Sibel’s parents) and modern (Sibel’s cousin Selma), which has already been sketched out in Arslan’s *Der schöne Tag* (compare Deniz’ mother and sister) and is still a hot topic in Turkey itself (see Kutlug Ataman’s *Zwei Mädchen aus Istanbul*, 2005). Even more so, *Auf der anderen Seite* focuses on transcultural

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<sup>37</sup> Akin’s documentary *Crossing the Bridge* (2005) has a similarly strong transcultural message. The question remains whether and in how far the director manages to analyse the rich variety of hybrid music that he presents. Lederle’s first assessment is clear when he argues ‘die analytische Durchdringung des Materials [ist] nicht unbedingt Akin’s Stärke’ as the director ‘bestaunt’ much more than ‘beleuchtet’ (2005: 27). A more detailed exploration of the film, potentially on the basis of Ha’s statements about capitalist instrumentalisation of hybridity in contemporary music, is unfortunately outside the scope of this study.

topics<sup>38</sup> and, with intellectual protagonist Nejat Atsu – a Turkish-German professor of German literature, the film also blurs the ghetto-boundaries that Cahit and Sibel had again subscribed to.

Considering a concept first coined by famous German philosopher Max Weber, it could be argued that the ‘capitalist spirit’ portrayed by Deniz’ sister and Sibel’s cousin is a transcultural phenomenon visible in many recent films.<sup>39</sup> However, in some post-modern elaborations this spirit might have lost its ascetic dimension and become associated predominantly with characteristics such as ‘efficiency’, ‘predictability’ and ‘quantification’, as discussed in Ritzer’s *McDonaldisation of Society*. A good example from Detlev Buck’s *Knallhart* (2006) is the very predictable and overall quite efficient underworld – usually with migrant background – that quantifies human value in money and links it directly to questions of power and social status. This reconstructs the cliché of a ‘migrantische Kriminalitätspyramide’, as Engels has noted (2006), but only for the purpose of its deconstruction. Certainly, the story focuses on a poor and rather helpless white German child Michael who becomes the victim of Erol’s Turkish–German gang and who joins Hamal’s drug dealers mainly because they seem to be the only chance to escape his misery. However, the ‘mise en scène’ of German drug dealer Hardenberg, the petty Berliner profiteer who buys the stolen silver cutlery, and Michael’s German friends demonstrates that the criminal underworld is by no means exclusively governed by Orientals. If anything, the boundaries in *Knallhart* are not culturally but geographically marked, and this with regard to different parts of the same town: Berlin-Zehlendorf tends to mean a life of luxury

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<sup>38</sup> See the omnipotence of death suddenly ending the lives of Turkish and German key characters, which forces the protagonists into a long-lasting quest for their own identity. Other universal topics are cross-cultural understanding, friendship, love and the fundamentalism of armed resistance, although the re-construction of the latter remains problematic. After all, the plot remains firmly embedded in official Turkish discourse within which the discussion of systematic torture in Turkey appears to be merely a product of the flourishing fantasies of German tourists and Kurdish fighters. While in the context of Turkish interests in joining the EU major improvements of the governmental human rights records have certainly been achieved, the clash between cinematic images of complete fairness up to harmonic relationships in Turkish jails (interrupted only by inner-Kurdish conflicts) and critical Amnesty International as well as Human Rights Watch Reports can hardly be overlooked.

<sup>39</sup> See Rings (2006) for an analysis of capitalist structures as mirrored in German *Lola Rennt* (Tykwer 1998) and French *Le fabuleux destin d’Amélie Poulain* (Jeunet 2001).

and without worries, while Berlin-Neukölln stands for a life associated with poverty, daily violence and criminality. However, the inhumanity does not start in Neukölln, where Erol's gang is waiting for new victims, but in Zehlendorf, where poor females pay for their temporary accommodation by becoming objects of sexual exploitation by rich German males. The latter might be slightly hidden behind the façade of a nice house or a partner search advert, but it is in the end as unscrupulous as the assaults by migrants on the streets of Neukölln. A particularly transcultural topic is the money-power link which is essential to the objectification and quantification of Michael and his mother Myriam, the former a victim of Erol's criminal greed and the latter of Klaus Peter's sexual exploitation. Also universal is the protagonists' search for basic dignity and respect, which collides with their transcultural interest in an easy way of life. Overall, the film by German director Buck confirms that transcultural tendencies are not limited to Turkish-German Migrant Cinema in the narrow sense but appear to be characteristic of contemporary films dealing with themes of migration and diaspora outside the ghetto-mainstream-fiction.

#### 4. Conclusion

As films like *Der schöne Tag* and *Auf der anderen Seite* confirm, transcultural tendencies have certainly made their way into contemporary Migrant Cinema. There is, however, no evidence that this correlates with a major decline in traditional concepts of culture on screen, be it as a consequence of large-scale migration or because of directors with migrant backgrounds gaining ground in German Cinema. In this respect, Göktürk's assumption is proven wrong by a number of Akin's films, including the acclaimed *kurz und schmerzlos*, *Im Juli* and *Solino*, as well as by most other productions assessed, ranging from Baser's *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* and *Abschied vom falschen Paradies* up to Sözen's *Winterblume* and Arslan's *Dealer*. An exploration of their cinematic context has revealed significant parallels to cultural representations by German directors and scriptwriters without migration backgrounds, from Fassbinder and Böhm to Holtz, which indicate that ethnic origin seems to play no major role.

Instead, there is evidence of substantial mutual enrichment that leads to structural continuities at formal and thematic level. One example is Baser's return to a combination of alienation and melodrama techniques for which key films of the New German Cinema have been exemplary, in particular Fassbinder's international breakthrough *Angst essen Seele auf*. Similarly, the portrayal of women with migrant backgrounds as double victims prevented from integration into German society by Turkish patriarchy and German bureaucracy appears to be a hot topic from Sanders-Brahms' *Shirins Hochzeit* up to Baser's *Abschied vom falschen Paradies*. The latter is also an example for the 'mise en scène' of successful intercultural communication as a consequence of Western-liberal initiatives opposing intolerant and inhuman traditional Turkish culture as represented in Böhm's *Yasemin* and other films of the 1980s. Such Orientalist perspectives are finally deconstructed in post-national films of the new millennium like Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* and partially also Buck's *Knallhart*. All these films are examples of both German and Turkish-German Cinema mirroring quite closely the socio-historical tendencies as portrayed in the mass media of their time, with paradigmatic changes in the middle of the 1970s (focus on integration after 'Anwerbestop' and oil crisis), the late 1990s ('Kanaken-Volkskulturkonzept' responding to ongoing Turkish-German outsider-status in unified Germany) and the new millennium (marking the beginning of more post-national tendencies in Germany and Turkey).

Although widely treated as a taboo, the delay in transcultural orientations could be regarded as a consequence of the linkage between new nationalism, racism and recession significantly shaping German politics in the first half of the 1990s, with severe economic problems continuing to dominate the second half. The re-erection of sharp socio-cultural boundaries between 'Ossis' and 'Wessis', which accompanied the economic failure of the German Unification project and culminated in never ending discussions about 'the wall in minds', might have overshadowed the Turkish-German topic for a long time but it has also left its mark on it, in particular with regard to an increase in German self-enclosure enhancing inverted portrayals of migrants' enclosure *vis-à-vis* their supposedly hostile German environment in contemporary Migrant Cinema. This tendency has certainly not vanished in the context of globally growing migration, the EU's Eastern expansion and Turkey's efforts in meeting the conditions for an accession state to the EU, but all this

might have also helped to open up a fragile space for transcultural representations competing with traditional concepts of culture in contemporary cinema.

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