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# THE SUBJECTS OF FATİH AKIN'S MELODRAMAS: A GENEALOGICAL READING THROUGH THE FILMS OF R.W. FASSBINDER, YILMAZ GÜNEY AND ATIF YILMAZ

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The Subjects of Fatih Akın's Melodramas: A Genealogical Reading Through the Films of  
R.W. Fassbinder, Yılmaz Güney and Atıf Yılmaz

A Dissertation Presented

by

EMİR BENLİ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

THE SUBJECTS OF FATİH AKIN'S MELODRAMAS: A GENEALOGICAL  
READING THROUGH THE FILMS OF R.W. FASSBINDER, YILMAZ GÜNEY  
AND ATIF YILMAZ

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Fatih Akın's feature films *Head-On* (2004) and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) resonated strongly with Turkish, German and Turkish German communities, albeit for diverse reasons, opening spaces for debate with regard to subjectivities that foreground their alterity and redefine readings of national identity. This dissertation addresses ways in which the melodramatic modality of Akın's films partake in such debates by presenting a dialogic genealogy of melodramas from Turkish, German and Turkish German contexts. An analysis of Fontane's novel "Effi Briest" and of R.W Fassbinder's *Fontane Effi Briest* and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*; Atıf Yılmaz's *O Beautiful Istanbul*; and Yılmaz Güney's *The Herd* suggests ways in which these texts and films inscribe different aspects of alterity, situating the subjects of these narratives in disruptive relationships with national and transnational identitarian discourses.

I examine these melodramatic narratives and the impasses they construct for their subjects together with the relationship of the films' uses of *mise-en-scène* to further complicate notions of ethnic and other modes of belonging. Divergent modes of distanciation and identification from different filmic traditions in Turkey and in Germany constitute a multivalent nexus through which I approach Akın's films. The ambivalence of the protagonists' affective states sets up another point of critical inquiry from which I utilize notions of performativity to critique interiorized and exteriorized readings of affect. I trace articulations of the realistic registers in these works, seeking the fissures where the melodramatic modality reveals itself to allow the directors to leave open the subjects' alterity. Finally, I link certain plot-lines to the "stranded objects" of Turkish and German national histories, including histories pertaining to the Nazi past in Germany, the erasure of the Ottoman cosmopolitan cultural nexus and the nomadic modes of existence of the Kurdish population in Turkey. I then posit ways in which these objects come to interact with transnationally determined subjectivities in the films of Akın. The dialogic genealogy I propose intervenes in current critical debates on melodrama as a trans-generic mode and on transnationality in cinema that look beyond paradigms of nationalism(s) towards a diverse articulation of subjectivities that resist reification by dominant identitarian discourses.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vi
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. DISRUPTING THE GERMAN NATIONAL NARRATIVE: FASSBINDER'S MELODRAMATIC OTHERS.....	24
A. Depictions of Alterity from Realism to Modernism: A Reading of Theodore Fontane's "Effi Briest" .....	24
B. Adaptation as Critique: Fassbinder's <i>Fontane Effi Briest</i> and <i>Ali: Fear Eats the Soul</i> .....	44
1. Responding to German History (of Cinema) .....	44
2. Adapting A Novel, An Author's Point of View and A Society's <i>Weltanschauung</i> : Fassbinder's <i>Fontane Effi Briest</i> .....	49
a. Cinematic Realism and National Cinemas .....	49
b. 19th Century Realist Novel and Fassbinder's Response .....	50
c. Fassbinder's Style: Departures from the Realist Register .....	52
d. Locating the Melodramatic in a Realist Costume Drama .....	61
3. The Conundrum of the First Generation <i>Gastarbeiter</i> : The Case of Fassbinder's <i>Ali: Fear Eats the Soul</i> .....	66
a. The Double Register of Identification/Distantiation.....	68
b. Kif-Kif: The Dialectics of Alterity and Victimhood in the Characters of Ali and Emmi.....	80
II. ETERNAL RECURRENCE OF THE SAME PATHOS: MELODRAMA AND DISPLACEMENT IN ATIF YILMAZ'S AND YILMAZ GÜNEY'S FILMS .....	88
A. Breaks and Continuities in <i>Yeşilçam</i> 's Melodramas: An Overview of Context, Content, and Form .....	88
B. Melodramatic Istanbul and Its Displaced Subjects: A Reading of Atif Yılmaz's <i>O Beautiful Istanbul</i> .....	91
C. Nomadic Kurdish Subjectivity at the Juncture of Realist and Melodramatic Modalities: Yılmaz Güney's <i>The Herd</i> and the Ideological Borders of the Turkish Nation State.....	110

1. Alternative Paths to <i>Yeşilçam</i> : The Neorealist Turn of the 1970s .....	110
2. Transitions between Realism and Melodrama: A Quest for the Moral Legibility of Alterity.....	112
3. A Marxist Perspective and Its Conundrums.....	128
III. ELUSIVE ALTERITY: TURKISH GERMAN SUBJECTS IN FATİH AKIN’S MELODRAMAS .....	132
A. A Critical Overview of Turkish German Studies .....	132
B. Representational and Affective Ambivalence in Fatih Akın's <i>Head-On</i> .....	139
1. The Narrative and Thematics of <i>Head-On</i> : Affinities and Divergences.....	139
2. The Precarious Representational Ground of the Musical Interludes.....	145
3. Affective States as Boundaries: A Reading of Emotions in Three Scenes.....	150
C. Lost and Found in the Transcultural Space of Fatih Akın's <i>Edge of Heaven</i> .....	164
1. Intergenerational Conflict in the Turkish German Domestic Sphere: The Case of Ali and Nejat .....	168
2. Intergenerational Conflict in the German Domestic Sphere: The Case of Susanne and Lotte .....	176
3. Transcultural Reconciliations in Istanbul - Delocalized Reconciliations in Trabzon .....	181
CONCLUSION.....	190
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	199

## INTRODUCTION

Following the success of his two feature films *Head-On* (Gegen Die Wand, 2004) and *The Edge of Heaven* (Auf der Anderen Seite, 2007) Fatih Akin became the most critically acclaimed and widely renowned Turkish German director. His success prompted scholars to examine his narratives in which “character portrayals not only extend the concept of Germanness [and Turkishness] ... but also destabilize a presumably authentic Turkish-German identity” (Esen 10). An alumnus of the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg with a degree in Visual Communication and an ardent cinephile, Akin has since his youth devoted himself to close examination of Turkish melodramas as well as masterpieces of world cinema, eventually educating himself to become a director capable of self-reflexive responses to the complex heritage of German and Turkish cinemas, while mastering the popular genre of melodrama.

Akin was already an established director when *Head-On*, his fourth feature film, won the Golden Bear Award, making him the first director from Germany in eighteen years to receive the award. The film won additional prizes including the National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Foreign Language Film and the Audience Award for Best Director at the European Film Awards in 2004, enjoying wide popular acclaim inscreenings in Turkish cinemas until late 2005. *Head-On* thus played an important role in precipitating public debate in Turkey about issues of importance to the status of second-generation Turkish Germans.

In 2007, *The Edge of Heaven* won best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival, going on to win the European Parliament’s first LUX prize, awarded to films “that go to

the heart of the European public debate”<sup>1</sup>. His achievements attracted the attention of film scholars and came to occupy an important place in academia. More articles in film journals and books have been published on his work than on that of any other Turkish German director. A recently published volume on Turkish German cinema, for instance, edited by Sabine Hake and Barbara Mennel, “Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium” devotes an entire chapter to Akin and his films.

Both *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven* resonated strongly with Turkish, German and Turkish German communities, albeit for diverse reasons, opening spaces for debate with regard to characters whose "alterity became a function of the ongoing redefinition of Germanness" (Hake, “German” 217) as well as Turkishness. Akin's narratives address larger social and political issues pertaining to the past and the future of Germany and Turkey while practicing a highly personal and poignant filmic language.

My project addresses the ways in which Akin's melodramatic modality responds to such questions<sup>2</sup>. Extending and amplifying the scope of single-director studies, this comparative dissertation places in dialogue a genealogy of melodramas from Turkish, German and Turkish German contexts, by reading each film in reference to the others.

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<sup>1</sup><<http://www.luxprize.eu/why-and-what>> Retrieved 9 November 2013.

<sup>2</sup> There have been different scholarly approaches to analyzing Akin's films to date, primarily from national and transnational scholarly circuits. Drawing primarily from scholarship from Germany and the US, Berna Gueneli, in her introduction to her dissertation, suggests that these could be brought under three categories in which his "films are read in relation to other Turkish German films, displaying some sort of genealogy and development within Turkish German cinema. Second, they are read against other ethnic and diasporic films within a German or European context. Third, in a social realist fashion, Akin's work is read against the backdrop of race and ethnicity problems or issues within Germany". (13) The affinities of Turkish German literature and film that draws upon Leslie Adelson's work on Turkish German identities in literature are provided by Adile Esen in her dissertation "Beyond 'In-Between,' Travels and Transformations in Contemporary Turkish German Literature and Film" (2009). Esen's and Gueneli's dissertations, as well as other scholarly pieces that followed, together with works on Akin's films from Turkey (Bayrakdar 2011, Karakoç 2009, Hake 2012, Ginsberg 2012, Yılmaz 2012) provide different points of departure for Akin's films. This scholarship, while grounding my discussion on Akin, does not, however, often consider the Turkish filmic nexus that constitutes my second chapter. This dissertation examines these debates more critically in the introduction to Chapter 3.

Much film scholarship with regard to Akın would suggest that *Head-On*, and also to a certain degree *Edge of Heaven*, adhere to melodramatic conventions. However, few if any studies adopt a genealogical approach in delineating the contours of these films *via* a critical conceptualization of the term melodrama. This project thus aims to address that lacuna by suggesting ways in which Akın's articulation of Turkish German subjects on screen can be read intertextually with genealogical threads of R.W Fassbinder's *Fontane Effi Briest*<sup>3</sup> and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*; Atıf Yılmaz's *O Beautiful Istanbul*; and Yılmaz Güney's *The Herd*<sup>4</sup>. In examining how these texts and films "encode otherness in melodramatic form" (Hake, "German" 217) and formulate their narratives within a melodramatic modality, I foreground a comparative film studies approach to the articulation of melodrama as a style (form), genre and modality<sup>5</sup>. In so doing, I provide commentaries on Fassbinder's work, *Yeşilçam*, and the relevant debates on Turkish German cinema. I then move on to close readings of scenes/sequences, drawing on multiple aspects of the films' episodic structuring of narrative, their *mise-en-scène*, and non-diegetic music.

I adhere to the evolving notion of filmic genres in framing my discussion around the genre of melodrama. In the past three decades, critical work around genre studies has shifted from "genre as 'containing' the possibilities of production and interpretation"

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<sup>3</sup> In conjunction, I also offer a close reading of Fontane's novel "Effi Briest".

<sup>4</sup> In looking at the adaptation of Fontane's "Effi Briest", a late 19<sup>th</sup> century realist text, to film by Fassbinder and in analyzing Güney's social-realist drama of *The Herd*, I consider the interactions of realism and melodrama. In all the other films under examination, I explore the ways in which melodramatic form is enhanced "by connecting with the signifiers of contemporary verisimilitude" (Gledhill et.al., "Reinventing" 238). The dialogic relationship between these two terms, realism and melodrama, remains a subtext throughout.

<sup>5</sup> From a standpoint of genre, *Fontane Effi Briest* and *The Herd* are not melodramas. To be sure, both Fassbinder and Güney have in their oeuvre films that are generic melodramas. It is, in part, in an effort to explicate how the melodramatic modality seeps into different ways of filmmaking that I have chosen these films.

(Neale 53, 55), to “genre as expansively generative, productive of more works” (Gledhill, “Gender” 19-20). Repeating genre conventions paradoxically created a space for directors to innovate within given forms where rather “than thinking of the rule-boundedness of genre, we are encouraged by this formulation to think of genre as rule-breaking” (20). As Jane Gaines argues in relation to the works of Linda Williams, Christine Gledhill and others, melodrama in this framework began to be “seen as a trans-generic mode” where “genre-as-limitation is reversed to genre as wonderfully and remarkably flexible (‘protean’) and highly productive” (19-20)<sup>6</sup>. Akin's and other directors' different ways of 'rule-breaking' within melodrama thus allow me to view these popular films as subversive.

Within this contemporary formulation of melodrama as a genre, rather than foregrounding it within a singular national, a European, or a global cultural framework, I analyze a transnational constellation of melodramas to map out Akin's work<sup>7</sup>. The intersections as well as the divergences between the national cultures of Germany and Turkey are articulated through close readings of the filmic texts of Yılmaz, Güney<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>6</sup> Though beyond the scope of this dissertation, another aspect of this formulation is analysis of how the European auteurs' rule-breaking “acceded to the political possibilities of ‘violation,’ ‘transgression,’ and ‘subversion’ of the form” (Gledhill, “Gender” 21) in a given genre. Through the affinities they have established between his work and New German Cinema, Akin was framed as an auteur early on in his career (Gueneli 3), though he rejected the claim later on in favor of considering himself to be a mere storyteller (Akin et.al., “Cinema” 30).

<sup>7</sup> Gueneli suggests that her work operates within a European context, while for example Ozkan Ezli's edited volume (2010) and Deniz Göktürk's article in the edited volume *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium* (2012) operate within a global cinema perspective in interpreting Akin's work. Here, I present a specific melodramatic genealogy that traverses national cinemas in communication with these geographical markers while resisting the temptation to prioritize one over the other. Rather I point to how examples from different national cinemas (Turkey and Germany) already maintain transcultural filmic discourses that later inform Akin's work.

<sup>8</sup> In an interview with the German newspaper *Die Welt* in 2011, Akin disclosed his pre-production process in making a documentary on Güney in collaboration with Güney's wife. In the same interview he calls Güney a unique artist, closest in his estimation to R.W. Fassbinder. (Rodek, Hans Georg, “Fatih Akin will

Fassbinder to show how these directors work within a cinematic space that leaves open aspects of alterity their subjects manifest in various geographical and temporal contexts. Following Randall Halle's critique of understanding transnationalism as supranationalism where only what are understood to be aspects of national cultures are brought together, I situate my points of inquiry in other forms of social organization as well, including "the subcultural, minoritarian, ethnic, migrant, diasporic, exiled, displaced, relocated, nongovernmental" (Halle 22) as they are given in various melodramatic narratives.

In writing about Fassbinder, Thomas Elsaesser claims that the "German director found himself at the confluence of three impossible yet productive 'film languages' - Hollywood, the UFA style, and the European auteur cinema- on the basis of which he ultimately developed his own style" (Peucker 48). By studying Fassbinder's work together with films from Turkey, I locate a similar productive confluence between Hollywood, *Yeşilçam* and New German Cinema in Akin's films. My aim, however, is not to treat Turkish German cinema and Akin's role in it as a synthesis between German and Turkish filmmaking practices, but rather to discuss how these cinemas already contain subversive, disruptive articulations of alterity, which Akin adopts in his own filmic project. Without attempting to define a Turkish German identity through the lens of Akin as an auteur, I suggest that this confluence allows him to challenge attempts at reifying or solidifying claims to identity.

Within the trajectory of films deemed Turkish German and their ensuing critical reception lies a certain dichotomy, as articulated by Sabine Hake:

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Yilmaz Güneys Leben verfilmen" <<http://www.welt.de/kultur/kino/article13383668/Fatih-Akin-will-Yilmaz-Gueneys-Leben-verfilmen.html>> 20 May 2011. 10 October 2013).

On the one hand, these new kinds of films are part of a cinema of border crossings that celebrates identities as hybrid, provisional, and contingent and that presents the process of transculturation and hybridization as transgressive and potentially subversive. On the other, they contribute to a discourse of identity that, even in its anti-essentialist rhetoric, often uses identity as a fixed category through which to distinguish self and other, create a sense of community, and make sense of shared experiences of exclusion and discrimination. (Hake, "German" 216)

This acknowledgement leaves in its wake a question: how can a certain group of films carry this contradictory transgressive quality while at the same time enacting an identitarian discourse, albeit an anti-essentialist one? It is in responding to this and other relevant questions that I opt for an analysis of Akin's films through the framework of melodrama studies. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith posits that it is melodrama's ideological failure that "it cannot accommodate its problems either in a real present or an ideal future, but lays them open in their contradictoriness" (Landy 273). In the case of Akin and the genealogy I propose for his films, I interpret this aspect of melodrama not as a shortcoming, but instead as an opportunity in which certain subjectivities' alterities remain open, enacting the abovementioned transgressive gesture. Meanwhile, I also posit that Akin provides a strong rhetoric of belonging and *heimat* albeit in ambivalent ways and not towards specific national cultures. To investigate these two threads, a key concept I utilize throughout is the ambivalent affective states of the protagonists of the films. I trace how the intricate plot-lines in each film respond to certain "stranded objects" of Turkish and German national histories. Finally, I focus on the films'



particular utilization of their mise-en-scène to communicate questions of identity and difference.

Following my analysis of these films through the abovementioned points of departure, I conclude with a discussion of the notion of ‘stranded objects’ and its relationship to alterity in regards to national, and other, homogenizing identity discourses. Both Thomas Elsaesser’s work on Fassbinder’s oeuvre (1996) and Carol Flynn’s study on New German Cinema and Music (2005) deploy this concept in their discussions of how films contribute to the postwar ‘mourning-work’ of the German nation. I point to similar catastrophic events throughout Turkey’s national history, focusing on the episodes of history that the films analyzed in Chapter 2 maintain as subtexts. *O Beautiful Istanbul* responds, in a nostalgic register, to how the city of Istanbul and its cosmopolitan heritage has been effaced by national narratives of Turkishness. *The Herd* articulates the absence of the most radical other in this same national narrative, namely of Kurdish nomads. Even though Akin is considered to be responding to New German Cinema through his films, critical insight into how he specifically engages with these stranded objects is excluded from previous studies. In mapping these films through stranded objects of their respective national histories, my genealogical approach aims to delineate fluid notions of belonging and of home as they remain in constant communication with these histories.

To further respond to the above mentioned dichotomy in Turkish German cinema, this project occupies the interstices of the methodological intersection between several area studies (German, Turkish and Turkish German Studies), interrogating the construction and disruption of identitarian discourses. Even though a comparative perspective on aspects of culture is becoming more prevalent in these fields, I agree with

Randall Halle that these gestures rely "on models of comparativity based in national traditions" (10). By presenting a genealogy of melodramas that are already situated in complex transnational histories as the locus of my analysis, I seek to challenge this reliance on national traditions and develop a level of comparativity that responds to the complex level of social organization that these films depict through "subcultures, micropolitical associations, ethnic migrant identities, midlevel economic partnering, sexual communities, and other "lower order" distinctive societies" (Halle 185). Additionally, film studies methodology and theory enables me to primarily locate these questions in the films' utilization of melodrama as a genre and a modality. Finally, the field of comparative literature, in linking national and transnational filmic as well as literary texts, allows me to effectively inquire into questions that operate across these boundaries through different media where localized discourses are brought in alignment with national and transnational ones.

In his films, Akın references a multiplicity of filmmaking practices<sup>9</sup> (Ross 187). Underlining the ways in which his films deploy elements from within the genealogy<sup>10</sup>, I not only update our framing of certain Turkish German cultural products but also

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<sup>9</sup> In terms of film styles' potential to maintain a subversive quality on its own, Caryll Flinn in her "The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style" asserts that "In the early twenty-first century, we have come a long way from believing that form and style determine a text's ideological position... [and] that self-conscious style did not necessarily produce progressive texts... Reflexive style today is as much tied to product promotion and marketing as anything else ... This is not to say that style can no longer be politically engaged;... But the effects that style produces, ideological or otherwise, can be neither predicted nor assumed" (8). In this ambivalent framework it becomes hard to adhere a transgressive motive to films in question in this dissertation. Yet mine is also an attempt to participate in this gesture by responding not only to film form but also to representational strategies, to breaking of genre codes as well as to various aspects of form. Rather than identifying a radical agenda, I find it politically relevant to present readings of each film that show how they leave aspects of alterity open for their protagonists.

<sup>10</sup> I utilize the term genealogy keeping in mind that it is often understood to be designating a model that work in a linear fashion where the younger generations' work harbors aspects of the older. To provide a more dialogic rendering of the term, I present the genealogical relationship of the films and the novel from my first two chapters to my analysis of Akın's work intertextually.

illustrate ways in which Fassbinder, Güney and Yılmaz's films can be read anew. This mapping out operates in both a linear fashion and a dialogic manner. My dissertation thus aims to contribute a perspective beyond merely pointing to stylistic affinities, shared actors or filmic allusions; I utilize a genealogy of melodramatic modalities to this end.

The articulation of a melodramatic modality within melodrama studies coincides with the expansion of the term from designating genre conventions and stylistic choices to referring to a broader set of practices at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There have been varying attempts at identifying what the term designates. From such efforts emerged certain key elements. One example is Linda Williams' assertion that the melodramatic modality moves its audience on an affective level "to pathos for protagonists beset by forces more powerful than they and who are perceived as victims" (Browne 42). More importantly for our purposes, on the level of moral imperatives that clash over the protagonists' lives, is that the modality provides, as Thomas Elsaesser contends, "a means of aesthetically organizing the experiences of the city and life under capitalism" (Gledhill, "Reinventing" 232). This is an integral component particularly of those films analyzed in Chapter 2 on Turkish cinema wherein urban space with its novel moral configurations articulates melodramatic content. This experience of the urban, in its various cosmopolitan as well as subcultural manifestations, also becomes a focus of my analysis on Akin's films, as his protagonists move between urban spaces in Germany and Istanbul. Through their mobility, they respond to different moral imperatives communicated *via* melodramatic narratives.

The notion of 'modality' is also central to identifying the thread that binds the films in the first and second chapters along with my reading of Akin's films through the

genealogical model, as modality "defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades and across national cultures" (Gledhill, "Reinventing" 229). This genealogical model, in fact, tests Gledhill's suggestion to understand how modality operates transnationally and transculturally across a diverse group of subjectivities through the films under scrutiny.

A common tendency in melodrama studies is to highlight the genre's potential in uncovering encounters with modernity<sup>11</sup>. More specifically, melodrama is presented as "...an aesthetic form that emerges in transitional periods, negotiating the dislocating traumas of class and gender struggle, answering the doubts and aporias consequent on secularization and the breakdown of the 'traditional sacred' understood as constituting the modern" (Gledhill, "Gender" 162). In addition to class and gender, the protagonists' struggles and negotiations of what it means to be modern also traverse ethno-cultural markers in all the films I analyze in this dissertation. These negotiations, however, take multiple forms that define the protagonists and their reactions in relation to their cultural backgrounds and often surface in ambivalent ways. In *Effi Briest*, Effi's affair with a young lieutenant prompts reactions from her husband and her family who are bound by traditional German conceptions of gender and honor, and by the transformation of such notions by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *O Beautiful Istanbul*, the male protagonist Haşmet's struggles with the changing face of Istanbul enact a similar negotiation. *The Herd*, which pivots around the migration of a nomadic Kurdish clan to Turkey's capital, explores a different set of questions that ensue from a clash between rural and urban

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<sup>11</sup> This point was articulated as early as the 1970s (Brooks 1976), and more recently in Ben Singer (2001) and in Christine Gledhill's work (2000). It retains its significance in reading different melodramatic works from different cultural contexts as attested by several chapters in Christine Gledhill's edited volume "Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas" (2012) that utilize this entry point for analyzing transnational films.

values resulting from physical displacement. The struggles of first-generation immigrants in *Fear Eats the Soul* suggest ways in which the encounter with modernity is further updated in the specific context of second generation Turkish German subjectivities in Akin's work. I frame Akin's intent on utilizing melodrama in his Turkish German narratives not simply as pre-modern Turkish subjectivities' struggles in modern Germany. Instead, I identify his project as one that treats a complex web of exchanges between different ethnic and cultural markers through which his protagonists challenge and re-appropriate aspects of modernity through specific positionalities.

Within the narratives analyzed here, modernity often surfaces as the homogenizing boundary through which various subjectivities pass. This passage, in turn, constitutes melodramatic impasses in which the moral order is re-negotiated. This, I contend, is one of the elements of the melodramatic modality that the films under examination share in various filmic ways. An inescapable aspect of this negotiation, and also often the melodramatic motor of these narratives, is the pathos that ensues from the audiences' anticipation of how the subjects will survive this passage. Pathos is thus "intensified by the misrecognition of a sympathetic protagonist because the audience has privileged knowledge of the 'true' situation" (Browne 49). Fassbinder's interplay between levels of audience identification and distantiation<sup>12</sup> manipulates this pathos, a trait that Akin will also adopt for his own films. This interplay enables both the protagonists and the audience to question the moral imperatives at issue in this passage.

Added to the layer of emotions provoked by melodrama is the layer of affective states of the protagonists, another point of departure in this dissertation. Alongside an

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<sup>12</sup> I present this approach in more detail in the introduction to both Fassbinder films analyzed throughout the first chapter, outlining his positioning between Douglas Sirk and Bertolt Brecht.

analysis of internal affective states, I read emotions as "intertwined with subjectivity, and 'excessive,' melancholic acts are attempts to negotiate identity and structure relationships to other people through objects, props, and sounds" (Flinn 69). I frame such gestures negotiating identity through the lens of performativity with an anti-essentialist bias that shows how protagonists perform such identities. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's work (2004) I also argue that emotions become the surface through which an interplay between identity/difference is enacted. Finally, emotions become a pivot in my analysis within a genealogical framework, following Richard Dyer's work on pastiche (2006) as well as on contemporary melodrama studies, where the emotions invoked in Akin's films are read as "shared historical re feeling, only enhanced by anticipation of echo and imitation" (Gledhill "Gender" 20), albeit in varying manners in different cultural contexts. I attempt a reading of these layers through recourse to the genealogy I present, offering instances of intertextual references that Akin draws on from the films discussed in my first two chapters. I frame certain emotive states in *Head-On* and *Edge of Heaven* that the protagonists find themselves in as filmically mediated, adding a layer of referentiality that complicates identitarian discourses within these gestures of echo and imitation.

In her chapter titled, "Rethinking Genre", Christine Gledhill comments on the relationship between filmic representations and moral imperatives that define readers and spectators, claiming that "[t]he questions how to live, who is justified, who are innocent, where is villainy at work now, and what drives it are, as Linda Williams (Browne 1998) has forcefully argued, those which the modality of melodrama organises in the material at its disposal". This, she suggests, allows these questions to "be embodied, personified, and enacted in different social and gendered arenas and historical periods" (Gledhill,

“Reinventing” 234). Through this comparative approach, my dissertation intends to contribute to multiple national film discourses as well as to the field of transnational cinema and melodrama studies. By bridging examples from Turkish cinema and Fassbinder's oeuvre that disrupt national narratives of identity with Akin's films, I ponder ways in which dialogic reading within these matrices can render the former relevant in the framework of transnational films of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More specifically, I explicate elements interpreted as self-reflexive gestures and as genre conventions in Turkish cinema and in Fassbinder's work and their potential for collective relevance in understanding Akin's films' politics of representation. Building on the scholarly work of Turkish, German and Turkish German film studies, the following chapters underline different social and gendered arenas and historical periods to narrate the filmic form and its potential operations that of alterity, opening medley of subjectivities that other discourses often reify into static identities.

In Chapter 1, “Disrupting the German National Narrative: Fassbinder's Melodramatic Others”, I explore Fassbinder's melodramas as a subversive site. His melodramas critique notions related to German identity and explore the meaning of such notions in the aftermath World War II. I start with a close reading of Fontane's novel “Effi Briest”, focusing on his articulation of alterity within the context of class<sup>13</sup>, gender<sup>14</sup>, and ethnicity<sup>15</sup>. The narrative voice in the novel, the spaces the characters

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<sup>13</sup>Baron von Innstetten's strict adherence to 'German' values of discipline, honor and loyalty to the government as an upper-middle class civil servant.

<sup>14</sup> Effi Briest's struggles throughout the novel between these values and her persona as a *Natur-kind*.

<sup>15</sup>The figure of the ghost of the Chinaman and the 'enchanted' spaces outside the urban spheres.

traverse, and the ways in which the domestic space becomes an agent of oppression constitute other entry points.

I underline Fontane's entrapment of his main protagonist Effi Briest in a dichotomy between the pursuit of desire and the socialization of the individual to the norms and morals of society. I argue that Effi and Innstetten's adherence to societal norms erode. Ultimately, all protagonists either remain dissatisfied at the end of their lives (Effi and Crampas) or continue to live in a dull, soulless manner (Innstetten and the von Briests), conveying a sense of alienation. I explore ways in which the narrative maintains a realistic register throughout with an emotive coil that surfaces in melodramatic fashion in the form of brief outbursts. I concur with Michael Minden that the novel fails to fulfill its critical potential with regard to such modes of alienation, "lacking the language or stylistic means either fully to recognize or address its own alienation" (23). I interpret the adaptation by Fassbinder as a response to this shortcoming. By deploying a melodramatic modality, Fassbinder transforms Fontane's realistic text into a more complex interplay between narrative and cinematographic innovations.

I begin my analysis of Fassbinder's adaptation as well as my reading of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* by situating his work within two strands of filmmaking. First is the intra-European tradition of Modernist filmmaking, underlined by self-reflexivity and an anti-illusionist cinematography deemed Brechtian. The second tradition comprises Fassbinder's reading of the works of Douglas Sirk, the Hamburg-born Hollywood director, and culminates in his attempts "to make commercially successful films with wide audience appeal without compromising a subversive, 'European' sensibility and an



idiosyncratic, personal style" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 77). I consider how Fassbinder's film style instantiates his project of documenting and intervening in the narrative of German national history. More specifically, I consider this project with reference to Fassbinder's depiction of alterity; his insights on German history and contemporary society, by focusing on its others as represented in both films.

I also examine his approach to uncover the possibility of a (political) position from which to read and represent such modes of alterity to outline a cinematic paradigm for reading Fatih Akin's films, albeit from within a discussion of transnational histories and identities. The ways in which Fassbinder refrains from establishing a fixed political position from which to understand different victim-positions becomes important in articulating modes of alterity without reifying them into set identities or judging them on moral grounds.

The chapter on Fassbinder's adaptation is presented under four subheadings. These segments entail the relationship between cinematic realism and national cinemas, Fassbinder's response to the dynamics of 19<sup>th</sup> century German novel, an assessment of his stylistic choices to present his departures from the realist register, and the melodramatic modality in his costume drama. How this repurposing of realist material adapts the moral dilemmas of the novel into post-war Germany's normative world becomes key to my argument. Close readings of interior shots, attention to framing and other aspects of mise-en-scène link Fassbinder's evocation of Effi and Innstetten's struggles within the German society. I conclude with the film's transgressive dénouement through which Effi realizes the oppressive nature of being German. Transgression, in this sense, may be possible and even necessary. Nonetheless, it coerces the protagonist to a tragic end pointing to a

utopian hope to which Fassbinder adheres, rather than asserting from a point of superior knowledge to overcome this oppression.

Next, I concentrate on elements in Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* that directly inform Akin's oeuvre to explicate Fassbinder's visual and aural strategies in representing the condition of the first-generation immigrant worker Ali, who marries an older German working-class woman. Focusing on Fassbinder's use of color, framing and identification/distantiation techniques, which enable him to articulate a melodramatic immigrant subject and his wife, I explore his use of 'inter-ethnic marriage' and its repercussions in the context of German nation-building narratives.

I analyze the relationship between alterity and victimhood through a complex web of power relations including oppression in interpersonal relationships, class perspectives, and emotional interiority. Fassbinder's representations of minorities on screen in the context of post-World War II West Germany complicate the relationship between images and ideology in two ways; first, the depiction of cultural difference through a German director's lens on Germany's others; and second, the demonstration of emotional, interior life through the axis of performativity. The chapter concludes with an exploration of Fassbinder's ideological pedagogy and his critique on German democracy and liberal identity politics.

In Chapter 2, "Eternal Recurrence of the Same Pathos: Melodrama and Displacement in Atif Yılmaz's<sup>16</sup> and Yılmaz Güney's<sup>17</sup> Films," I provide a close reading

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<sup>16</sup> Atif Yılmaz remains to this day the most prolific filmmaker in Turkish cinema, having worked in the industry for over 50 years. Having directed over 120 films, he helped generations of filmmakers from Turkey in various ways: as a mentor during his productions and by providing financial assistance. He is known for his capacity to adapt to the changing political climate of Turkey, overcoming censorship issues and retaining his privilege to make films during military coups and regime changes.

of the films of the two most prominent directors of Turkish cinema. The chapter commences with an overview of the cultural and political nexus of *Yeşilçam*, the name collectively given to films produced in Turkey between the 1940s until its demise in the late 1980s. I summarize key points on the construction of Turkishness with the advent of the Turkish Republic in 1923. I then challenge film scholars' classification of these films' subjects as being caught between East and West. I illustrate how this configuration obscures a constellation of figures situated outside the national narratives of identity construction and the benevolent and patriarchal gaze of its ideological nexus.

Within this context, I first consider Atıf Yılmaz's urban melodrama, *O Beautiful Istanbul*, the story of Ayşe who moves to Istanbul from her village, aspiring to become a film actress. Once in Istanbul, she finds a boyfriend/manager/director who has different ideas about how she should use her good looks and talent. One day, Ayşe meets Haşmet, a grumpy, weary street photographer from a good family gone bankrupt. Haşmet seeks to "save her" and link her to an art predicated upon Ottoman aesthetics. Meanwhile, Ayşe insists on becoming an actress at all costs. The film renders legible several conflicting moral orders through its identification and distanciation techniques, and by depicting a melodramatic relationship between its protagonists, Ayşe and Haşmet.

The couple's narrative is situated within a newly emerging and disruptive context of capitalist exchange in Istanbul in the mid-1960s. This context harbors a distinct, localized modality and a history comprising of *mahalle* [the neighborhood], nostalgia and

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<sup>17</sup>Yılmaz Güney's career as an actor began thanks to Atıf Yılmaz who provided him with a screen persona that made him the most popular anti-hero in Turkish cinema. He began his career behind the camera as a screenwriter, becoming assistant director in Atıf Yılmaz's films in the early 1960s, eventually leading him to win the first Palme d'Or awarded to a film from Turkey in 1982 for his film "The Wall". Until his death in 1984, he remained one of the few directors known outside of Turkey both as a filmmaker and as a political figure. While Atıf Yılmaz's works are primarily melodramas, Güney is known as a political filmmaker, often compared to Greek film director Costa Gavras who was also a close friend of Güney's. Interestingly, both Yılmaz and Güney are of Kurdish origin.

the ensuing melancholia of its inhabitants. The clash between a cosmopolitan Istanbulite ethics/aesthetics and a newly emerging capitalist one bound to a homogenous, patriarchal Turkishness provides the melodramatic mode of the film. I locate this modality in the film's utilization of different genres of music, both diegetically and non-diegetically, as well as in its narrative impasses. The film consists of five episodes of the couple uniting/re-uniting and breaking up. Each episode entails elements that enable the protagonists to realize that their desires are predicated upon "faulty morals". Yet they fail to break the cycles of poverty and melancholia. I conclude by asserting that the ending, similar to that of Fassbinder, remains open. It points to a utopian moment of reconciliation of competing strands of Turkish identity and its others, grounded on the couple's love for one another and the historically constituted space of Istanbul.

Prior to my analysis of *The Herd*, I provide a brief outline of the neo-realist turn in *Yeşilçam* influenced by Italian neo-realism, and more importantly, by the rise of leftist ideals in Turkey. My analysis of *The Herd*<sup>18</sup> constitutes another example of the impact of the melodramatic modality in a realist film, albeit within a different national and filmic background. In the concurrent use of these modalities, I identify a tripartite narrative, which commences in Pervari, in southeastern Anatolia, where the Kurdish clan travels in nomadic cycles with its sheep. A journey by train from the outermost periphery of the Turkish nation to its center ensues. The narrative ends with its tragic conclusion in the nation's capital. The family is embroiled in a blood feud with a neighboring clan and is forced to auction off its sheep in Ankara by its tyrannical patriarch. Encountering

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<sup>18</sup> Scripted by Yılmaz Güney when he was in prison due to politically motivated criminal charges, *The Herd* (1978) was directed by the assistant director of *O Beautiful Istanbul*, Zeki Ökten. The film is regarded as a collaboration between these two directors. For the purposes of establishing Akın's connection to Güney, that he articulates as evidenced in the above footnote, I opt to use Güney's name throughout.

misfortune and corruption at every turn on the journey, when they finally reach their destination, the family is engulfed and betrayed by a rapidly changing modern state.

The realism infused with documentary footage and montage sequences of urban and rural landscapes is often offset by a poetics of loss depicting the family's migration within Turkey. Güney's film often infuses a melodramatic sensibility into its characters' development. This sensibility surfaces particularly in moments of loss figured in the love relationship between the family's eldest son, Şivan and his wife Berivan, and in Hamo's encounters with modernity in urban settings. My argument is founded on close readings of the sequences in which I contend that erosion of familial ties is attached to this move to a modern locality. The hierarchic depiction of victims in the realist register places Berivan at the bottom as a Kurdish woman of nomadic heritage. While through her heritage, she contends with the core elements of Turkishness, the melodramatic modality and the unfolding events complicate this hierarchy to reveal a web of oppression that affects each member of the Kurdish clan. Honor, father-son relationships, and familial ties all come under attack with the thrust of modernity and the pressures to conform to its demands to comply with a homogenous Turkish identity.

In the final part, I argue that the film's Marxist stance towards a different societal vision reveals a conundrum. In asserting a working-class identity on the migrant populations of different backgrounds, the film mirrors the national project of the Turkish Republic that promotes a singular national identity, albeit a different, liberal and capitalist one. Nevertheless, just as *O Beautiful Istanbul* suggests an indeterminate subjectivity articulated in a utopian moment and promulgates a memory of Istanbul and the absences that this memory elicits, *The Herd* presents yet another utopian moment framed by the

absence of the disappearing subjectivities of Kurdish identity, though gesturing towards a more solid subjectivity based on class struggle.

Chapter 3, "Elusive Alterity: Turkish German Subjects in Fatih Akın's Melodramas," begins with a critical overview of the Turkish German studies literature to detail its responses to Turkish German subjects. "Living between Turkish and German cultural realms in what we see to be 'transitional' states of mobility, change, and transformation" (Esen 24), the protagonists of Akın's films figure as an important site for locating these debates. I argue that Akın's unique interpretation of the transnational/transcultural melodramatic mode places his films in tension with the debates on multiculturalism and hybridity in Germany while effectively situating his protagonists outside the framework of victimhood. My analysis references the genealogy outlined in the preceding two chapters in reading these films as transcultural/transnational, maintaining a comparative approach throughout. I follow the critique of multiculturalism, informed by Adelson's work (2005), and maintain a critical distance to narratives articulating Turkish German subjectivities as caught between two national/ethnic cultures. I further consider the dangers, as outlined by Göktürk, of adopting a celebratory triumphalism with regard to the "pleasures of hybridity" (Ross 180) to understand how his films refrain from "ethnic essentialism, offering more individualized and differentiated portrayals of the 'other'" (Berghahn, "Introduction" 7).

I frame my reading of Akın's *Head-On* by foregrounding the representational and affective ambivalences that surface upon close readings. The film follows two Turkish Germans who meet in a mental institution near Hamburg. Both are confined after suicide

attempts: Sibel, due to her oppressive family, and Cahit, after the death of the love of his life. Sibel asks Cahit to marry her to free herself from her family's oppression. She assures Cahit that this is to be a fake marriage and that both will maintain their autonomy, especially in sexual affairs. Cahit consents, and the film's episodic structure begins to unfold. The couple's desire for freedom from society's constraints, as defined for Turkish Germans, manifests itself as a desire for one another. Similar to the narratives of Ayşe and Haşmet of *O Beautiful Istanbul*, and Emmi and Ali in *Fear Eats the Soul*, Sibel and Cahit experience melodramatic impasses that raise the challenge of attaining selfhood while retaining their difference, in tension with fixed identitarian discourses. Throughout this segment I follow the narrative to reveal affinities to the genealogy I outline primarily in terms of the *mise-en-scène*, the play between audience identification and distantiation.

I then move to close readings of the musical interludes that divide the film into five episodes. My analysis points toward the impossibility of claiming a set representational ground for interludes. I first critique a position that regards them as enacting a 'Turkish' space, going on to critically engage with a conception of the director as a repository for enacting discourses of identity.

I then present three readings of affective states as boundaries that allow the protagonists to manifest their alterity. I first seek a subjective, interiorized display of emotions in the opening sequence with Cahit, in tandem with Akın's distinct soundtrack that accompanies and comments on his state of mind. Next, I seek the markers of emotions as a shared feeling in the sequence during which Sibel and Cahit share a traditional dinner. Finally, I present their last encounter together in the film in Istanbul in a hotel room as the third figurations of emotions in the film, viewing emotions as the

surface or boundary through which "I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (Ahmed 10). I contend that the film's melodramatic core that relies on the love between Sibel and Cahit gestures toward how the relationship between Cahit and Sibel (contact with others) and its trajectory of 'fake', 'real' and 'absent' love between the couple allow them to position themselves within their worlds, concluding by suggesting that they overcome modes of identification through ethnic or national ties, grounding their subjectivities in a fluid manner.

Akın's *Edge of Heaven* maintains a complex narrative structure in which first- and second-generation Turkish German, Turkish and German protagonists' tales intersect. The film pivots around three families: Yeter (first generation Turkish German, born in Turkey) and her daughter, Ayten (born in Turkey and remains in Turkey until the age of 20); Susanne's German family, played by Hanna Schygulla, and her daughter Lotte; and Ali, played by Tuncel Kurtiz who plays the patriarch Ramo in *The Herd*, (first generation Turkish German born in the northeastern Anatolian city of Trabzon), and his son Nejat (second generation Turkish German born in Germany). In each, either a mother or father figure is absent. These families separate and reunite in various configurations as certain protagonists become surrogate family figures while Yeter and Lotte die accidentally. In this polyphony of exchanges and transformations, I seek melodramatic tropes such as intergenerational conflicts between Ali and Nejat, and Susanne and Lotte, dissolving domestic spheres that persist throughout that reveal ruptures within the construction of identities.

In the final segment, I trace familial reconciliations in Istanbul between Ali, Susanne and Ayten as a transcultural one and between Ali and Nejat as delocalized one in



Trabzon, identifying how domestic tropes of melodrama are transformed into various discourses of belonging. I situate my final delineation of opening aspects of alterity in the ways in which Akin configures these acts of reconciliation in an interplay of *heimat* and cosmopolitan sensibilities.

## CHAPTER I

### DISRUPTING THE GERMAN NATIONAL NARRATIVE: FASSBINDER'S MELODRAMATIC OTHERS

#### A. Depictions of Alterity from Realism to Modernism: A Reading of Theodore Fontane's "Effi Briest"

This chapter begins with an analysis of Theodore Fontane's 1898 novel *Effi Briest* and is followed by a close reading of the novel's 1970 adaptation to screen by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Even though Fontane's novel, a canonical piece of German literature, has been grouped with the realist novels of late 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Effi Briest* was written at a juncture in German literary history when the move from realism to modernism had already begun. It is within this transition that I will first seek to locate the ways in which the social fabric, realized here in a realistic register, is constitutive of Fontane's novel; second, focus on the ways in which the passage towards modernism complicates the characters, in order to reveal cracks and fissures in both the aforementioned social fabric of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany as well as in Fontane's point of view; and third, examine how Fontane articulates aspects of alterity with regard to the contexts of class, gender, and ethnicity in the belief that tracing these lines of inquiry brings us closer to Fassbinder's interpretation of this novel. A closer look at Fassbinder's adaptation now follows.

Fontane's most popular novel has received much critical attention. Building on this scholarship, my analysis locates aspects of the narrative that Fassbinder adapted to his own filmic project while examining the novel's main protagonists and spaces to delineate representations of alterity articulated by the patriarchal German bourgeoisie. Among these are the main protagonist, Effi Briest, and the Chinaman, the ghost that

haunts their house, and Baron von Innstetten, Effi's husband who in defining the norm for the German bourgeoisie, stands in contradistinction to the other main characters.

My focus on dualities between center and periphery of late 19<sup>th</sup> century German social life includes the places that Effi and her husband Baron von Innstetten travel to and inhabit throughout the novel, most importantly the imaginary towns of Kessin, of Innstetten's post, and Hohen-Cremmen, of Effi's family. In tandem with these characters and places, I locate the constellation of themes and motifs that the novel as well as the adaptation centralizes, particularly those identified with Effi and more broadly women's place in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussia, as well as the domestic sphere with its Germanic norms, the novel's view of adultery and the honor code of the era. Finally, this chapter considers the motif of the Chinaman which Fontane himself called the "pivot" [Drehpunkt] of *Effi Briest* (Baker 22); a trope through which we can articulate the ways in which the novel deals with aspects of otherness in the context of patriarchal and colonial German culture at the time. The analysis concludes by examining ways in which the novel is situated within the canon of realist literature, problematizing its formal and ideological qualities and the deeper layers of Fassbinder's adaptation of the text, the affinities between Fontane's particular realism and Fassbinder's own conception of melodrama.

The narrative voice in the novel, constant in tone and engagement, remains a strong stylistic element throughout, affording glimpses of the author's decisions as well as the worldview he at once affirms and disavows. This element Fassbinder takes great care to acknowledge, as indicated by the film's title, *Fontane Effi Briest*<sup>19</sup>. Fontane's narrator is not omniscient:

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<sup>19</sup> Elka Siegel in her chapter "A Novel Film" further comments on Fassbinder's decision to entitle his films *Fontane Effi Briest* as a way of "showing the place and attitude of the literary author" (Peucker 377) to

[he] narrates from outside, he tells us what can be seen and heard, he does not tell us what cannot, or what it would be improper to see or hear. He does not dwell on sensation, he creates states and moods, attitudes, complex relationships between socially highly defined people, who are not in the habit of verbalising their deepest feelings. (Minden 19)

Assessing the formal qualities of this voice throughout Chapter 1 clarifies Fassbinder's adaptation and its relation to emotions, as voice serves as a primary gateway to understanding the protagonists' emotive states.

The structure of Effi's narrative, and her brief affair with a charming soldier with the hope of escaping from her stifling marriage to a much older man consists of four parts in three different locations, beginning and ending in Hohen-Cremmen. This circular movement forms one of the aims of this chapter, namely to ascertain which thematic and formal elements return full circle with Effi's narrative and which values and norms are reaffirmed through this structuring. Fontane shares with Fassbinder a love for their protagonists. Apart from the social and other critical modalities, both author and director harbor a distinct affinity with their individual characters (although not necessarily with their social milieu); this devotion is perhaps best exemplified in Fontane's approach to his protagonist, Effi<sup>20</sup>.

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comment not only on Effi's condition but also on Fontane's and his own in regards to German society. How Fassbinder engages with the narrative perspective rather than only with the narrative itself becomes one of the entry points for my analysis as well as how the adaptation comments on the novel's realist framework, a point I return to at the end of this chapter.

<sup>20</sup>Fontane's and Fassbinder's approaches to the domestic sphere of a Prussian familial setting and consequently Effi's role in this sphere differ significantly. Fontane affirms, to a larger extent, the familial sphere while Fassbinder attempts to divert this understanding to reveal how it could be understood as one of the main sources of conflict and domination that underwrites German society.

We meet Effi while she is embroidering with her mother in the quiet, aristocratic family home in Hohen-Cremmen, thus engaged in the strictly gendered domestic training for ladies of aristocratic upbringing, motivated to make a good marriage. Initially, although no words are exchanged, the narrator is clear about Effi's impatience with such activity, thereby contrasting social expectation and personal preference, an opposition maintained throughout the novel: "Grace and careless abandon were combined in everything she did, while her laughing brown eyes revealed much good sense, a great zest for life and kindness of heart" (Fontane 6). This chapter's abundant motifs, symbols, and foreshadowing of the events thus establish a microcosm of each implicit meaning and norm, contradictions Fontane articulates as the narrative unfolds, beginning with Effi's portrayal as a *Natur-kind*, a girl full of vitality. The first figure Fontane brings forth to counterbalance Effi's spontaneity is her mother, who exclaims when her daughter hugs her rather violently: "Not so wild Effi, not so passionate. It always worries me when I see you like this" (6). A visit from three friends from town rescues Effi from partaking in the boring daily activity that her mother ordains, and their small-town conversation offers a further indication of Effi's untamed character.

This idyllic setting is interrupted by Baron von Innstetten's arrival, asking for Effi's hand in marriage. Even though the topic of marriage has been a constant staple among the girls for some time, Effi is nevertheless taken by surprise. It is the primary educator of Effi, her mother, who broaches the topic with her daughter, concurrently presenting society's assumption of what constitutes a good husband and a good marriage: "Of course he is older than you, which is a good thing all in all, and he is a man of character, position and sound morality, and if you don't say no, which I would hardly

expect from my clever Effi, then at twenty you'll have a position others don't reach until they're forty" (13). The motivation for pre-arranged marriages within the German aristocracy is laid bare with Effi mother's words. Effi recovers from the initial shock sooner than expected, running to tell her friends about the engagement. When her friend Hertha asks whether Baron von Instetten is the right one, Effi retorts: "Of course he's the right one. You don't understand these things Hertha. Anybody is the right one. Provided he is an aristocrat and has a position and good looks, naturally" (14). The change is so sudden that Hertha is taken aback "My goodness Effi, the way you talk. It's quite different from how you used to talk", to which Effi replies, "Yes, used to" (14). The violent events that will eventually lead to Effi's demise, which may be read as a sacrifice to maintain the order of middle class<sup>21</sup> values, are thus put in motion<sup>22</sup>.

The dichotomy between pursuing one's desires and the socialization of the individual to the norms and morals of aristocratic society (gradually giving way to the pressures of the norms of the middle classes) becomes central to the novel through this

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<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to ascertain to which class the novel's values belong. The narrative takes place at a turning point for German aristocracy, which is living its final decades. For the sake of argument, I frame the moral order and the values in the discussion of the novel as middle class since Fassbinder's own focus is primarily on middle class values. Furthermore, Fassbinder's filmic project seeks continuities between the values of German aristocracy and the German middle class before and after World War II.

<sup>22</sup>The theme of sacrifice, specifically the sacrifice of women for the sake of society recurs in the narrative. Fontane presents this theme as a long-standing aspect of German culture when he has the newlywed couple visit Herthasee where they encounter ancient sacrificial stones from pagan Germanic times. These symbolic inferences point towards the ending of the novel where Effi is literally "sacrificed for an outmoded and unnecessary code of honour" (Bade 110) that ebbs from the German cultural sphere as the aristocratic modes of behavior lose their currency. Perhaps what interests Fassbinder later on is not the history behind such a secularized code of honor that asks individuals to sacrifice themselves to uphold norms, but the implicit, unspoken quality of the violence that befalls these individuals. Minden sums up the narrative premise of the novel underlining this implicit violence: "A little girl playing in the garden of her youth is called away from her play to meet a gentleman, from who she hears that he wishes to marry her. The cruelty is not explicit, Effi's parents love her and want the best for her, Effi loves her parents (and wants the best for herself), Innstetten is old but by no means an old man, and attractive enough to have been the object of Effi's mother's affection and aspirations in the past" (Minden 19). The pedagogical violence is at the heart of the novel with its conscious and implicit modalities all enmeshed into the fabric of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian societal norms.

initial scene. Later, after the family travels to Berlin to gather the necessary items for Effi's dowry, she engages in a moment of reflection and her demeanor suddenly changes. Noticing this hesitation, her mother asks whether Effi has any second thoughts about the marriage. Effi wants to satisfy both urges- her socialization and her subjective impulses. Her hierarchical formulation of this impasse may appear simple, yet it becomes a rather ominous prediction of the events that will unfold: "Love comes first, but right after it comes brilliance and honour, and then come diversions - yes, diversions, always something new, always something to make me laugh or cry. The thing I can't stand is boredom" (23). Though seemingly trivial, her insistence on diversions in her life, which spans from Effi's interest in the supernatural to defying her husband's domestic rules, becomes the most threatening aspect to the idyllic domestic sphere that Effi is to establish in her new home in Kessin with Baron von Innstetten, and thus inexorably leads to an affair with Major Crampas. Furthermore, as Elke Siegel contends, it is Effi's desires, however restricted they may be "that set her apart" (Peucker 381).

As the wedding festivities come to an end, Effi initially seems more and more attuned to her new role as a bride. Yet her ultimate mentor, her mother, feels something is amiss. Their conversation suggests that Effi's worries, again given Fontane's economy of narration in a double register that may be read as ominous signs of things to come, are still very much in place. Her mother questions Effi:

‘Don't you love Geert?’

‘Why shouldn't I love him? ... I love everybody who wishes me well and is kind to me and spoils me. And I expect Geert will spoil me too. In his own way of course. He already wants to give me jewelry in Venice. He hasn't the slightest inkling that

I don't care about jewelry. I prefer to climb or swing, especially when I'm afraid something's going to snap or collapse and I might fall. It wouldn't have to cost me my neck.' (24)

In an aristocratic fashion that contradicts middle class values that foreground material wealth above all else, and that perhaps endears Effi further to the reader, she rejects worldly goods for a simple sense of wonder and excitement. Even though she is careful to point out that she is not willing to forego everything for such 'diversions', their fundamental value for her remains central.

The same conversation allows Effi to articulate her fear of this marriage and of Innstetten, who is capable of choosing to gratify societal expectations above all else:

'I might almost say that I'm all in favour of him, if only... well if only he were a bit different.'

'How do you mean Effi?'

'[...] We were talking about Instetten, and suddenly old Niemeyer furrowed his brow, but it was with respect and admiration, and said, "Yes, the baron. He's a man of character, a man of integrity."'

'And so he is Effi.'

'Exactly. And I think Niemeyer went on to say he's a man of principle. And that, I imagine, is a bit more. Oh, and I... I haven't any. You see Mamma, there's something about all this that worries and frightens me. He's so good and kind to me and he's so considerate, but... I'm afraid of him.' (24)

Effi maintains a dread, unaware though she may be, not necessarily towards the individual that is Innstetten, but what the Baron stands for, indicated by the words, “a



man of principle". The blurring of the line between his sense of self and his understanding of his duties is central to the novel's articulation of Innstetten's personality<sup>23</sup> and lies at the heart of the narrative's tragic outcome.

After their marriage Effi and Baron von Innstetten move to Kessin, where the Baron holds his post and occasionally visits the Kaiser's nearby summerhouse. Situated in his home, Innstetten immediately begins to elucidate an educator's aura of order. The imaginary town of Kessin allows Fontane to create an enchanted landscape that will contrast significantly with the values that Innstetten represents. In his introduction to *Late Imperial Romance*, McClure points out that this binary is akin to the "familiar romance division, with the West represented as a zone of relative order, security and secularity, the non-Western world as a zone of magic, mystery, and disorder" (qtd. in Baker 9)<sup>24</sup>. Different permutations of this divide underwrite the differences among Effi, Innstetten and Effi's family, driving the narrative towards its tragic ending.

The town of Kessin plays a crucial role in staging these binaries. The novel indicates that Kessin's location in Eastern Pomerania situates it not in Poland but in the German Empire; nevertheless, Effi's conversations and letters with her mother and her friends in Hohen-Cremmen "regarded [it] as distant and exotic" (Bade 116). The town is first and foremost a "distant seaport where everything is 'unsicher'" (121) and a detailed account of its exoticized spaces is given during the cart-ride Effi and Innstetten take from

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<sup>23</sup>This contradictory and in many ways tragic aspect of German patriarchy that underwrites the definitions of maleness in society forms the focus of both Fassbinder's adaptation and his other works is analyzed later, as well as the Turkish-German films of Fatih Akin.

<sup>24</sup> A similar, more fundamental binary, between Germanness and its others, will be one of the focal points of this dissertation. In this context, considering Fontane's articulation of the above binary in a dynamic manner with its different ramifications for Innstetten's Prussian rationalism and Effi's spontaneity, or between Innstetten's secular outlook on order and Effi's desire to view her surroundings as enchanted and enchanting spaces, remains an important task.

the train station to their new house. These include, together with Innstetten's house, the "Plantage, the forest, the beach, and the dunes, with the nearby Utpatels Mühle, the churchyard, and the Chinese grave" (119) followed by a list of other exotic individuals that reside in the area "a Scotsman and a Portuguese, and further up the river, where the ships are moored, are a Swede and a Dane" (121).

It is during this cart ride that we first hear of the Chinaman, a moment that Fontane later calls the pivotal point of the novel, rendered as yet another exotic aspect of the port-town of Kessin. His story is one of banishment after an illicit affair with a local girl, followed by a mysterious death. Even after his death, the Chinaman continues to cause an uproar. When the local pastor decides to give him a proper Christian burial in the local cemetery, the townspeople forbid that decision and so his grave lies next to the dunes, a place that acquires its own enchantment later in the novel, away from the town and the cemetery. Similar to other ominous motifs, the Chinaman's story also reveals certain twists of fate to befall Effi later in the novel, as well as Major Crampas' death. However, at this point, it becomes yet another part of the exotic experience of Kessin itself, that Effi, "enchanted with the moon rising over the forest of alder trees and reflected in the water of the lagoon" (Bade 121), finds "beautiful, but sort of uncanny [*unheimlich*], too" (Fontane 34).

Within the backdrop of Kessin, the Chinaman appears multiple times in the lives of Effi and Innstetten, operating as the "other who metaphysically haunts" (Baker 179) the novel<sup>25</sup>. His demarcation as Chinese operates on the level of ethnicity; his

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<sup>25</sup>The figure of the Chinese ghost has been explained in a multiplicity of ways "as a psychic projection of Effi's repressed longings, as a strictly pedagogical tool, as the return of the oppressed colonial or female Other, as a penchant for the exotic, or as a systematically thematized allusion to political and social history during the period of the novel's production" (Baker 177). Furthermore, "the Chinese ghost is twice

supernatural qualities render him as a perennial other to the rational world order that permeates the surface of all societal relationships in the upper social classes that Effi and Instetten occupy. Revitalized in the fears of the female protagonist, the specter of the Chinaman also operates as an aspect of the gendered other, the female, thus retaining the quality of a fluid referent that partakes in various modalities of the conception of the other in the narrative. Nor is the ghost late in making its appearance. During Effi's first night at her new home, she believes she has heard steps above her room and spends a sleepless night alone. Fontane thus moves the uncanny specter of the Chinaman into the domestic sphere. In the days that follow, with Instetten leaving the house to attend to Bismarck as he would often do later in the novel, Effi fears that the ghost might appear again, and her maid suggests that she sleep together with Effi in the same room. Effi refuses, saying that the presence of the dog Rollo would be enough to calm her. Later in the night, she wakes up from a bad dream to see an apparition in the room. Johanna comes running in, and after a short conversation puts her to sleep, and this time she does sleep in Effi's room. They decide to hide this incident from the Baron. Next morning

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marginal, in the dual form of an ethnicity minor in nineteenth-century Germany, and a supernatural that is antithetical to the forces of rationalization represented in the novel” (Baker 202). This range of interpretations is welcome in this analysis of the novel and the subsequent look at its adaptation by Fassbinder as well as the following chapters of the dissertation, as it provides a constellation of conceptions to read and articulate the other. As a starting point for the genealogy in the later chapters, the fluidity that the figure of the ghost maintains operates first and foremost to unsettle the idea of a societal order that the subsequent directors challenge in various ways, blurring the comfortable divisions between aspects that could be brought under a notion of a (German) identity and thus regulated and controlled, with the uncanniness of the spectral other. Furthermore, the idea of the ethnic other, whose different figurations will be analyzed in different works, thus meshes with Fontane's depiction in the form of a ghost, a symbolic content that cannot be thought apart from its spiritual and mystical qualities. As such, it provides a link that is challenged in different ways through each work, namely the two domains of the material and spiritual. Partha Chatterjee claims that “the material is the domain of the ‘outside’, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed ... The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity” (qtd. in Baker 11). My dissertation considers this binary in its different configurations and how in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century German, Turkish and Turkish German works respond to each geographic and ethnic context.

Johanna, despite having promised Effi that she would disclose nothing to the Baron, announces the news to her master in a reserved manner. Instetten, as expected from his rationalistic demeanor and class position, responds strongly to the allegations that the ghost is haunting his Kessin house.

The dichotomy between rational and irrational is thus laid bare in the novel; the dynamic established between these poles constitutes another motor for the narrative to reach its tragic conclusions. Effi asks her husband to stay in the house longer so that she might recover from these spells, yet Instetten unequivocally rejects the idea, saying that he is first and foremost “a civil servant,” and that he “can't just say to Prince Bismarck or the Princess, Your Highness, I can't come, my wife gets so lonely, or my wife is afraid. If I said that it would show us in a ridiculous light, certainly me, and you too” (56). Later on in a similar vein when Effi asks to move from this haunted house to a new one, Instetten refuses by saying “I can't have people in the town here saying Landrat Instetten is selling his house because a little Chinaman stuck on a chair appeared as a ghost at his wife's bedside. I'd be finished, Effi. There's no recovering from ridicule like that” (57). Instetten does not strictly ostracize the idea of the ghost but rather appeals to Effi's sense of their perception as a couple and as individuals both in their small society in Kessin, and in the larger group of civil servants that serve the Kaiser. Without entirely rejecting the possibility of a ghost, Instetten acts strategically and puts forth the fear of ridicule and most importantly of sharing superstitious beliefs of the lower classes. Such an approach does seem to discipline Effi and she temporarily abandons the subject, though the sense of the uncanny requires further attempts by others in the novel to be rationalized away and never fully leaves the landscape of the novel.

Further in this episode we are introduced to Major Crampas with whom Effi eventually has a brief affair. They first meet with Innstetten present in one of the excursions to the Kessin dunes during the summer months. Later, Effi and Crampas take horse-rides together with their servants to the same dunes as they establish an intimacy that allows Effi to rid herself of her husband's eminently proper modality of existence. The suffocation that Effi gradually comes to feel in the domestic sphere of the Kessin house is neatly contrasted with the space and freedom of conversation in the dunes which Fontane fashions "into a zone of romantic permissiveness and romantic indiscretions, a field of possibilities outside the strictures of bourgeois marriage morality" (Baker 194). It is only later through the letters that Innstetten finds seven years after the affair that we learn that the dunes were also the place where Effi and Crampas consummated their relationship. Occurring almost next to the grave of the Chinaman, the relationship, in its capacity to fully upset the domestic order of the Prussian family, makes this space a double threat where one observes a "commingling of what is not domestic, with what may not yet have been fully rationalized" (Baker 195), surfacing the primary tension in the narrative.

It is in these same dunes that Effi's fear of the Chinaman leaves her for a more self-conscious comprehension of the ghost's purpose. In a strategically delivered conversation to tear Effi away from her husband's sphere, Crampas tells Effi how, when they were in the army together, Innstetten would tell ghost stories that allowed him to secure his advancement. Through this example, Crampas invokes the idea that Innstetten might have deliberately cultivated this fear in Effi, in order to render her dependency upon him, providing, in Crampas' words an "education through a ghost" (97). In

Crampas' estimation "Innstetten has one other passion: he always has to improve everybody, he's a born pedagogue" (97), a claim with which Effi reluctantly agrees, even though she is as suspicious of Crampas' motivations to control her as well. She invokes the constancy of Innstetten's reliability and contrasts it with Crampas whom she calls a "poseur". Yet the conversation succeeds in fully disenchanting Effi by providing a distancing from the metaphysical, enchanted substance of the ghost story to one that could be utilized to educate and make her more submissive. She also realizes that Crampas' guidance in helping her realize her husband's schemes is yet another attempt to put her under the influence of a male character. These insights that Effi articulates enable her to stop fearing the Chinese ghost; nevertheless, the ghost still remains in the narrative, transformed into a fond memory, primarily of her loss of innocence in regard to societal mores. Leading an increasingly dull and orderly life in Kessin until the advent of the affair, she remembers the ghost and the diversion it provided in a melancholic manner in her letters to her mother.

The affair is depicted in the most implicit manner imaginable, especially for contemporary eyes, yet the toll on Effi is nonetheless relegated to the smaller narrative arcs of the novel. Effi's fears of living two lives, one with Instetten and another with Crampas, surface in a peculiar invocation of the now-forgotten ghost:

Once, late in the evening she stepped in front of the mirror in her bedroom; light and shadows were flickering back and forth and Rollo barked outside, and for a moment it was as if someone were looking over her shoulder. But she quickly remembered herself. 'I know what it is; it wasn't *'him'*, and she pointed a finger at

the haunted room upstairs. 'It was something else... my conscience... Effi, you're a lost woman.' (124)

This time the ghost comes to permeate Effi's guilty conscience. It is stripped of its supernatural aura yet is still an imminent threat, transformed into fears of ostracism that eventually are realized in the novel. Later on, after she is banished to a small apartment in Berlin, having been expelled from her home and unwelcome in her parents' house, Effi remembers the days in Kessin and the ghost in a more mature way. Talking to Roswitha, the maid who has taken care of her daughter in a drab boarding house room in Berlin, Effi's words maintain almost a nostalgic yearning for the fear that the ghost culminated in her:

Dear old heart, how are you? Remember what it was like in the old days, with that Chinaman haunting us? Those were happy times. I thought then they were unhappy, because I still had to learn how hard life is. I know now. Ghosts aren't the worst thing, not by a long chalk!" (193)

In a splendid reversal of what it is that one needs to fear in this society, the now mature Effi maintains in an implicit manner that what has hurt her has never been the irrational fears of the ghost but the rationalized and internalized code of honor and ethical norms that underwrites Prussian society.

The discovery of the affair allows Innstetten to take Effi's daughter away from her mother, effectively rendering him the sole parent. Towards the end of the novel, Effi finally meets with her daughter, after a series of polite exchanges with Innstetten facilitated by a minister's wife. Mother and daughter hold a brief conversation in Effi's small flat in Berlin, an incident, which in many ways becomes the final blow to Effi's

emotional well-being. At the same time, the encounter with her daughter provides clarity on Effi's part as to what has been suffocating her throughout. Her daughter responds to her in curt sentences, effectively parroting what her father has told her to disclose, cutting off sentences where Effi hopes to prolong the conversation. As soon as it is over, Effi rips open the top buttons of her tight dress. Viewing the daughter as the perfect specimen that came to life in the hands of Instetten the pedagogue, Effi realizes what has been expected of her through her marriage, "being confronted with the perfect image of her own social behaviour: that of a child repeating like an automation the words of her symbolic father, society itself" (Minden 27). For the first time the narrative points towards a consciousness outside the "repressive and loveless patriarchal society" that has come to define each and every relation presented. As Effi cries to herself:

'But *this* is too much. For what's happening here with the child, that's not *you*, God, punishing me, it's *him*, and him alone! I thought he had a noble heart and I always felt small beside him; but now I know *he's* the one who's small. And because he's small, he's cruel. All things small are cruel. *He'* taught it to the child, he was always a schoolmaster. ... "Oh yes, if I'm allowed." You don't *have* to be allowed. I don't want any of you any more, I hate you, even my own child. Too much is too much. A careerist, that's all he was, nothing else. - Honour, honour, honour ... And now he sends me the child because he can't say no to a Minister's wife, and before he sends the child, he trains her like a parrot, and the phrase he teaches her is "if I'm allowed". I'm disgusted at the thought of what I did; but I'm even more disgusted when I think of how virtuous you both are. Away with you. I have to live, but it won't be forever.' (201)



The cracks within the patriarchal order, in terms of the awareness it attempts to impart to each member of that society, are thus imparted in a melodramatic outburst. Fassbinder focuses on these rare moments and utilizes their subversive potential, without presenting Effi as merely a victim.

Innstetten's trajectory throughout this latter part of the novel is curiously similar to Effi's, albeit taking a different path to reach a similar plane of self-consciousness. However, the individual presentation of their altered consciousness is quite distinct, as Innstetten would never leave his cold, calculated discourse, suggesting that each trajectory is inherently gendered first and foremost. From the moment he finds out about the affair, he "is unable to conceive of it as a private matter: Effi has betrayed not only her husband and her vows to him, but has transgressed against all of society's values by violating its moral order" (Shostak 61). His identity is primarily founded upon his conception of himself as a civil servant, upholding the "firmness and loyalty to Protestantism and Prussia and stand[ing] as a bulwark against the impudence, rebellion and lack of discipline under Bismarck" (Fontane 61). His thoroughly socialized identity requires the resolution of what in our eyes is a private matter, in the public sphere, and in the form of an ancient ritual, namely the duel. Its ancient quality adds a sense of immanence to his gesture, thus shifting the guilt of the violence that ensues from the bloodshed from his shoulders back upon the society whose values Innstetten is trying to uphold. However, as years pass, Innstetten persistently revisits the affair and the duel. Ironically, each return to the event in his mind diminishes these core values that he relied upon in the first place to take action. In the last moment of the novel when we read about Innstetten, he learns from a letter addressed to him from the Prime Minister that he has

reached perhaps one of the highest posts one can attain as civil servant under Bismarck. However, his response is neither pride nor joy.

His solution to the impasse he feels regarding his life fittingly takes the gesture of starting anew in a land “where the natives are black as pitch and ignorant of culture and honour” (212), effectively enacting a dreamlike colonial space where taking responsibility for one's actions, no matter how violent, is unnecessary. The bulwark of discipline that is Innstetten has been torn down as he reflects that in the end the idea of honor has brought misery to one's life, whereas if the whole ordeal had occurred as a whim of passion, the affair would have been “excusable”. Although his calculus of permissible emotions and the rational order is still tilted towards reason, Innstetten nevertheless remains broken at the end.

The novel comes full circle to Hohen-Cremmen, the town where Effi's family resides. When the von Briests discover Effi's physical suffering after the meeting with her daughter, they decide to take her in. Their change of heart is revealed in a brief conversation, which presents their transformation as similar to Innstetten's, from upholding the moral code of society to privileging their love for their daughter above all else. They differ from Innstetten in that they are able to act upon such a change of heart, albeit at a time when it is too late for Effi.

Within this final segment that ends with Effi's death, we find her attuned to nature. The entire segment is underscored with a mystical air reminiscent of what the ghost of the Chinaman had earlier brought to the narrative. There is an observable progression from the distanced, rational narrative voice that Fontane deploys throughout

the novel to one that affirms the mystical aura of the impending death. This tone clearly stands in contradistinction to Effi's suffocation in the urban center of Berlin:

She rose quietly from her chair and went out. However, hardly had she gone when Effi rose too and sat by the open window to draw in the cool night air once more. The stars shimmered, not a leaf stirred in the park. But the longer she listened, the more clearly she could again hear something falling like a fine drizzle on the planes. A feeling of liberation came over her. 'Peace, peace.' (216)

In her fervor, Effi stands a bit too long watching the night sky, and falls sick again. The dichotomy between the urban center with its rationalized, secular order that suffocates the individual and the peaceful, natural environment closer to a spiritual bliss fails to hold firmly, since it is these prolonged gazes out into nature that ultimately bring about her demise<sup>26</sup>:

Poor Effi, you gazed up at the wonders of the heavens for too long, thinking about them, and the upshot was that the night air and the mist rising from the pond put her back on her sick-bed, and when [Dr.] Wiesike was called and had seen her he took Briest aside and said, 'Nothing can be done; the end won't be long, prepare yourself.' (215)

This is the first moment when the figuratively and formally distanced authorial voice resorts to directly addressing Effi, and within the same sentence switches from the second person singular to its usual third person voice. It is a crucial switch in that up to this point

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<sup>26</sup> What literally kills Effi is the night air, perhaps a reference to the miasmatic theory, which holds that diseases are spread by miasma ("pollution" or "night-air") rather than germs. Though this theory was abandoned at the time of the novel's publication, it demarcates how certain older conceptions linger on and affect the characters' lives directly, mirroring Innstetten's adherence to the older aristocratic code of the duel that affects all involved, to devastating effect.

the novel veers away from the formal qualities of the distanced narrative voice of the 19<sup>th</sup> century realist novel only in this instance of disregard for an omniscient point-of-view. Such a gesture towards the modernist trope layering different authorial voices could be said to point towards the formal limitations of the realist form when depicting the impasse in which Effi as well as other protagonists find themselves, in terms of accommodating their subjective desires with those of objective, societal norms and the text's capacity to actively reflect on this impasse. One might suspect a short-coming of realism<sup>27</sup> in this regard, arising from the fact that a protagonist's "vision, realism's metaphor of reality and its knowledge, cannot contain the fact of realism, its writing, the activity of its production" (qtd. in Minden 21).

That the novel ends on a note that postulates all its protagonists as dissatisfied either at the end of their lives (Effi and Crampas) or continuing to live in a drab, soulless manner (Innstetten and the von Briests) suggests a clear sense of alienation. Yet I agree with Michael Minden that the novel fails to fulfill its critical potential with regard to these modes of alienation. To explicate this claim, Minden, in his "Poetry versus Realism" distinguishes two narratives running simultaneously in the novel in two registers, namely the realistic and the poetic plot where:

"the realistic material has an implication of its own which remains resistant to the poetic plot, thus making this plot not poetic in any sense we -as opposed to Fontane- could happily entertain but rather sentimental, an evasive recoil,

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<sup>27</sup> This lack of self-consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature gradually became a central point of contestation through modernist and post-modernist tropes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century literary and filmic output. This provides us with yet another trajectory to trace in Fassbinder's novel adaptation and his melodrama *Fear Eats the Soul* in the subsequent parts of this chapter.

symptomatic of a society- lacking the language or stylistic means either fully to recognize or address its own alienation.” (23)

Addressing Effi's condition through the formal properties of realism does not succeed in suggesting ways of overcoming the social obstacles that create such alienation. Furthermore, Minden contends that rather than pointing towards a critical reading of this social condition, the novel in its limitations as a realist text reaffirms the role available to women at the time:

The poetic balladesque closure of the novel, thus, preserves the very alienation its realistic plot depicts. ... While within the plot the tragedy of her tale makes her a point of poetic resistance to the lovelessness of the world she lives in, the novel as a social document offers one more example of an ideal woman for men, childlike, 'natural', and thus unthreatening, but then erotically tinged nevertheless. She is 'too good' for society *in* the fiction, but *as a* fiction she is the familiar and necessary blend. (24)

The novel frames Effi's alterity, her deviation from the norms, as a factor that causes her demise. Yet it neither affirms that alterity nor maintains a critical distance to discourses of discipline and authority that permeate the narrative. Framing the ways in which Fassbinder's adaptation challenges such formal and ideological connotations (or rather limitations) of the novel pertaining to Effi and other modalities of alterity becomes the task of the next segment.

**B. Adaptation as Critique:**  
**Fassbinder's "Fontane Effi Briest" and "Ali: Fear Eats the Soul"**

**1. Responding to German History (of Cinema)**

In its most frequent critical interpretation, Fassbinder's filmic output is read through two distinct traditions in filmmaking. The first is the intra-European tradition of Modernist filmmaking, underlined by self-reflexivity and an anti-illusionist cinematography deemed Brechtian. Fassbinder's interest in this vein is found in his earliest works when he and Jean-Marie Straub made a short film "with the Antiteater, Fassbinder's experimental theater group in Munich" (Kaes 77). A second tradition is Fassbinder's reading of the works of Douglas Sirk, the Hamburg-born Hollywood director, and culminates in his attempts "to make commercially successful films with wide audience appeal without compromising a subversive, 'European' sensibility and an idiosyncratic, personal style" (77). This second line allows the director to situate himself in the tradition of German filmmakers, and *via* Sirk and the German émigrés in Hollywood, in the tradition of classical Hollywood filmmaking. It remains difficult however, to analyze Fassbinder's filmic output either in terms of the categories of classical Hollywood narration or only by reference to Brechtian notions. In what follows, I frame my readings of Fassbinder's adaptation of Fontane's novel, *Fontane Effi Briest* (1974) and his *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1973) as a response to this difficulty and propose ways in which the films' communication with these two poles allows them to articulate novel ways of representing different modes of alterity.

*Effi Briest* remains one of the key films for Fassbinder's oeuvre, attested partly by the fact that it became his most watched film by German audiences and brought the director the recognition he sought. Furthermore, in assessing his own films, Fassbinder

places *Effi Briest* amongst his own list of "the Best German Films" as well as in the list of "My Top Films" (Töteberg 109-10). Shot in 1974 when Fassbinder's filmic project had already evolved into making "Hollywood films in Germany" with a Sirkian sensibility, the adaptation maintains an interesting link to the history of the director's attempts to repurpose the Sirkian model of melodramas. Fassbinder claims to have been influenced by Fontane's novel while working on his *Merchant of Four Seasons* (Töteberg 15), the film that initiates his Sirkian phase. In crafting these melodramas Fassbinder does not completely forego his previous attempts to develop a Brechtian cinematic mode of expression for delivering a political cinema. With these later films, he still adheres to the goal of raising audiences' self-consciousness of their historical and present positioning. In this regard, *Effi Briest* and later *Fear Eats the Soul*, in their dual motivation, were no exception to this goal.

Throughout the adaptation, Fassbinder stays close to Fontane's text, particularly in terms of plot, costume, and décor. Similarly, *Fear Eats the Soul*, an adaptation of Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), closely follows the trajectory of the characters and narrative structure of Sirk's film. Yet both bear the marks of his larger filmic production in delineating the strands of Germany's past to the degree that this past continues to determine the present<sup>28</sup>. In what follows, I consider how Fassbinder's film style instantiates his project of documenting and intervening in a narrative of German national history. More specifically, I understand this project with reference to

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<sup>28</sup> Anton Kaes presents this attempt specifically in Fassbinder's reading of the events of the Nazi past, understood as still very much part of West Germany: "At issue is the "guilt remaining in the subconscious" and the "danger of a renewed perversion of bourgeois ideology". Fassbinder wants to pierce the heart of German ideology, not only because it created the conditions that made murderous anti-Semitism possible, but also because, in his view, the soil that nourished anti-Semitism is still fertile. He sees continuities where others see rupture, he makes the system of bourgeois values itself responsible for the crimes of National Socialism" (94).

Fassbinder's depiction of alterity, focusing on his readings of German history and contemporary society by focusing on its others, as represented in both films. In tandem, I explore his approach to the possibility of a (political) position from which to read and represent such modes of alterity in order to outline a cinematic paradigm for reading Fatih Akin's films, albeit within a discussion of transnational histories and identities.

The years that saw the production of *Effi Briest* constitute a juncture both in terms of the history of West Germany and Fassbinder's interrogation of his place within it. This questioning has two polarities; in his own words Fassbinder is firstly "interested in showing how the Germans... are predisposed in such a way that the idea of fascism can lead them to something like national socialism" (Töteberg 46). Secondly, in the same time period he maintains an ongoing discussion of his positioning in the history of West Germany, often asking "Why am I a German?" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 15). Elsaesser argues that the manner of this questioning is unique to this period:

Fassbinder's move from the programmatic outsider to a more complex and differently provocative stance came at the point in his career when the international fame he began to enjoy made him self-conscious about his work and about being 'German' in a way he may not have been before the mid-1970s. (15)

The ongoing debate on West Germany as a nation emerged as a response to the political crises of the same period. These debates frame Fassbinder's search in the wider network of the second-generation directors of New German Cinema. *Effi Briest* in this regard becomes the object of a tripartite questioning of what it means to be German in the contours of the bourgeois values that underwrite the film's narrative and Fassbinder's



reading of the novel as a manifestation of his own attitude towards his society<sup>29</sup>, as well as Fontane's attitude toward his own contemporary society<sup>30</sup>.

Wolfgang Schütte's perspective on Fassbinder's cinematic output and its relation to society is useful in its contention that "the paradigmatic character of Fassbinder's oeuvre came about both against the establishment consensus and without creating a political identity. In his films, no nation recognized itself, though the nation is recognizable in and through the films" (qtd. in Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 19). Fassbinder's ongoing relationship with the question of West Germany's national character and its representation in cinema does not narrate this discursive construct from a totalizing standpoint that would only affirm what Fassbinder instead seeks to expose about German national discourses. Rather, "what preoccupied Fassbinder was the (im)possibility of a 'critical' position altogether, of what it meant to have a political vantage point at all" (Elsaesser 29), from which to engage in a dialogue on what the question of national identity entails. His exploration of "oppressive power relations and dependencies, melodramatic emotions, hopeless compromises, double binds and inescapable situations that often end in suicide" (Kaes 77) is framed by the question of attaining a critical position and maintaining a political vantage point, together with a necessarily ambivalent

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<sup>29</sup> In the same conversation Fassbinder applies his comments above to present time: "My task was to make my attitude toward the society I live in clear by trying to make a film about Fontane" (Töteberg 150), thereby effectively providing us with the ways in which his adaptation could be read. Yet he does so in a complex manner, analogous to the societal framework and its workings in West Germany in the 1970s.

<sup>30</sup> In his conversation with Kraft Wetzel in 1974 regarding *Effi Briest*, Fassbinder outlines his motivation for how he perceived the adaptation: "What makes *Effi Briest* different from the other films? Because it isn't a film about woman but a film about Fontane, about this writer's attitude towards his society. It's not a film that tells a story, but a film that traces an attitude. It's the attitude of a person who sees through the failings and weaknesses of his society and also criticizes them, but still recognizes this society as the valid one for him" (Töteberg 149). Although Fassbinder claims that the film is not about a woman, Effi's plight in the novel mirrors precisely the predicament that Fassbinder claims had shaped Fontane's attitude toward his own society.

and fluid response. At the same time, his position in this regard is underscored by a post-World War II standpoint that does not guarantee such a firm vantage point to anyone. He nevertheless maintains an affinity to the radical, utopian ideals of this period<sup>31</sup>. These two ideological conditions are critical to the ways in which his films continuously "thematize the failure of these uncompromising ideals and the final shattering of illusions" (77). These films reveal ruptures in the fabric of the nation and in turn uphold the dialectical tension between the diverse ways of being and the national narratives that attempt to bring them under an all-encompassing identity that is at once readable and controllable. The readings undertaken here on Fassbinder's representations of alterity, with heroes and heroines who fail continuously in the face of the dynamic described above, maintain this unresolved tension throughout.

This ideological aspect of my analysis goes hand in hand with endeavoring to understand the dynamics of Fassbinder's representational strategies in both films-- his unique stylization and the repurposing of the melodrama genre. Here, I follow Flinn who maintains that style is "a constitutive feature of all forms of representation" (1) and Elsaesser who posits that Fassbinder's "allegorical, deadpan-ironic, excessive, melodramatic, or camp modes are not only matters of style but of historical reference" (23). The links that bind this constellation of history, style and genre, the ways in which stylistic and genre choices invite engagement with notions of national identity and its disruption through representations of alterity, are far from self-evident. What follows

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<sup>31</sup> Utilizing a complex notion of naivety, Elsaesser presents Fassbinder's affinity as maintaining a position not akin to any other director of New German Cinema: "...the metaphysical core, so to speak, of Fassbinder's new naivety, was his challenge to several kinds of old naiveties, including the belief in 'authenticity,' so prominent in other directors of the New German Cinema. In Fassbinder, there is no safe 'position of knowledge' (whether grounded subjectively in 'personal experience' or objectively, in the dialectic of history)" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 53).

then is a discussion of these two aspects of Fassbinder's filmmaking that will eventually yield a clearer understanding of his contributions to the filmic lexicon.

## **2. Adapting A Novel, An Author's Point of View and A Society's *Weltanschauung*: Fassbinder's *Fontane Effi Briest***

One of the aims of this dissertation is to outline ways in which how seemingly unrelated and often opposing genres of realism and melodrama, and their subsequent styles and sensibilities, bear upon contemporary cinemas. My closer look at Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* is framed by a discussion of cinematic realism in Fassbinder's work, an undertheorized aspect of the director's films primarily viewed through the lens of the genre of melodrama. The points of inquiry that follow include cinematic realism and national cinemas, the literary genre of Fontane's "Effi Briest", its filmic departures from a realist register and their eventual achievements, and, finally, the link between realism and melodrama. These considerations are embedded in my analysis of the cinematic gestures Fassbinder makes to adapt the novel into film.

### **a. Cinematic Realism and National Cinemas**

Even though Fassbinder was situated outside the traditions of cinematic realism, the register of realism since World War II has been a defining aspect for European national cinemas, in contradistinction with genre cinema. How does Fassbinder's work embed genre conventions, specifically those of melodrama, in a national mode? In Fassbinder's conception, history is a key concept in understanding such a gesture of embedding. Fassbinder's historical understanding prompts him to reconfigure this history through themes that foreground the history of others (and as such, of oppression), which becomes the primary subject of Fassbinderian melodrama. As Flinn points out:

For a national film movement attempting to come to terms with recent history, melodrama makes a certain amount of sense, given its own preoccupation with past events ...[However,] that “past” is not as singular as the word might imply. Given that melodrama was construed as, among other things, both an American phenomenon and an emblem of repressed Nazi populism, it cannot excavate any pure, prelapsarian national identity or history... For melodrama ultimately dramatizes the irretrievability of the “stranded objects” of Germany’s postwar psychic, social, and political landscapes—while simultaneously stressing their ongoing importance. (36)

Later on, the themes touched upon in my discussion of Fontane's novel will be taken up again within the context of these "stranded objects"<sup>32</sup> of German history.

### **b. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Realist Novel and Fassbinder's Response**

The second thread of realism is Fontane's *Effi Briest*'s realist legacy in the late 19th century German novel. To be sure, the film embodies historical accuracy in its attention to detail of costumes and décor. However, the impulse of realism to document in a detailed and objective manner does not find its proper counterpart in Fassbinder's adaptation. This is primarily due to the fact that Fassbinder's

ambition to cover all social strata and classes is no longer founded on the belief in the documentary character of literature (or, for that matter, film). Instead, Fassbinder's Germany is one where writing its social history means recording the history of its social imaginary, demonstrating the mechanisms of "miscognition"

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<sup>32</sup>The notion of ‘stranded objects’ of a national history will remain key to our evaluation of the themes that arise in the second and the third chapters in regards to the national history of Turkey and the transnational histories of the Turkish German people.

within recognition, and locating identification at work in identity. (Elsaesser, "Historicizing" 19)

At the end of my discussion I argued that Fontane's novel foregoes briefly the realist modality in order to allow different voices to be heard, including the author's direct speech to the reader. Fassbinder picks up on this brief diversion on the part of the authorial voice and builds his own voice into the film by means of voiceovers in which he reads parts of the novel himself, and introduces intertitles from the lines of the novel, bridging plot elements and maintaining neither a critical nor a sympathetic distance to Effi's plight<sup>33</sup>. The spectator is not allowed a comfortable moment to develop a safe distance for understanding Effi's struggles and bring forth her own [presumably] liberal beliefs; nor is she given the opportunity to simply connect with Effi on an emotional level in an uninterrupted manner. Instead, these voiceovers are carefully chosen from parts of the text and are read in a different register; as such they become critical and often ironic commentaries on the oppression of the patriarchal norms of German bourgeoisie. In this vein, Fassbinder provides the intertitle that starts the sequence of events following Effi and Innstetten's marriage "Freilich, ein Mann in seiner Stellung muß kalt sein. Woran scheitert man denn im Leben überhaupt? Immer nur an der Wärme." ("A man in his position must be cold. What do people founder on in life? Only on warm human emotions?"; author's trans.) Similarly, he chooses this sentence from Effi's letter to Innstetten when their new life in Berlin is about to commence: "Nun bricht eine andere Zeit an, und ich fürchte mich nicht mehr und will auch besser sein als früher und Dir

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<sup>33</sup> Fassbinder's practice of introducing his own voice as well as bringing in the texts that he is dealing with into his films was also a frequent gesture of French New Wave films, especially those of Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut. Fassbinder spoke and wrote about their influence on several occasions.

mehr zu Willen leben" ("A new era is dawning and I am no longer afraid. I shall try to be better than before and live more accordingly to your wishes"; author's trans.).

Fassbinder's voice and in his intrusions through the intertitles thus become the furthest thing from an omniscient and omnipresent narrator in a realist register and instead operate as devices that only mimic their counterpart in the realist mode in order to develop a novel strategy "of the mechanisms of "miscognition" within recognition". In other words, what is familiar in a realistic register--the calm, soothing voice of the narrator--is inverted to reveal the false premises of both the device itself and what it attempts to conceal. Unlike Fontane's focus on Effi's plight, and by extension his commentary on the problems of women in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Fassbinder's departures from realism, and his introduction of melodramatic registers of interaction between characters, allow him multiple layers of interpretation that include the involvement of women in the social sphere (both historically and in the present), Fontane the author, and Fassbinder the director and spectator. In turn these levels are implicated in the historical and political nexus upon which the film reflects.

### **c. Fassbinder's Style: Departures from the Realist Register**

This active implication in the construction of a patriarchal bourgeois framework by these actors is structured stylistically in Fassbinder's *Effi Briest*, and the departures from a realist register as a key aspect of his mise-en-scène challenge the ideological nexus that surrounds the film and its reception in West Germany and elsewhere in the 1970s. As indicated above, style is in no sense its ideological demarcations. Talking about *Effi Briest*, Fassbinder is highly self-conscious of what his practice achieves:

I think the images are constructed in such a way that they almost function like blank film, so that even though there are images there, you can fill them again with your own imagination and your own emotions. What makes that possible is the triple alienation effect: the mirrors, the fade-ins and fade-outs, and the emotionless acting style. (Töteberg 158)

The detachment Fassbinder seeks through style requires consideration of the ends he has in mind. Fontane examines the contours of the German bourgeoisie; Fassbinder is committed to this goal as well. Yet, Fassbinder seeks other ways than mere representation and/or narration to realize his project, viewing the plot as more than a narrative of Effi's victimization by framing the topic as Effi's "taking advantage of an opportunity this society offers and accepting it, and still knowing that it's basically wrong" (Töteberg 154). These levels of detachment evoke for the viewer contradictions similar to those Effi experiences. The convergence of Fassbinder's stylistic and political goals together with the novel's themes is best illustrated by the ways in which Fassbinder utilizes mirrors in key segments of his adaptation. I shall focus on three different scenes in which mirrors are utilized to perform particular themes. Fassbinder's use of mirrors through his *mise-en-scène* are at once departures from the novel's realist register and at the same time enact its

critical but often ambivalent<sup>34</sup> stance towards the norms of the German bourgeoisie and its effects on the individual<sup>35</sup>.

With as many as thirty distinct mirror shots dispersed throughout the film, this formal device incorporates a multitude of meaning that varies with context. Certain shots include a hint of the mirror displayed to the side of the frame, as if to remind the viewer of the importance of this device at all times. In others, the mirror occupies a central position, complicating the viewer's ability to discern which is 'real'--the image in the mirror or the one in front of the camera. Yet the mirrors offer a consistent "double view of a character (or characters), signal[ing] an inherent contradiction in a given socio-psychological situation" (Pipolo 105). The highly self-conscious camera movement that Fassbinder utilizes in the presence of mirrors distances the viewer from a simplistic response to the device. These movements at times efface certain protagonists by moving them out of the frame and concentrating only in the image reflected in the mirror, playing out the complex relationship of identity and performance. This treatment is consistent with Fassbinder's overall approach to representation and identity, since he "never pretends to be giving us people as they 'are', but as they represent themselves, be it as the image they have of themselves or the image they want to give to others" (Elsaesser,

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<sup>34</sup> Fassbinder's position has been deemed as ambivalent, especially the gray areas in his critiques. As Elsaesser claims, "where the 'young German film' of the 1960s utilized naturalism as a form of satire, Fassbinder's stylizations, his carefully calculated strategies of identification and distance ... ensured a troubling mix of sympathy and antipathy, beyond clear-cut positions of good and evil" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 29). Concerning his treatment of his evil characters, more specifically Innstetten in this film, it is hard to point towards an unequivocal denunciation of his repression of Effi. In the Fassbinderian universe of values, the victims are as strongly implicated as the perpetrators in the power relationships that ensue. Such a depiction often gives way to controversy in the films' reception.

<sup>35</sup> The order that Fassbinder brings to his shot compositions, as Susan Nurmi-Schomers contends, together with "the sense of physical inhibition which the slow motion pace of a film composed exclusively of long shot generates" (Macleod 372) reveal a similar commitment to the distantiating techniques that Fassbinder attempts with the mirror shots. Fassbinder's further critique of the Prussian order that Innstetten stands for and almost every other character in the novel follow to a certain extent.



"Fassbinder's" 23), an approach that Fatih Akin deploys extensively in his films, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 3.

Fassbinder's film utilizes a medley of indoor shots concentrating on the domestic spheres of Effi's family and, later, her marriage. These shots of the domestic interiors progressively reveal an oppressive social climate through his use of "'framing shots' in which spatial components seem to be constantly encroaching on the characters. Doorways especially, but also windows, walls, and furniture, which can have a structuring effect within the picture, are frequently used as social markers of inclusion and exclusion" (Scharf 190). The use of mirrors renders this dynamic of boundedness more complex, visualizing "an atmosphere of stuckness [sic] from which there is no way out... In this vein, Fassbinder's aesthetics strikingly illustrate the literally crushing dominance of social structures over individual agency" (190). The power dynamics within the family<sup>36</sup> are one of Fassbinder's prime locations for situating these contradictions in *Effi Briest* wherein the struggle between social norms and individual agency is played out. A primary trajectory is that of Effi's education in both of the domestic spheres in which she participates. The second mirror shot suggests how Effi is allowed certain outlets to manifest her desires, only to be checked in a framework that her mother deems acceptable. Upon their arrival from Berlin where they traveled to buy goods for Effi's dowry, we see Effi playing the piano as she and her mother quietly

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<sup>36</sup> The prevailing criticism of the post World War II generation crystallized in the uprisings of 1968 "implicated the bourgeoisie as a class and authoritarianism as an ideology in the disasters" that Germany faced in the 20th century. "Their thinking was indebted to 'Frankfurt School' theories of culture, associated with T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer who had, already during their exile in the United States, approached the question of Germany's cultural identity not only as an issue of class, property and ideology, but also psychoanalytically: national identity as a structure of internalization and projection where the bourgeois family is called upon to mediate between the rebellious individual and the authoritarian state" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 14-15). Fassbinder's sustained focus on Effi's family throughout the film thus allows him to present this mediation in a critical manner in more than one instance.

converse about Effi's demeanor, described in a previous scene by her mother as a *Natur-kind* full of imagination and a bit inclined to follow her impulses. There is a large mirror in the background duplicating their images and the shot is framed by heavy wooden furniture occupying a significant portion of the frame. When Effi responds to her mother's insistent question as to whether her heart desires anything else for her dowry, the camera begins to pull closer, leaving Effi outside of the frame, with only her image in the mirror. Effi's response is to request an exotic item, a Japanese screen with golden birds and a lamp that would radiate red light. As soon as Effi iterates this desire, she asks her mother if she has said something improper. Her mother takes a step back and proffers a fundamental characteristic that Effi needs to correct to avoid future heartbreak. This, in her mother's words, is Effi's way of imagining the future as though it were a fairy tale with herself in the role of princess. The camera tracks backward to reveal Effi again, while keeping both figures' images in the mirror in the frame. Effi's mother claims: "Yet, this is who you are," and Effi softly agrees: "Yes mama, this is who I am," as she rises from of her piano chair and kneels to rest her head on her mother's lap. With this movement, however, Effi's image in the mirror, which makes her face visible throughout this shot, disappears from the shot, leaving only her kneeling back visible to the viewer. The shot lingers a second longer and dissolves to white with no further words exchanged. With minimal camera movement and close attention to the framing devices throughout the shot, Fassbinder thus allows one of the main subtexts of the film to emerge, namely that Effi's demeanor as a dreamy and impulsive young girl will be her undoing, regardless of attempts to educate her. There are no mysteries as to who Effi is, and it is as clear who Effi should be in order to avoid the disasters that will befall her. The dialogue affirms this

foreshadowing and though its mise-en-scène enacts how Effi is going to be effaced, both from society and from her domestic sphere.

Fassbinder's depiction of Effi's husband, Baron von Innstetten, constitutes the second example of the use of mirrors with which the director focuses his critique of the bourgeoisie and its historical trajectory. In his comments about another novel adaptation project prior to *Effi Briest*, that of Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben*, Fassbinder's views of the German bourgeoisie emerge:

Especially the most odious passages in the novel *Soll und Haben* - those demonstrating, as it were, the author's false political consciousness...- force us to face perhaps one of the most important issues that tie us today to our history, to the nineteenth century and to our social forebears ... *Soll und Haben* tells of how the [German] bourgeoisie in the middle of the last century, after a failed revolution, developed its self-understanding and established its value system, a system that did not progress much beyond the notions of hard work, honesty, righteousness, and that defined the so-called 'German character' by fencing it off in all directions, internally against the proletariat and the aristocracy, and externally against anything alien, and above all against a world view denounced as 'Jewish', but in truth distinguished by its objectivity, humanism and tolerance. It is this bourgeois value system which could, without much trouble, find a home in the ideology of national socialism, but it is also one that extends to today's society. (qtd. in Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 36)

For Fassbinder this trajectory is based on a constellation of concepts and practices that, in his view, were in many ways responsible for the Third Reich and that have not yet been expunged from German society, even after World War II.

Innstetten is twice Effi's age when they are married- the motivations behind Effi's family's approval of this marriage stem primarily from Innstetten's character and class- he is a civil servant who aspires to succeed in the German bureaucracy, he has good taste and appears throughout the novel as an honest man. Yet he is incapable of loving Effi or anyone else for that matter, revealing few emotions throughout their marriage. Fassbinder's decision to adapt Fontane's novel appears to be motivated not only to incarnate Effi but also Innstetten's condition that is indicative of a larger segment of society: the male German patriarch of the upper middle class who in the wake of the demise of the German aristocracy stands out as the torch bearer of an ancient and oppressive code of conduct that has defined and continues to define the values of the German middle classes.

Innstetten discovers Effi's affair with Crampas when he comes upon a pile of her letters and his response is highly consistent with what is expected of him. Without revealing emotion, he holds a prolonged conversation with Wüllersdorf, his best friend in Berlin, analyzing what is to be done in the face of such shame and dishonor. In this exchange of over ten minutes of screen time Fassbinder's complex *mise-en-scène* includes shots of Innstetten and his friend framed in an ornate, multi-chambered mirror, cross-cut with shots of the duel between Innstetten and Crampas. The stakes of a duel with Crampas are laid out by Innstetten only to be weakly argued against by Wüllersdorf. They move around the room conversing and interchanging positions in front of the ornate

mirror. The shots double the qualities of previous sequences in which doors and furnishings organize the shot-compositions, providing frames within frames. Fassbinder's camera captures the men's faces at odd angles, their eyes never meeting throughout the conversation.

A small rectangular mirror, framed inside an ornamental larger mirror separated into rectangular segments, enables Fassbinder to capture Innstetten at key moments when he expresses what his heart tells him to do, namely "forgiving Effi," forecasting what he must do as an individual bound by rules of his society--that is, pursue a deadly duel with Crampas and banish Effi from his house, cutting her ties with their daughter. For Innstetten this decision has already been made even before his conversation with Wüllersdorf. Similarly, shots of the duel taking place and Crampas dying in the arms of Innstetten are interspersed throughout the dialogue. From a narrative standpoint, the audience is given no space to ponder the decision that Innstetten will take. Fassbinder's cross-cutting of the result of this conversation thus works hand in hand with the inevitability that is locked in- to the narrative impulses of both novel and film. For just as in Fontane's novel, Fassbinder's film also acknowledges the futility of claiming agency as an individual, while living at the mercy of a society that holds that individual in the tightest of grips. That both Effi and Innstetten, albeit in different terms and to different degrees, attempt to discuss or act out their agency in turn provides the narrative's melodramatic impasse, which is brought about by the misery of both at the film's conclusion.

For Fassbinder, however, there is more to this impasse than the acknowledgement of society's powers over the individual. As indicated above, any form of presenting one's

identity in the Fassbinderian universe is mediated and performed without an essential kernel. It is this mediation and performativity that is played out towards the end of this sequence by Innstetten. As he finishes his soliloquy on lack of free will, Innstetten positions himself across from the ornate mirror, his image out of focus in the center. Wüllersdorf's frontal image is complemented by portions of his back reflected on different portions of the segmented mirror. He makes a final attempt to say that society need not be involved, as he promises to remain silent until death. As the camera closes in on the mirror, finally showing only the images reflected from it, Innstetten posits his true fear in having revealed the truth to his friend: "There's no such thing as secrecy. ... and the fact that you express your consent and understanding does not save me from you. I am and I remain, from this moment on, an object of your sympathy." Innstetten reveals his fear of relinquishing the most precious quality of a bourgeois male: his control over the perception of his familial sphere and by extension his own self. Innstetten does make a choice and is bound by his own values that uphold this control above all else. The oppressive power that society holds over its members is not unidirectional; instead the individual is primarily constitutive of this oppression, as long as every member is held accountable. The unwritten contract of the patriarchal German middle class is thus revealed by Fassbinder. The reflection in the mirror at this point has broken into five different segments, showing in the center Innstetten's full body in its strict upper-middle-class attire, the top of his head (his thoughts) and his mouth (his speech) in different segments. At once, Fassbinder presents the divided identity that is Innstetten, together with its constitutive elements brought together within the larger frame of the mirror. This play of unity-cohesion with that of dispersal is indicative of Innstetten's broken identity.

Yet concurrently, the same interplay centralizes his responsibility for the oppression that he enforces with his own decisions. At once victim and perpetrator, Fassbinder's Innstetten is a broken mirror held up to modern audiences that still need to submit to the idol of middle-class values.

#### **d. Locating the Melodramatic in a Realist Costume Drama**

Finally, I turn to melodrama as genre framed here as a sensibility with a critical potential. Melodrama is the genre Fassbinder repurposed to fit his adaptation, maintaining its inherent relationship to realism. In a costume drama such as *Effi Briest*, this goal is achieved primarily by Fassbinder's careful attention to costume and other elements of mise-en-scène that embody turn-of-the-century Prussian values. However, on an ideological level, melodrama further draws on realism "by adjusting to the contemporary public opinion on cultural and social issues, the reigning consensus on reality" (Skvirsky 111). In this manner, "melodrama must adapt itself to the new consensus. It must present a constellation of moral dilemmas that the audience accepts as relevant to its own situation" (111). Fassbinder's own brand of melodrama, his repurposing of this genre and sensibility, builds on these premises that define the relation between realism and melodrama to maintain a filmic apparatus that is at once revelatory and empathic.

The primary gesture in rendering the narrative as melodrama is made by placing Effi's plight at the center of the film and articulating it in a melodramatic mode within a web of relationships anchored by the domination of Effi by her husband Innstetten. The narrative impasses are underlined by the protagonists' moral impasses in reconciling themselves with the societal bonds that define them. Following Fontane's narrative

content to the letter, Fassbinder nevertheless allows "his characters few insights into possible escape routes from the vicious circles that bind them to each other in emotional inequality or exploitation" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 34). These blind alleys, Fassbinder maintains, compel the viewer, already in the affective grip of melodramatic content, to a self-reflective questioning of the past, present and future of German identity. This filmically supported desire is consistent with Fassbinder's conviction that the operational structure of his films asks the viewer to "be able to activate things and feelings in himself *via* the characters, [while] the structure of the presentation ought to give him the possibility for reflection" (qtd. in Shattuc 5). The plot thus is imbued with a moralizing element while the style works as a counterstatement that updates the moral dilemmas of the novel to a post-World War II setting.

It is melodrama's internal inconsistencies that Fassbinder and other directors employ to enhance the self-revealing and critical dimensions of their filmmaking. Fassbinder, who writes and comments on Sirk's work in Hollywood, responds to this circuit by appropriating the 'Sirkean System' for his own films, all the while maintaining Brechtian elements. The keystone to the 'Sirkean System' lies in its implication of the audience by the use of narrative techniques and *mise-en-scène* in order to emotionally involve the spectator. This emotional investment is then exploited with the aim of subverting audience self-perception, assumed to uphold the bourgeois value system, in order to promote a critique of normativity. Fassbinder's films may thus be described as the opposite of a distorting mirror:

The world the audience wants to see (an exotic world of crime, wealth, corruption, passion, etc) is a distorted projection of the audience's own fantasies



to which Sirk applies a correcting device, mirroring these very distortions. This conjunction of, or rather contradiction between distantiation and implication, between fascination and its critique, allows Sirk to thematize a great many contradictions inherent in the society in which he worked and the world he depicted. (Sirk 130)

The primary contradiction that Fassbinder treats in his own melodramatic mode is the way in which an oppressive relationship between Effi and Innstetten is established and maintained until the final moments, within a marriage where the wife seeks love and the husband seeks respect above all. I have thus far been interested in the vantage point "from without", namely how society has determined these characters and their relationships. Yet in *Effi Briest* as in Fassbinder's other post-Sirkean films, "it is when examining the subtler but also more devastating dynamics of exploitation within the couple that the vantage point 'from without' will eventually give way to the perspective 'from within'" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 34). This vantage point from within, which is from the emotive kernel of the characters, is a fundamental aspect of the melodramatic sensibility of the film. Yet the novel itself is removed from this sensibility. Despite the fact that it is a story of adultery, the film avoids grand displays of emotions and retains its stoic character throughout. Fassbinder, I would argue, utilizes this withheld emotive quality of the novel in a subtle rendering of Effi's emotions in the few instances she is permitted to manifest them.

A fitting example of Effi's quiet outbursts occurs at the end of the film during an arranged meeting with her daughter whom she has not seen in over four years. At this point in the narrative, Effi is excommunicated from her societal setting, living in a flat in

Berlin, forbidden to contact her parents or anyone from her class. Having accepted her condition, she is nevertheless anxious to make contact with her daughter. Their meeting is formal, devoid of any warm feelings in which the daughter parrots responses taught her by her father. Effi is agitated as she sends her away after a brief exchange and remains alone in the house. Cut to a shot of Effi's face, her head hanging from the side of her bed, looking downward, framed once again by the wooden carvings of a bedpost. Her clothing, tightly buttoned up and black, is reminiscent of how she would look when going to confession in church, as later on in the same sequence she confesses that she has more responsibility for her demise than Innstetten, blaming herself alone. The guilt imparted to Effi by those surrounding her after the ordeal of the affair has made Effi guilty in her own eyes as well, quite apart from Innstetten's complicity. Her confession has multiple dimensions; it is primarily a cry against Innstetten's treatment of her from the first day of marriage not as an object of affection but as a component of his self-advancement. It is also a cry against his excessive reaction to the affair in which Crampas was murdered, even though she "did not even love him". Hanna Schygulla delivers these lines in lilting sighs and softly exhaled breaths, yet as she plumbs the reasons why events have unfolded as they did, she focuses on the concept of honor, saying under her breath but forcefully, "Honor, honor, honor!" and ending on a final, piercing cry. Throughout this shot, the camera remains completely still and the action is delivered through Effi's face and through her intonation of these words. The final cry is followed by the recognition that she has had enough of playing this role and will soon depart from this life. The melodramatic admission of her impending death, borne out only much later in the novel, is readable as Fassbinder's attempt to transcend the victim-perpetrator dynamic.

I argue that Fassbinder's conception of Effi does not necessarily leave her as a victim at the film's conclusion. This condition has also been a part of Fontane's narrative, as argued above. Instead Fassbinder's portrayal of Effi's recognition of her own role in her victimization goes further; in the final fifteen minutes, the framing devices and the mirrors that have come to define the characters are no longer present. In the remaining sequences Effi appears primarily in exterior shots where the sharpness of her image evolves into softer hues. Having fallen ill, Effi leaves Berlin to return to her family who finally accept her back into their home. Central to her condition in this final segment is her newly acquired understanding of her own plight as not merely personal but as one that implicates German society and its norms. Fassbinder's representation of her illness conveys an aura of saintliness. At the same time, the exterior shots situate her where she is most in her element as a *Natur-kind*. On her deathbed, Effi's words of forgiveness towards Innstetten are more convincing than elsewhere in the film. With this recognition also comes the impossibility of existing in a meaningful way in a German society that, as Fassbinder suggests, literally and figuratively murders any citizen who attempts to transgress its rationalized boundaries. Effi's death is indeed melodramatic. Yet she is not a pitiful victim of male patriarchy but an example of German society's intolerance towards such disobedience. While transgression, in this sense, may be possible and perhaps even necessary, it binds the protagonist to a tragic end. The blank frame following Effi's last words, accompanied by Fassbinder's final reading from the novel, surge as the final distancing strategy, inviting the viewer to consider the complicity of all parties in containing alterity. Through these devices Fassbinder once again points to

Effi's implication, along with Innstetten, Fontane and his readers, Fassbinder himself and the audience, in the (re)enactment of these gestures throughout multiple generations.

### **3. The Conundrum of the First Generation *Gastarbeiter*: The Case of Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul***

The themes and formal innovations as discussed in the previous segment have influenced Fatih Akin's oeuvre, but perhaps a more direct influence can be seen in Fassbinder's later work *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) which display Fassbinder's visual and aural strategies for representing the plight of the first-generation immigrant worker Ali, who marries a much older German working-class woman. Fassbinder uses color, framing and music as well as identification and distanciation techniques to represent the theme of inter-ethnic and inter-generational marriage in terms of its consequences for German narratives of nation building and the modalities of alterity these narratives negotiate. In this section I will analyze the relationship between alterity and victimhood through a complex web of power relations including oppression in interpersonal relationships, class perspectives, and emotional interiority. Fassbinder's approach to the question of representing minorities on screen in the context of post-World War II West Germany<sup>37</sup> complicates the relationship of images and ideology in two ways: first the representation of cultural difference through a German director's representation of Germany's others on screen; and second the representation of emotional, interior life through the axis of performativity. The chapter concludes by exploring Fassbinder's

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<sup>37</sup> Elsaesser presents "two discursive fields, that of "mourning work" and "tabula rasa" thinking" (253) that directors of New German Cinema grapple with as they contemplate the national history within which they work. I will look at how these fields are transformed for later generations of immigrant workers and the hybrid culture within which they exist and produce works in my analysis of Akin's films in Chapter 3.

intended ideological pedagogy for his audiences and as his critique of German democracy and liberal identity politics.

Shot during the same period as *Effi Briest*, *Fear Eats the Soul* offers a more direct affinity with Douglas Sirk's films. It is a remake, albeit a peculiar one, in that it repeats Sirk's narrative structuring and thematics in *All That Heaven Allows* (1956) wherein the couple, played by Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson, challenge age and class barriers of 1950s suburban America. The dynamics of *All That Heaven Allows* as a Sirkian melodrama, centering primarily on "Jane's unconventional longing for [Rock Hudson] which is tied to feelings of guilt, pain, and repression" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 72), are intensified through the dichotomies between these two characters: "the contrast between youth and old age, upper-middle class and working class, country club civilization and nature man" (72). In their place, however, Fassbinder's remake presents an even odder couple and perhaps an even more complex web of dichotomies: Emmi, a housecleaner in her sixties and Ali, a first-generation migrant worker from Morocco, a mechanic in his thirties. After their chance encounter at the corner bar, frequented mostly by migrant workers, they move in together and marry. This sequence of events allows Fassbinder to stage the outraged reaction of those surrounding the couple, from Emmi's family to their neighbors, a local shopkeeper, and even strangers on the streets of Munich. At the center of the narrative is the couple's extra-diegetic vacation and, upon their return, a series of events that miraculously improves their lives. Each member of the society who had previously ostracized them changes perspective, motivated by personal gain mediated by capitalist exchange. However, despite the warmer reception, the relationship between the couple now sours. Ali returns briefly to his previous lover but after a few days collapses

in Emmi's arms. The film ends with the doctor's diagnosis of an intestinal ulcer, an ailment that seems particularly frequent in migrant workers<sup>38</sup>.

### **a. The Double Register of Identification/Distantiation**

*Fear Eats The Soul's* attempts at uniting the dynamics and the popular appeal of Sirkian melodramas with those of Brechtian sensibility are more clearly legible. Gerd Gemünden evokes aspects of Brecht's theory that Fassbinder incorporated, including Brecht's "involvement of the spectator in the text, his open admission of his own position, his interruption but not elimination, of dramatic illusion, and his rejection of purity and harmony in favor of the fragmentary, the episodic, and the open" (57). Fassbinder's work may be considered as an attempt at adapting and transforming not only Sirk's film, but a theoretical position that belongs to the Weimar era (the Brechtian) and an approach to film (the Sirkian)<sup>39</sup> that belongs to post-World War II America. In my understanding, Fassbinder's approach is readable simultaneously as a subversion and an adoption of these positions. Each film in Fassbinder's Sirkian phase beginning with *Merchant of Four Seasons* in 1974 is uniquely constructed and conceptualized. His objective in incorporating aspects of Sirkian identification is quite clear to Fassbinder when he claims, in response to a question underlining the importance of audience identification, "[People] didn't tell me, 'do identification' but they told me, 'it's important to change the world'. But why with those kinds of form? Because it doesn't work any other way.

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<sup>38</sup> Relevant to the purposes of this dissertation is the fact that Fassbinder conceived of the story with a Turkish guest worker protagonist. It is "first told by Franz's girlfriend in *The American Soldier*, but with an ending pointing to a quite different irony. One day, Emmi is found strangled, with the marks of a crested ring on her neck bearing the initial A. Her Turkish boyfriend Ali is arrested but protests his innocence: why should it be he, when Germans call every Turkish worker Ali ('Every Turk Is Called Ali' was Fassbinder's original film title)" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 281).

<sup>39</sup> To be sure, this approach has been theorized belatedly by Fassbinder himself and other critics on both sides of the Atlantic.

Because it's pointless to make films for the public that the public can't feel involved in. That would be idiotic" (Töteberg 158). I propose that in the case of *Fear Eats The Soul* this dual form attempts to 'change the world' with regard to the construction and reception of alterity through cinema.

To ascertain how this dual approach operates, it is useful to consider the nine-minute first scene that includes one of the most important spaces, the Asphalt Bar and the meeting of Ali and Emmi through a warm, loving dance. The film opens with the lines "Happiness is not always fun" appearing on screen, with an out-of-focus shot of a street in the background and a puddle in the foreground over which the credits run. This is Fassbinder's rendering of an establishing shot and what it establishes, literally, is the muddy and gloomy urban space of Munich. The non-diegetic Arab sounding music<sup>40</sup> heard for the first four minutes of the scene becomes a motif for alterity for the remainder of the film. Even without an understanding of its lyrics, the music's tone is melancholic, full of pathos. Cut to an angular interior shot of the bar as the distancing effects accumulate. The angularity is established through lighting; it is a narrow shot with a table and four chairs in the foreground, four more of which are lined up to the furthest point of the frame. The right and the left of the frame are poorly lit, allowing a corridor to emerge from these tables all the way to the door of the establishment. Through this door appears a very small Emmi, timid and indistinct in her movement. The silence in the bar resembles that of a library; as the sound level of the non-diegetic music decreases. Cut to the next shot where customers stare in a hostile or an indifferent manner at Emmi. She

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<sup>40</sup> The song "Al Asfourieh" is sung by the Lebanese singer Sabah, who is one of the most prominent Arab singers of the century. She is also famous as an actress who appeared in almost one hundred films, most of which are melodramas.

stands out from the immigrant clientele through her whiteness and her older age separates her from the younger German female bartender.

The tableau-like arrangement of the characters, another filmic device known to have its distancing effect, dominates this shot as the seven customers in the bar, with Ali at the center, stare at Emmi for at least six seconds. After a brief cross-cut to Emmi seating herself at a table near the door, the focus shifts back to the bar where the bartender walks towards Emmi to take her order as the clientele continue staring at her for another six-second shot, at the end of which the camera moves in to frame Ali and his closest colleague. A brief exchange as to the language of the music ensues, followed by a cut back to the bar crowd still staring at Emmi without changing expression. They are framed from above by a historic mural of Istanbul's old city and the Bosphorus coursing through it; this and another mural of the upper Bosphorus occupy the upper third of most of the remaining shots in this sequence. The crowd's expression finally eases as the bartender returns to bring Emmi her drink; they have remained fixed for over forty seconds of screen time without moving or changing facial expression.

Up to this point, the film remains as Brechtian as almost any other Fassbinder film. *Fear Eats the Soul* however has already singled out Emmi in her loneliness through the brief bits of conversation taking place between the immigrant, younger clientele of the bar and begun to focus on Ali with camera movements and another brief conversation in which a young German woman asks Ali to come home with her, to which Ali responds, "Nein, schwanz kaput." ("No, dick kaput"; author's trans.) Ali's assumed virility is thus inverted and the makings of a melodrama begins by centering on the particular theme of loneliness in a crowded, urban world; as Ali accepts the challenge of asking



Emmi to dance with him, the melodramatic tension between the couple begins to take shape. Ali persuades an Emmi who needs little persuasion with the words "Ja, du allein sitzen. Macht viel traurig. Allein sitzen nicht gut." ("Yes, you sit alone. Makes you real sad. Sitting alone is no good."; author's translation) He then bows slightly to ask Emmi for her hand for the dance in his usual untutored German and the camera moves along with them as both awkwardly walk towards the dance floor. The light changes from the regular lighting of the bar to a dimmer tone, concentrating a red flood light on the couple as their dancing image fills up the shot providing Sirkian undertones of visual excess to a moment that has, from a realist register, little significance for the lives of the characters that populate the film. Their conversation begins to deliver the melodramatic content of the narrative when their simple questions and answers about each other's lives underline each person's particular way of loneliness in this world. The framing of the couple as they dance also establishes an audience's identification with them. Fassbinder's stylistic choices, specifically in the double framing of them through the lights and the out-of-focus frontal plane of the shot, suggests the dual operation of distancing and identification.

This duality is maintained throughout the film in multiple ways and by means of many filmic devices. Gerd Gemünden offers a conceptual bridge to Fassbinder, drawing on Roswitha Müller's analysis of the similarities between melodrama and Brecht's epic theater: "a shared focus on ordinary life and ordinary people, the emphasis on polarization between good and evil, and the frequent use of the form of the parable." More specifically, he underlines

[m]elodrama's tendency to exteriorize psychological conflict - in Sirk often underscored by music, setting, decor, and acting - can be compared to the

Brechtian Gestus which challenges the representation of things as unquestioned givens- with the important distinction that Gestus addresses the social nature of individuals, whereas melodrama stresses the personal component of emotional dilemmas. (70)

It is important to note here that *Gemünden*, like other critics, purports to show the bridge in filmic approaches that Fassbinder builds. However, his interpretation falls short of noting a fundamental approach that the director utilizes here and elsewhere, namely that for Fassbinder the so-called 'social nature of individuals' is determined by 'the personal component of emotional dilemmas' and that the opposite, namely the ways in which an individual's emotional impasses determine his or her social nature, is also valid. In the case of Ali, on the one hand, his émigré status determines not only his social self but also his emotional world. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, his emotional hollowness and vulnerability, depicted through his acceptance of his condition regardless of how unbearable and unjust it becomes, determines his position *vis-à-vis* his social self as an immigrant worker. This mutual determination, I contend, is the novel critical position that allows Fassbinder to extend the ideological implications of Brecht's distanciation techniques, through Sirkian motifs in the use of lighting, camera angles, sets, décor, and performance. To be sure, the distanciating effect is there to encourage the audience to engage in a rational and critical reading of the filmic text, yet the dual approach, "unlike Brecht's alienation ... need not dissolve the basic meaning of the gesture, but can also enhance and celebrate" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 73). The enhancement here is the layering of critical approaches that the film enacts equally on an emotional and a rational level.

The order with which the Sirkian enhances the Brechtian changes is evidenced in Fassbinder's use of language in Ali and Emmi's limited conversations. During the dance we grow accustomed to Ali's simple German, for example when he comments, "Deutscher Herr. Arabisch Hund". ("German master. Arab dog"; author's trans.). The viewer's initial response is in line with the liberal pity one feels towards an immigrant living among other barriers within a language barrier. His simplicity signals a rather inherent naiveté, due primarily to Ali's language skills that suggest a correspondence with his cognitive and emotive capacity. Perhaps the only occasions during which Ali's wisdom emerges are when he translates idioms directly from Moroccan Arabic to German, at which point his words are often understood while they are orientalized by Emmi. His intelligence is evident for example when Ali provides in his broken German what he calls to be a saying in Moroccan that gave the film its title, asking her not to worry since worries, fears "eat the soul." Emmi's response to Ali's words in such instances is one that recognizes their poetic beauty but nevertheless often relegates the translation as useless or inappropriate in the German context.

This disparity is displayed when a colleague of Emmi's visits to ask her for a favor but changes her mind when she sees Ali coming out of the shower. The colleague, shocked by an Arab in his bathrobe in the living room, immediately departs and expresses her dismay in unkind words and a hateful gaze. When his handshake is refused by the woman, Ali is taken aback and says " Dies Frau nix gut... Auge nicht gut. Diese Frau hat Tod in Auge." ("This woman no good. Eyes no good, she has death in her eyes"; author's trans.), to which Emmi responds " Naja, wenn heut die Schwester gestorben ist" ("No wonder, her sister just died", author's trans.). Ali retorts by saying "Nicht Tod von

Schwester war in Auge, andere Tod" ("Not death of sister was in her eyes but another type of death."; author's trans.). Emmi finally cuts him off saying that he imagines her hostility, refusing to honestly discuss the implications of Ali's words. Even in the simplicity of his language, he can convey an ethnic difference, which elicits pity for being misunderstood by his wife in the face of such blatant racism. The pathos, however, is not a comfortable one, as the simplicity and the awkwardness of his language also imparts a self-reflexive quality that makes for an awareness of its staging.

Emmi's simplicity stems from a different source; in their initial conversation and in other scenes we hear "Emmi's reliance on popular clichés and platitudes" (Flinn 42) often delivered in her self-confident grandmotherly tone. Whenever she veers outside of these clichés, however, her capacity to articulate her own thoughts becomes diminished and her struggle on screen becomes one that seeks further clichés so as to make sense of her situation. Her dilemma becomes self-evident especially in the middle of the film, when a rain-soaked Emmi opens her heart to Ali about her frustration with other people's treatment of her because of her decisions. She finds it hard to reconcile the dilemma of seeking others to populate her life while simultaneously greatly resenting their behavior towards her. Their conversation then moves towards a rather juvenile level as Emmi asks "Wie viel [liebst du mich]? ("How much do you love me?"; author's trans.), to which Ali responds by opening his arms wide "So viel." ("This much"; author's trans.) Emmi, as expected, comes back with "Und ich von hier bis Marokko" ("Oh I love you from here to Morocco"; author's trans.). For both characters, "[t]rue to melodramatic form, language offers little, draping figures with the telltale marks of national difference and class

...Upholding melodramatic tradition, words do little except to construct the barest, most superficial aspects of their identities" (Flinn 43).

Within this rubric, the superficiality of how words operate on the surface of the film in a melodramatic register does not negate the Brechtian register; instead, it amplifies the amount of space that other distancing devices maintain. However, addressing the social nature of alterity in different social backgrounds while infusing it with a melodramatic content occurs not only through the use of language. Looking and framing, one of the most thoroughly analyzed aspects of Fassbinder's cinema, could be viewed in this fashion as well.

The importance of framing and mirror-shots has been analyzed in the previous segment on *Effi Briest*. I contend with Elsaesser that both these aspects and the insistence on displaying protagonists looking intently at one another at the end of most of the sequences are

a typical feature of much 'self-reflexive' cinema, in the tradition of European auteurs and yet, to explain the frequent mirror shots in Fassbinder's films, neither modernist self-reflexivity nor pastiche finally accounts for the foregrounding of vision and the excess of framing one finds in [Fassbinder's films] ... [Here, t]wo structures - the viewer/film relation and the relation of the characters to the fiction itself- mirror each other infinitely and indefinitely. (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 58)

I consider the above discussion of the Sirkian and the Brechtian as enhancing one another in this indefinite zone that Elsaesser articulates for Fassbinder's films. To this end, I revisit the sequence at the midpoint of the film's narrative, shot in the café garden with yellow chairs scattered about, attempting to seek out the implications of this so-called

mirroring of two structures. Fassbinder's filmic gestures and the melodramatic content of their conversation provide clues for my reading.

The sequence begins in an extreme long-shot of the couple, exactly at the one-hour mark of the film, sitting amongst a group of yellow empty chairs and tables, framed by an old tree trunk and a vine-covered wall. Their image regresses all the way to the back of the shot thanks to other light poles and similar vertical items. It is a crowded frame, one that, however, contains only Ali and Emmi. Their tableau-like stance is interrupted after five seconds when Ali looks over his shoulder and exclaims, "Alles gucken". ("Everyone is looking"; author's trans.) Cut to a mid-shot of Ali in the foreground and a blurred image of a crowd of well-to-do middle class Germans of different age groups, all staring. As Emmi begins to cry, saying "Sind plus neidisch die Leute" ("All these people are really jealous"; author's trans.) the camera moves from left to right from a mid-shot that balances them in the middle, to a close-up of Ali, looking slightly down at Emmi, asking "Warum weind du?" ("Why are you crying?"; author's trans.) Emmi's response outlines the premise of the first part of the film with respect to the melodramatic dynamics of the couple's relationship:

"Weil, weil ich so glücklich bin auf der Welt sein, und auf der anderen zeit, halt ich alles nicht mehr aus. Diese Hass von dem Mänschen, von Allen, Allen! Manchmal wünsche ich mir, ich wäre mit dir ganz allein in der Welt, und keine um Uns zu. Ich tue natürlich immer so, das mach mir das alles gar nichts aus, aber natürlich das mach mir Alles aus. Das mach Mich kaput."

("Because I am so happy, on the one hand, and on the other I can't bear it anymore. All this hatred from the people, from everyone. Sometimes I wish I

were all alone with you in the world, with nobody around us. I always pretend I don't care. But of course I care. It is killing me."; author's trans.)

Her words are delivered as the camera looks slightly down on her, from Ali's left shoulder, the back of his head occupying half the frame. Cut to a shot from her point-of-view as she barks at the people staring at them without moving, "Das ist mein Mann, mein Mann!" ("This is my husband, my husband"; author's translation) and the camera reverses a movement from a moment earlier, moving slowly this time from right to left. Emmi is seen crying, her head on the table and Ali's huge hands caressing her hair, saying "Habibi" ("My love"; author's trans.). They then resort to the juvenile exchange of words asking how much each loves the other. Emmi regains her composure through this exchange of platitudes and in an excited manner proposes that they go on a vacation to a place where "uns keine kennt" ("no one knows them"; author's trans.) and "uns keine anklost" ("no one stares at them"; author's trans.), while looking straight into Ali's eyes. As she pronounces these words, the camera reverts to a mid-shot where both Ali and Emmi are viewed from the same height with the camera tilted slightly up. There are no further shots of onlookers staring at them as though the conversation had already resolved these issues. She prophesizes that "wenn wir zurück kommen, dann hat sich alles verändert, und alle Leute sind gut zu uns" ("Once we get back everything will change for the better and everyone will be nice to us"; author's trans.). As her prophecy is uttered, the camera makes as grand and enigmatic a gesture as the prophecy itself, panning back while maintaining the couple at the center of the shot. The camera stops moving on a long shot with all the yellow chairs crowding the image, mirroring the first shot of the

sequence, concluding the sequence with the only fade-to-black of the film, apart from the ending.

The mirroring between the two structures -that of the viewer/film relation and the relation of the characters to the fiction itself- is indeed a complex one in this three-minute sequence. First, the layering of looks: of Ali staring and at other times lovingly gazing at Emmi; Emmi looking towards the camera, towards the crowd staring at them in the background, or at Ali; the unmoving crowd looking with emotionless eyes at the couple; and finally, the gaze of the camera and we, the viewers. This layering often implicates the complicity of each party in what the person(s), as object of the gaze, solicits. In other words, within this matrix of exchange is the looking as well as "being seen ... which calls attention to a space or place of difference and 'otherness'" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 65). The web to be untangled is not simply one wherein certain privileged individuals with power are looking at powerless victims, nor is it simply the case where the gaze of the power structure constitutes the subject of its gaze.

The process of untangling and deconstructing requires analysis of the position of the viewer herself who is made all the more aware of her presence by these gestures of looking embedded in the film. At the same time, she is pulled into the film by the melodramatic content that has at its center the impossible wish to be seen without being acknowledged as different. The group staring intently at the couple without moving is yet another layer, an evocation of the Brechtian Gestus, with its paramount social implications, where the film "...appears to offer a social critique of the pressures to conform and the narrow scope that prejudice tolerates in the way of cultural or racial otherness" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 65). This intentional gaze is the focus of



Fassbinder's critique of German society, although only to a certain extent. Emmi and Ali, as a couple and as individuals, simultaneously gaze and solicit looks throughout the film and even in this brief sequence. This interplay that embodies Fassbinder's concept of alterity is constituted on screen, beyond the obvious racial and other cultural markers of difference. Within this interplay lies a paradox, however, since the couple,

cannot be 'seen together', because there is no social space (work, leisure, family) in which they are not objects of aggressive, hostile, disapproving gazes (neighbors, shop-keepers, bartenders, Emmi's sons and daughters-in-law). Yet conversely, they discover that they cannot exist without being seen by others, for when they are alone, their own mutually sustaining gaze proves to be insufficient to confer on them or confirm in them a sense of identity - that delicate balance between their social, their sexual and their ethnic selves, in the interplay between sameness and difference, self and other. (65)

Within this rubric, Fassbinder's complex understanding of difference and identity is, I suggest, tied strictly to the couple's melodramatic condition. In other words, in Fassbinder's brilliant formulation, at least within this film, the pathos at the heart of their condition, the one that enables the viewer to experience empathy for this couple, is exactly the impulse that drives them outside of the boundaries of a historically constituted yet firm German, middle-class national identity and renders them as different in almost every given context. This formulation applies to the couple when they operate within the film as a unit. Within the internal dynamics of the couple, however, a different story operates. Their relationship to one another is indeed more fluid than it appears on the surface; the emotional exchange and the power relationship that ensues is marked by

ageism, racism, and different levels of conformity to their surroundings. To read these levels, I turn to the next and final discussion of how Fassbinder presents a complex web of alterity for each member of this couple in his novel articulation of victimhood and minorities.

### **b.Kif-Kif<sup>41</sup>: The Dialectics of Alterity and Victimhood in the Characters of Ali and Emmi**

The narrative structure of *Fear Eats the Soul* constitutes two parts that mirror one another, divided by the scene at the cafe in the park. Part one articulates the couple's as well as each individual's rejection from various social groups in which he or she belongs, rendering them as victims in their difference and in various degrees. In Emmi's case, this ostracism is more acutely felt and the groups that reject her are more numerous, since Ali has not been included in most of these in the first place. Her neighbors, all female, are given the harshest treatment by Fassbinder, as they harass the couple in many situations within the border space of the apartment, situated between domestic space and society at large. Emmi's family, of whom we learn during Ali and Emmi's first private conversation, do not bother to communicate with her, and are also primary actors in terms of the violence with which they ostracize Emmi. Her daughter and her two sons respond by physical violence<sup>42</sup>, ridiculing her to her face, and deciding never to talk to her again. The list of accomplices in this exclusion includes her coworkers, her local shopkeeper, and ordinary people they encounter in the urban space of Munich. These harassments occur in

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<sup>41</sup> "Kif-Kif" is the slang used by Ali in the film at various times that translates as "whatever" to English, also connoting the phrase "who cares", and "egal" in German, accompanied by a shrug of shoulders.

<sup>42</sup> The oldest son kicks the television set in Emmi's living room upon hearing of the couple's marriage, an homage to the TV given to Jane in *All That Heaven Allows* by her children to alleviate her loneliness and to direct her towards more acceptable ways of dealing with life. It is perhaps indicative of the hatred that Fassbinder feels towards mainstream television programming.

the first hour of the film, until the garden café scene, ending with Emmi's hopeful prophecy that everyone will be nice to them upon their return. What brings Emmi to tears is the recognition that there is no space where they can exist without the constitutive gaze of others around them<sup>43</sup>. Skvirsky notes that

[t]he second part of the film then explains the nature of this dependence. ...the scenarios of the first part of the film are replayed, but with a difference [where people reverse their] position toward Emmi and Ali under the pressures of the growing dominance of the supermarket in German society. Discrimination is bad for business... Throughout the second part of the film, relations between Emmi and her neighbors, family, and coworkers confirm this market logic. Her relationships with others are shown to be determined, in the last analysis, not by a distorted sense of decency and morality, but by need. (Skvirsky 100-2)

It is worth noting that the two groups that Fassbinder excludes from this web of oppression are Emmi's landlord who accepts Ali's presence as long as they are to be married, and the police, who leave Ali and Emmi to enjoy their place with immigrant coworkers, as long as they create no disturbance. These two instances, in my understanding, distinguish themselves from others referenced above in that their position *vis-à-vis* Ali and Emmi are governed by legal and bureaucratic regulations. These institutionalized positions on the surface remain liberal with respect to minorities in the aftermath of World War II, and Fassbinder does not challenge them overtly with this film.

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<sup>43</sup> Following the garden cafe sequence, Fassbinder cuts to the couple returning from a vacation -we learn from a conversation- at a lake near Munich. Fassbinder does not introduce the space that satisfies Emmi's desire to be where no one stares at them, as the vacation is not shown on screen. In the diegesis of the film such a space oddly exists only in words.

Ali's struggles coexist with those of Emmi in the first part of the film as his race is the main source of the ostracism they experience. In the second part, as others begin to act kindly towards the couple as a unit and towards Emmi as an individual, Ali's situation alters as well. As each scene appears to go well for the couple, Fassbinder reveals another modality of difference and ostracism particular to Ali. Emmi accepts the shopkeeper's invitation to her shop, as she accepts the requests from her son to babysit their daughter and from her neighbor for more storage space. In each of these scenes, Ali's presence is acknowledged, whereas earlier people either treated him as invisible or with hateful looks<sup>44</sup>. Each person who acknowledges Ali qualifies him with a racial marker, chosen albeit from the group of "kind" words or gestures for an outsider. Ali nevertheless remains a victim of their gaze and their more 'progressive' attitude in this new modality. The discourse of looking and the gaze is aware of the viewer's presence at all times in this film, implicating the viewer's complicity. As Elsaesser would have it "[m]aking someone a victim is the way to maintain the proper distance towards [him] ... Our compassion, precisely in so far as it is "sincere", presupposes that in it, we perceive ourselves in the form that we find likeable: the victim is presented so that we like to see ourselves in the position from which we stare at him" (67).

Such a relationship of a gaze equally exchanged is evident most clearly in the scene where her coworkers accept an invitation to meet at Emmi's apartment. The tone is quite different from an earlier bitter visit by a coworker, as we see the jovial group of ladies on the right-hand side of the mid-shot of the living room with Ali watching

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<sup>44</sup> Skvirsky's comparison of the two parts of the film regarding the racism that Ali faces is insightful: "The adjustment to the story turns out to be the contemporary face of racism. Because in Ali the passage of time (a mere worker's vacation) cannot justify the change in attitude (i.e., the realization that discriminatory practices do not pay), the film suggests that the new attitude does not represent an advance or progress or moral epiphany, but rather, a new incarnation of the original offense" (Skvirsky 102).

television on the left. Fassbinder blatantly presents Emmi's coworkers' vulgar curiosity about Ali as they first comment on how useful Ali is around the house, moving closer to examine him. Emmi, visibly proud of showing off her husband, asks them not to be shy and touch his muscles, to which they comply as Ali presents a bicep. Everyone in the scene is smiling, with the exception of Ali, whose smile cannot hide the sadness and pain in his eyes. For him, it seems, even such acts are "Kif-Kif", the colloquial Moroccan term he utters in similar situations indicating everything is the same for him. In other words, Ali's response to such acts, whether the more violently racist examples in the first part of the film or the kinder ones in the second, reveals no visible difference. For the immigrant worker, the melancholy mood<sup>45</sup> prevails, allowing the melodramatic pathos of the first part to carry over to the second.

With this scene, another dynamic between the couple begins to play out more clearly, that of different modalities of oppression in a couple's relationship, a favorite of Fassbinder. A series of exchanges between them ensues in which there is no proper power equalization. Emmi refuses Ali's request of couscous for dinner saying " Langsam solltest du dich an die Verhältnisse in Deutschland gewöhnen. Und in der Deutschland isst mann kein kus-kus" ("This is Germany and in Germany people don't have couscous for dinner, you have to get used to it"; author's trans.). The North African dish becomes a motif for the later part of the film as Ali goes back to his old partner, the bartender, who makes "good couscous" according to Ali. He spends the day and night there, presumably

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<sup>45</sup> Fassbinder's oeuvre hosts different characters from the German society that live with melancholia, including Petra the female upper middle class protagonist of *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972), or Franz, the working class protagonist of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980). This mood endures in each character -as it does in Ali- and represents how they remain as others and not as victims. This melancholia proves irresolvable as each narrative unfolds, pointing us towards a deeper, existential source of their current conditions. I contend that Ali's melancholia (visible in every scene, even in ones where his wife Emmi is joyful or when he is in the camaraderie of other working class peers) underlines primarily the impossibility of reconciling his racially other identity within German society.

eats his couscous and has sex with the bartender when she gets home, essentially cheating on his wife. Yet, this ethno-culinary marker does not resolve Ali's situation, apparent in the way in which now Ali remains distant from his own present world as he makes love or eats couscous, and as he continues to drink regularly and heavily while losing his weekly salary at cards, upon leaving the bartender's house.

The second part of the narrative is also divided into two segments; Emmi accepts the new friendly model and in no way relates to Ali's plight. Ali responds by casting Emmi out of his circle of immigrant friends, effectively cutting ties with those with whom they had once socialized together. He further uses their age difference as leverage through his sexual endeavors. In displaying these behaviors, Fassbinder does not claim to have a more profound insight into the subjectivities of different minorities. Rather, he claims: "I have always maintained that one can learn most about the majority by looking at the behavior of the minorities. I can understand more about the oppressors, when I show the actions of the oppressed, or rather, how the oppressed try to survive in the face of oppression" (qtd. in Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 30). He claims to represent the totality of oppressive regimes embedded in West Germany at the time by depicting acts in which the couple engage together. This cycle of oppression culminates nevertheless in the scene where Emmi comes to confront Ali, who has not returned home in days, in the auto-repair shop where he works.

Emmi's entry into their workspace is preceded by a truly Brechtian sequence in which Ali and his friends remain working on a car as a German co-worker tells dubious jokes which generate neither laughter nor amusement. Emmi enters, framed by several doorways, and asks in a rather agitated yet caring fashion where he has been spending his

nights. The scolding tone immediately gives way to a melodramatic register, as Fassbinder switches to a shot-reverse-shot between Emmi and Ali. As Ali looks down upon a shorter Emmi across the car he is repairing, Emmi exclaims "Ich brauch dich Ali, ich brauch dich so sehr" ("I need you Ali, I need you very much"; author's trans.). These words are also met with a cold and silent stare from Ali. In a mid-shot of his colleagues, two working-class Germans and another working-class Arab, the coworker who has been cracking silly jokes says, "Wer ist das Ali? Ist das deine Grossmutter aus Marokko?" ("Who is that Ali? Is that your grandmother from Morocco?"; author's trans.). Everyone in the room bursts out laughing, including Ali who suddenly looks down as he laughs. Emmi stares back at him, then down at the floor herself. Ali then looks up; this time the cold stare has given way to defiance. Their eyes meet again, Emmi reads Ali's stare, looks down, turns around and slowly leaves the workshop. Within the camaraderie of the workshop, established not only through class alliances but also through an ethnic alliance, Ali seems to be no different than his peers in terms of his viciousness towards Emmi. This singular hostility exists because

[i]n Fassbinder, suffering by itself is not enough to establish virtue. If the melodramatic mode's use of suffering as proof of virtue is assimilable to partisan[ship] toward marginal groups solely on the basis of being marginal (i.e. victimized)," then it is this equivalence between suffering and virtue that Fassbinder refuses by interjecting the counterweight of the victim's own cruelty. Recalling Linda Williams' terminology, this is melodrama without victim-heroes: suffering does not establish moral virtue, and moral virtue is never misrecognized because it is beside the point. Elsaesser calls this a "non-judgmental relation to

destructive or evil characters"; Fassbinder has called it "indulgence [toward characters] to the point of irresponsibility". (Skvirsky105)

The German worker makes the same joke again as Emmi leaves the frame and the workers break into laughter once again for thirty seconds. Emmi walks into the street, framed through a dirty window. In this laughter, however, Ali does not join. He looks down as his oblivious friends continue to laugh. This last gesture is the culmination in the trajectory of the couple's power struggle and Ali's suffering is plainly visible.

Contrary to Skvirsky's reading of the surface melodramatic content of the scene that "the old washerwoman needs the guest worker, just as the guest worker needs the washerwoman" (102), Fassbinder posits the impossibility inscribed in the subjectivity of *gastarbeiter* in the liberal context of West Germany. The identity politics framework offered by this society, in an attempt to rid itself of its racist past, nonetheless does not allow for the alterity of an Ali to exist in an unchallenged, harmonious manner, neither on film nor in reality. Only when lying in bed unconscious at the end of the film after an ulcer attack, with Emmi watching over him, does Ali seem to be at peace. Elsaesser and others interpret the motherly, loving gaze as the gateway to a utopian moment that could arise in the future for this subjectivity to become whole again. In the final shot, however, Emmi first gazes at Ali who cries in bed, only to look away towards the closed window blinds. The blinds obscure what is on the outside, suggesting that Emmi remains locked in the vicious circles Fassbinder identified for her. The love between Emmi and Ali surfaces as insufficient to overcoming their obstacles, rather than promising a utopian moment. The experience of later generations of guestworkers and working-class women further dissolved the hope of a Utopian future. It is, in my view, this socio-political and



representational dilemma that Fatih Akın inherits, one that he accepts and makes his own, both filmically and politically. The attempts through which he reformulates this conundrum for his own generation of Turkish Germans will be the focus of Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER II

### ETERNAL RECURRENCE OF THE SAME PATHOS: MELODRAMA AND DISPLACEMENT IN ATIF YILMAZ'S AND YILMAZ GÜNEY'S FILMS

#### A. Breaks and Continuities in *Yeşilçam*'s Melodramas: An Overview of Context, Content, and Form

This chapter extends my focus on how representations of different modes of alterity present alternatives to narratives of national identity. Analyzing two films from *Yeşilçam*<sup>46</sup>, *O Beautiful Istanbul* (1966) by Atif Yılmaz and *The Herd* (1978) scripted by Yılmaz Güney and directed by Zeki Ökten, I outline another genealogy for my later reading of Fatih Akin's films. These films, not unlike Fassbinder's melodramas, highlight many 'stranded objects' of Turkish national history. They take part in narrativizing the modernization project of the Turkish Republic, particularly the complete suppression of a cosmopolitan Ottoman Imperial past (specifically in *O Beautiful Istanbul*), and the subjugation of gendered and ethnic identities of the nation under a singular, patriarchal identity.

Before discussing how Yılmaz's film both challenges and participates in these cinematic modes of representation, I offer an overview of the cultural and political nexus of *Yeşilçam*, from its inception in the 1940s to its demise in late 1980s. The Turkish cultural sphere in the 20th century has been primarily depicted as an oscillation between East and West, "a rhizomatic existence, not one or the other but in a continual movement, between two cultures" (Kaya 5). These polarities are also central to the national narrative imposed on the populace by its ruling elites since the establishment of the Turkish

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<sup>46</sup> *Yeşilçam* is the name given to films produced in Turkey from the 1950s and to the early 1990s. The name was first used amongst the members of the film industry. Literally meaning "green pine" the name refers to a small street in downtown Istanbul that harbored a close-knit community of filmmakers, actors and technicians.

Republic in 1923. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, its heritage was discarded as Eastern and irrational, bigoted and shaped by Islam. The founders of the Republic pushed through an agenda of Westernization known collectively as Kemalism (named after the founder of the Republic), characterized as strictly secular--both in public and private realms-- rational, and purportedly shaped by humanist values. The ensuing ambivalence as to how a truly national yet Westernized nation building project could be implemented and which aspects of the past be included in its realization underlie the political, social, and cultural tensions of Turkey to this day.

Rather than a positive definition, a negative description of Turkish identity was promulgated in the Early Republican period (1923-1946). Drawing on Sibel Bozdoğan's work on architectural works, modernism and nation-building during that time, Umut Tümay Arslan posits this negative articulation of Turkish identity through the rejection of "the Ottoman and Islamic ... as 'the cultural other' of the new nation while a Western perspective with cosmopolitan, liberal and individualist bearings was also eliminated, as it was deemed as equally dangerous for a homogenous notion of Turkishness"<sup>47</sup> (Arslan, "Mazi" 107; author's trans.). Such a homogenous notion of Turkishness persisted into the later periods of the Republic, when the films under discussion were produced. The Turkish national narrative meticulously adopted certain Eastern and Western notions, all the while carefully excluding others.

Scholars of Turkish cinema and Turkish filmmakers have also maintained this binary while discarding a medley of other probabilities. Symptomatic of these 1960s

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<sup>47</sup> "Çifte olumsuzlama'ya dayalı bu modern millilik hayali, Osmanlı ve İslami geçmişinin yeni ulusun "medeniyet bakımından ötekisi" diye reddederken, homojen bir Türklük için aynı ölçüde tehditkar kozmopolit, liberal, bireyci Batıyı da kendi dışında bırakmak istemiştir" (qtd. in Arslan, "Mazi" 107).

debates was the discussion of authenticity<sup>48</sup> in cinema circles. For scholars of the following decades, "civilization and the ensuing modernization, Westernization, are key concepts in understanding Turkish identity as well as Turkish Cinema"<sup>49</sup> (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 27; author's trans.). To be sure, contemporary scholars present *Yeşilçam* as "marked with an ambiguity and transitionality, which did not fit to the models of modernization as prescribed by the modernizing elite and scholars" (Arslan, "Hollywood" 105), or they maintain an altogether ambivalent stance concerning these issues. Viewed thus, the films "would simultaneously stress the indeterminate aspects of Turkish identity all the while embodying the discomfort felt by this project of modernization"<sup>50</sup> (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 28; author's trans.). The binary between the poles of East and West nevertheless remains constitutive.

Through my reading of *O Beautiful Istanbul* and *The Herd*, I critically examine how approaches to *Yeşilçam*<sup>51</sup> have maintained this binary. Promoting a discourse within this binary and qualifying it with terms such as 'rhizomic', 'ambivalent', or 'in flux' mirrors the identity-construction practices of Turkey's founding fathers. Such a critical gesture entraps a constellation of figures that are situated outside the national narrative of identity construction, within the benevolent and patriarchal gaze of its ideological nexus.

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<sup>48</sup> One can consider the fierce and polarizing national cinema debates of Turkey of the mid-1960s in this regard when several groups of directors rejected *Yeşilçam*'s mode of film production for a more truly Turkish cinema. Yılmaz Güney's cinema is very much part of this debate as he continued to occupy a space both inside and outside of *Yeşilçam*.

<sup>49</sup> [m]edeniyet ve bununla ilişkili olan modernleşme, batılılaşma kavramları gerek Türk kimliğinin gerekse Türk Sinemasının anlaşılmasında anahtar kavramlardır" (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 27).

<sup>50</sup> "...bir yandan sınırları tam olarak belirlenmemiş olan ulusal kimliğin bileşenlerine vurgu yapıyor, bir yandan da modernleşme projesinden duyulan rahatsızlığı dillendiriyordu" (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 28).

<sup>51</sup> For a brief exposition of the history of critical inquires on *Yeşilçam* melodramas from a Turkish scholar, see Hasan Akbulut's chapter "Türk Melodram Sinemasının Kuramsal Çalışmalardaki Yeri" ("The Place of Turkish Melodramas in Theoretical Works"; author's trans.) (Akbulut, "Kadına" 116-125).

I propose that these two films offer disruptive modalities of alterity and being/existence *via* narrative impasses and characterizations unresolved through the frameworks dependent upon dichotomies such as East/West, authentic/false etc.<sup>52</sup> These filmmakers also offer alternatives to the Turkish national narratives permanently locked in the binary I have elaborated above; their frequent rejections of the imposition of national identity provide glimpses of the paths that Turkish modernity did not choose to follow, as well as of the 'stranded objects' it disregarded. In particular, it is their implementation of different modalities of melodrama that demonstrates the filmmakers' concern to advance radical narratives in formal terms accessible to audiences.

### **B. Melodramatic Istanbul and Its Displaced Subjects: A Reading of Atıf Yılmaz's "O Beautiful Istanbul"**

One of the primary properties of melodrama is its ability to render legible the moral order (Gledhill, "Reinventing" 233) of the spaces that are traversed; films of this genre possess a capacity for laying bare social contradictions through formal mechanisms that allow access to "the reality under the surface" (Singer 51). Atıf Yılmaz's urban melodrama, *O Beautiful Istanbul*, exemplifies a *Yeşilçam* film in reinforcing the dominant patriarchal order of Turkish identity while gesturing beyond these boundaries. The film renders legible several conflicting moral orders through its identification and

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<sup>52</sup> To be sure, this dichotomy is needed to read a multiplicity of films within *Yeşilçam* as it is a national cinema bound to national narratives. I agree with Arslan that in most of these films "the protagonists of melodramas who are in pursuit of a sign, a memory or a model, began their lives in this geography with the displacement that came about in the attempt to Westernize. It is for this reason that the antagonism of East and West stands at the forefront of all narratives of national belonging. The reservoir of cinematic narratives is this antagonism." (Arslan, "Mazi" 95; author's trans.) However, in reading all films under this rubric our inquiries forego the chance of fully engaging with the critical potential that some examples from *Yeşilçam*, such as *O Beautiful Istanbul*, carry. ("Melodramın işaret, iz, hafıza, model peşindeki kahramanları bu coğrafyada daha en baştan Batılılaşmanın yol açtığı anlatsal yer değiştirmeye hayata başlamışlardır. Bu yüzden Doğu-Batı karşıtlığı ulusal-biz ile ilgili hikayelerin ve mecazların başlangıcına yerleşmiştir. Sinema anlatılarının rezervuarını da bu karşıtlık kurar.")

distantiation techniques and through its characterization of the melodramatic relationship between its protagonists, Ayşe and Haşmet. The couple's narrative is framed within a newly emerging and disruptive context of capitalist exchange taking place in Istanbul in the mid 1960s that harbors a distinct, localized modality and history rendered through a constellation of concepts including *mahalle* [the neighborhood], nostalgia and the ensuing melancholia of its inhabitants.

*O Beautiful Istanbul* tells the story of Ayşe, who flees her working-class family in Western Turkey to Istanbul, hoping to become a film actress. Once in Istanbul, she acquires a boyfriend/manager/director who exploits her dreams of stardom with the intention of forcing her into prostitution. As Ayşe seeks a photographer for a movie-star contest, she meets Haşmet<sup>53</sup>, a grumpy, world-weary street photographer descended from a rooted Istanbul family that has gone bankrupt. Haşmet takes it upon himself to "save" Ayşe, offering her a place to stay and attempting to pass on his understanding of art and culture based on Ottoman/Istanbulite ethics and aesthetics. Ayşe however maintains her desire to become an actress; when that dream fails, she aspires to a career as a music star, thus attempting to adapt to the newly emerging capitalist sensibilities of post-1960s Turkey. Ayşe and Haşmet gradually fall in love; the melodrama unravels as the couple unites and then separates over four episodes. Each episode entails elements that enable the protagonists to realize how their desires are predicated on "wrong morals", yet this realization does not allow them to break through cycles of poverty and melancholia. Before the film concludes, they reunite and gaze at Istanbul one last time after exhausting

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<sup>53</sup> Played by Sadri Alışık, one of the most renowned stars of *Yeşilçam*, who is primarily known for his heart-felt depictions of working-class heroes and tragi-comic depictions of lumpen-proletariat con-artists.

all familiar modalities of existence, as Haşmet assures Ayşe that the city will offer something for them to believe in.

*O Beautiful Istanbul* employs a realist backdrop and on-location shooting within which a melodramatic plot unravels; the film is predicated on a typical trope/plot device of Turkish melodramas at the time: a man attempts to take a young woman with whom he has fallen in love, under his protection in order to help her realize her potential as he attunes her to the prevailing moral order. This trope/plot device undergoes a specific economy of desire wherein "patriarchal ideology is reaffirmed by proposing that the "spoiled woman" often encountered in domestic [*Yeşilçam*] melodramas can only be happy if she learns to desire the man who desires her"<sup>54</sup> (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 48; author's trans.). The film not only undertakes to shape female subjectivity but also to mold an older, male subjectivity that refuses to forego ties to the past. Unlike most other *Yeşilçam* melodramas, the 'correct' moral vantage point is not easily legible; this ambiguity enables the film to simultaneously affirm and reject prevailing national narratives of Turkish identity.

Haşmet's voice and identity depart from what viewers are accustomed to seeing in *Yeşilçam* films. In the film's first shot, before the credits, his words affirm values belonging to pre-Republican urban Istanbul. The first image is a long shot of the Bosphorus shore, lined with old wooden houses and wooden fishing boats, and enclosed by a large wood-framed window. The camera pans down to focus on Haşmet from above. He finishes his soup and, clearing his throat, immediately lights a cigarette as Yılmaz cuts to a frontal mid-shot of him. Haşmet then notices the audience and, in a four-minute

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<sup>54</sup>"Böylece yerli melodramalarda sıkça rastlanan 'şımarık' kadının, kendisini arzulayan erkeği arzulamayı öğrendiğinde mutlu olabileceğine" ilişkin ataerkil ideoloji yeniden üretilmiş olur" (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 48).

monologue, introduces himself, starting with his family genealogy that harks back to the Ottoman court. Such self-reflexive shots occur several times, resulting in what Nezi̇h Erdođan calls "a cinematic discourse, blending Hollywood-style realism with an unintentional Brechtian alienation effect" (266). The anti-illusionistic devices<sup>55</sup> in this and other films of *Yeşilçam* are motivated by concerns unrelated to those that are readable as Brechtian. *Yeşilçam* films intended "to meet a demand for two hundred films a year,[where] production practices had to run at great speed and thus by default, a visual tradition of shadowplays, miniatures, and so on was revived" (Erdođan 266). The effect of such anti-illusionary shots often results in a more intimate relationship between audience and characters, rather than the intended critical distance of the Brechtian framework.

Haşmet's opening monologue reveals his personality. He explains that his grandfather was a master food-taster at the Ottoman court, having amassed a fortune that his father spent on women and wine; what remained of the family fortune Haşmet himself lost due his inability to conduct business in the new capitalist system. His mother's elopement with a young soldier after Haşmet's birth led to his upbringing by his courtly grandparents. Although he has sold the mansion and its possessions, he lives in a small shack in the mansion's courtyard, a few steps away from the Bosphorus.

His new arrangement resembles the peripheral position of the masses that migrated to Istanbul in the past decade. He is visibly proud of his past yet a bit melancholic about his condition. This melancholia is not tied to the loss of the family riches because he claims to be doing well even in these reduced circumstances. His

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<sup>55</sup> These devices became practically obsolete for the generation born after World War II, except for the shadowplays that lingered longer than other forms of entertainment from Ottoman times. The viewers of the 1960s would still recognize these devices. Yet later generations would perceive them as motifs of the films themselves, rather than having direct access to such forms of entertainment.



demeanor, as he confesses, also results from having over-indulged in alcohol the previous night. Haşmet works for the moment as a street photographer, thanks to an old camera bought by his great uncle when serving as the Ottoman consul in France; Haşmet claims that he can sustain a meager existence in his small neighborhood on the Bosphorus. He emphasizes his ability to work at other jobs yet claims that "I did not want to sell my freedom for a few pennies"<sup>56</sup> (author's trans.). As he pronounces the word 'freedom', he yawns and stretches, downplaying the significance of such concepts as freedom and work.

Haşmet's heritage has been rendered irrelevant by the establishment of the Republic. He now speaks from the periphery, depicting a vanished world. He is conscious of his precarious condition, and yet in his *mahalle* [neighborhood] situated on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, his heritage still elicits reverence from his neighbors. This reverence is discernible in the following sequence, as he is greeted while walking to catch the ferry, a staple in Istanbul narratives, which stops at some twenty Bosphorus neighborhoods each morning to bring inhabitants to the Old Town. Haşmet's inner voice picks up as a voice-over speaking in the present tense, followed by a tracking shot of him walking the streets. While voice-over may be a Hollywood convention, Haşmet's narration also indicates how "*Yeşilçam* combines melodramatic modality with the storytelling conventions of Turkey that rely upon oral narration" (Arslan, "Hollywood" 18). This device enables Haşmet to assume the role of external narrator, thus situating him closer to the audience, and revealing his psychological state.

The monologue detailing his past embodies the social dynamics that define him in his locale. Haşmet's bachelorhood and the several eligible women living nearby are

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<sup>56</sup> "İki, üç kuruşa hürriyetimi satmak istemedim."

mentioned as he bows to these potential spouses as he walks by, describing each and his reasons for not marrying them. Marriage becomes a motif that explains why Haşmet (and the past sensibilities he represents) cannot find a suitable partner in the new social order. His options run the gamut of urban Istanbulites, all of whom have been part of the city's fabric for more than a generation. He first greets a Turkish lady, a French teacher by profession, who fulfills the criteria that the Kemalist regime advocated for Turkish women: westernized, educated, secular, and independent. Haşmet claims that she is interested in him, having heard of his knowledge of literature, but dismisses this choice, saying that educated women are to be avoided. Haşmet then greets an older lady as her driver opens her door; she has inherited several apartments and is now a wealthy landlady. Haşmet describes her intentions as willing to literally tie a rope around him like a slave. Finally, as he passes by the neighborhood butcher he describes the butcher's daughter; ready to marry him, with her father supporting her wish. He rejects this possibility, saying middle-class women are not marriageable for they harbor aspirations and material needs that he cannot fulfill. The marriage motif and Haşmet's rejections repeatedly appear in the narrative, marking the danger that the qualities he represents might not be present in the next generation, just as the wooden houses lining the Bosphorus will soon be replaced by concrete apartment buildings.

Haşmet reaches the dock to board the ferry and all other noises in the streets yield to the approaching ferry's horn and the sound of seagulls. A long shot of him on the platform is followed by a cut to him gazing at the sea. An inner monologue commences on the soundtrack, this time in a different emotional register, as he leaves his anxieties of daily existence behind and concentrates on the calming beauty of Istanbul and the

Bosphorus. The camera pans right to left, revealing the largest medieval castle on the European shores of the Bosphorus as he speaks in a voiceover:

O Beautiful Istanbul, how your beauty of a thousand years remains unchanged! O beloved Bosphorus! Once our grandfathers also held their breath in the face of this beauty. How was that old song by Bimen Şen? O our ancestors also went through these waters, proud, warrior-like... Where is Central Asia, Where are the gates of Vienna."<sup>57</sup> (author's trans.)

Haşmet's elegy presents his persistent nostalgia for the city and its illustrious past. In tracing the genealogy of the city, he echoes the national narrative of Turkish military advance that had ended three hundred years earlier. This genealogy Turkifies the city with its discourses on tribes of Turks descending into Asia Minor, later capturing Istanbul and then laying siege to Vienna over the span of a thousand years. His words about his grandfathers invoke another layer of a cosmopolitan culture that flourished on the Bosphorus over the past few hundred years, this time moving in a different register from the previous one. This culture entailed a layered rule of conduct, informed by Armenian, Greek, Italian, French, Jewish, Arabic and Kurdish cultural influences, among others. Concurrently, he mentions a composer of Ottoman classical music of Armenian descent, Bimen Şen, whose family name had been changed allegedly by *Atatürk* himself, from Dergazarian to Şen, Turkifying the composer's Armenian name. The composer's song is heard in the middle of Haşmet's words, to complement the image and the nostalgia his words offer in a more cosmopolitan manner.

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<sup>57</sup> "Ah Güzel İstanbul, nasıl da bozulmamış o bin yıllık güzelliğin! Ey canım Boğaziçi! Bir zamanlar dedelerimiz de içlenmiş bu güzelliğinin karşısında. Nasıldı o Bimen Şen'in eski bestesi? Ah atalarımız da geçmiş bu suların, mağrur, akıncı... Nerde Orta Asya, nerde Viyana kapıları."

Invoked in the first episode, Ottoman classical music plays a central role in the construction of Haşmet's alterity. Yet, his alterity is more complex than it appears. In the early Republican era, modernizing elites had to choose between Eastern (Ottoman Classical), Western, and Turkish folk music of the rural masses, in the process of constructing a national identity. Asking the rhetorical question, "For us, which one of these could we call national?" The following categorization was given:

Eastern music is what is foreign to Turks, while folk music belongs to the Turkish *Kultur*, and Western music to the new civilization of Turks." Classical Ottoman music or traditional folk music were banned from radio broadcasts during 1933-1934 while Western classical music and opera, tangos, waltzes, and polkas, along with modernized versions of folk music were broadcast. (Arslan, "Hollywood" 5)

The film negotiates these categories and expands on the narrow categorization of the Eastern to render it distinct from its depiction in the national narratives. Haşmet's invocation of this musical heritage in various moments in the film places him in contention with narratives of national identity.

The excluded layers of Istanbul's cultural sphere are presented in this brief moment when Haşmet overlooks the Bosphorus on the pier; all these layers are invoked in Haşmet's voice, coupled with the landscapes of Istanbul, Ottoman Classical music, and ambient sounds of the city. His melancholia thus relates to the loss of the physical (the deteriorating palaces and mansions) and of the cultural (the shunned and almost forgotten Ottoman Classical music). The sound of the boat coming to harbor startles him, reminding him of his daily struggles in the face of this loss. He boards the ferry, saying "O tired

Haşmet, lazy Haşmet"<sup>58</sup> (author's trans.), scolding himself for once again becoming lost in his reverie.

Haşmet's subject position articulated on screen could be deemed the negatively constructed subject of the melodramatic tradition. Referencing Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's work on Asian Cinemas, Asuman Suner builds an affinity with this notion concerning the subjects of *Yeşilçam* films from the 1950s and 1960s. In this position,

[u]nlike the subjects that make choices and decision, take action and influence the outcome of events, "the negatively constructed subject" points towards one that is passive, self-effacing and influenced by events. In these films, the tensions arising from the onslaught of modernity and the ensuing societal transformations are dramatized through such a subject position.<sup>59</sup> (Suner, "Hayalet" 187; author's trans.)

This subject construction vitiates the necessity of an East/West binary in reading Haşmet's passive and melancholic subjectivity. It enables the audience to understand how different aspects of his alterity are articulated on screen. Surrounding events guide Haşmet and when he decides to act, either the modernist state or capitalist relations destroy his plans. Yet his response is layered and resists characterization as Eastern.

While Haşmet's voice represents the hitherto shunned Ottoman influence, it is also multivalent. In invoking the Ottoman heritage through nostalgia, he is informed by late Ottoman culture. Haşmet is a graduate of *Lycée de Galatasaray*, an imperial school

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<sup>58</sup> "Ah yorgun Haşmet, aah miskin Haşmet"

<sup>59</sup> "Seçim yapan, karar alan, harekete geçen, olaylara yön veren etkin özne konumunun aksine, 'negatif olarak kurulmuş özne' edilgen, kendini silen, olaylar tarafından yönlendirilen bir konumu ifade eder. Bu filmlerde, modernleşmeyle birlikte gelen hızlı toplumsal dönüşüm sürecinin neden olduğu toplumsal gerilimler, böyle bir özne konumu üzerinden dramatize edilmektedir" (Suner, "Hayalet" 187).

transformed by the Ottoman Sultan in early 19<sup>th</sup> century to educate his prized students in the French academic tradition. Haşmet's frequent, fond reminiscences of his grandmother underline how the Ottomans, especially women, differed in terms of their behavior and occupations in the private sphere. Yet, the grandmother is also a talented piano player, having chosen a Western instrument rather than an Eastern one. To earn a living Haşmet relies on the camera his great-uncle brought from France. He also stands out from amongst his working class friends with his knowledge of Ottoman and Western literature. All these render him a multivalent protagonist from a cultural sphere that had already been struggling with modernity prior to the establishment of the Turkish Republic. However, the background that had once anchored Haşmet has now relegated him to minority status without defined ethnic, religious, or class boundaries.

As the boat that Haşmet embarked on leaves the pier, the film's credits roll as images of derelict palaces and mansions, antique boats, seagulls, and pigeons appear on screen while the same Armenian composer's song plays in the background. Having traversed the Bosphorus, the ferry ride ends with images of the old city of Istanbul. The credits end at Haşmet's workplace on Sultanahmet Plaza across from the church of Hagia Sophia. This is the place where Haşmet and Ayşe meet for the first time as she walks down an unpaved road with shopping bags in her hands and an insecure look in her eyes. She asks for her photograph to be taken and as Haşmet prepares his camera small talk ensues. We learn that it is her first time in Istanbul and that she has come to become a movie star. Until she discloses her professional aspirations, Ayşe remains the clichéd naive girl from the countryside, frightened of looking others in the eye. As she tells Haşmet that she aspires to become a movie star while posing for his camera, we can see

how her demeanor reflects her perception of how a movie star should act. Haşmet recognizes the "danger" and the narrative begins to follow a central trope of *Yeşilçam* films, narrating "both the desire and the dangers of becoming modern through the female protagonists"<sup>60</sup>. A short reverse-shot, one that appears very rarely in this film, reveals a constellation of dichotomies between Haşmet's values and those that Ayşe deploys to transform herself in becoming an actress in the context of the emerging market economy and individualism.

Their chance encounter is intensified in the following four episodes, all of which are predicated on the parallel economies of desire and of Westernization/Urbanization, where "Haşmet attempts to turn down the bright lights of the city, dampening mechanisms of desire, Ayşe turns the lights on and again expresses desire"<sup>61</sup> (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 189; author's trans). The first three episodes begin with Haşmet inviting Ayşe to his shack and conclude with Haşmet returning to his aptly named shack "Kulübe-i Ahzan" ("Wooden Shack of Melancholia"; author's trans.) alone, enacting the vicious circles of melodrama at every turn, mirroring those observed in the narrative of Emmi and Ali in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, where both couples are positioned in their struggles against an overarching narrative of national identity *via* the circles.

Ayşe's narrative parallels that of Haşmet in its inconsistency and oscillations in terms of what she desires and where she situates her beliefs. In the first episode, Ayşe initially refuses to leave the hotel (fittingly named "*Medeniyet Pansiyonu*" ("Hotel

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<sup>60</sup> "Gerek modernleşme arzusu, gerek modernleşmenin getireceği olası tehlikeler, kadın karakter üzerinden anlatılır (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 34).

<sup>61</sup> "Haşmet şehrin ışıklarını söndürmeye çalışacak, arzuyu frenleyecek, Ayşe ise ışıkları yeniden yakıp, arzuyu hareket ettirecektir" (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 189).

Civilization"<sup>62</sup>; author's trans.) with Haşmet as she prepares herself for a photo shoot by a photographer whose motivation is to portray her nude to sell the photographs. The ill-intentioned photographer, Haşmet and Ayşe end up at the police station and Ayşe is then taken to the hospital for a health screening. Ashamed and penniless, she accepts Haşmet's offer to stay with him only to run away with his money the next morning. In the following episode, Ayşe purchases a mini-dress and strolls around in modern districts of Istanbul, only to be followed and molested by men on the street. Her dreams of stardom only get her as far as working as a singing belly dancer in a night club; once again she flees to Haşmet's shack, escaping from a group of men pestering and attempting to grab her at the end of her stage act.

Ayşe's luck appears to improve in the third episode as she transitions from being a girl desiring to change her circumstances overnight to a wife seeking work at menial jobs to support her husband. The film points towards a female subjectivity desired by the national culture, one that has "been saved from being Eastern but nevertheless maintains her chastity"<sup>63</sup> (Arslan, "Bu Kabuslar" 50; author's trans.), a desire maintained by many *Yeşilçam* melodramas. In articulating such a female subjectivity, these films point towards "a unification that remedies all the rifts that modernity posits; between the rural and the urban, local values and western values, rich and poor and ultimately between

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<sup>62</sup> Haşmet continually contrasts what he claims to be the culture he hails from and the culture of capitalism. In this instance, he speaks to the audience in an ironic register claiming how the word civilization fits in well with the scheme of tricking young women with dreams of becoming a movie star, only to end up working as a prostitute in hotels.

<sup>63</sup> "...alaturkalıktan kurtulmuş ama asla iffetsiz olmayan..." (Arslan, "Bu Kabuslar" 50).



male and female identities"<sup>64</sup> (50; author's trans.). Yet, in *O Beautiful Istanbul*, neither the female nor the male identity aligns properly with this desired unification quite apart from the moral lessons imparted in each episode.

This misalignment stems from Haşmet's efforts to distance himself from the edifying male subject typical of most *Yeşilçam* films. Though often following a patronizing discourse in attempting to tame Ayşe's desires, his own identity entails a deficiency that becomes apparent in the third episode. After the couple decides to marry, Haşmet promises Ayşe that he will change; his notion of change ranges from quitting smoking to finding a job and living in a proper, modern house in Istanbul, in other words, succumbing to middle-class norms. In the following sequence, Haşmet contacts friends from his prestigious high school but is unable to stay in business environments situated in the newly emerging, modern parts of the city, appearing to be physically stifled. He runs away to his old neighborhood; he buys his usual pack of cigarettes and gets drunk. In his attempt at assimilating to these norms and securing his partner's affection, an economy of desire unfolds wherein "the desire for new objects", signifying the emerging world of capitalist exchange, "dissolves the ties to the objects of the old civilization, and the melancholia that ensues from such a dissolution takes the form of a conscience that impedes such desires"<sup>65</sup> (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 193; author's trans.). At this juncture in the film, the condition for love and a happy domestic life seems to be predicated upon fulfilling the capitalistic requirements of a modernized Turkish subjectivity. This

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<sup>64</sup>"Bu kadın imgesi, modernliğin yarattığı bütün meseleleri gidermesiyle kelimenin tam anlamıyla bir bütünlük yaratır; taşra ile kent arasında, yerli değerlerle batılı değerler arasında, yoksulla zengin arasında ve nihayet kadınla erkek arasında" (Arslan, "Bu Kabuslar" 50).

<sup>65</sup>"Yeni nesnelere duyulan arzu, kayıp medeniyetin nesnelere olan bağlılığı çözmekte, bu bağlılığın çözülüşünün uyandırdığı hüznün ise vicdan biçimini alarak arzuyu frenleme mekanizması olarak işlemektedir" (Akbulut, "Yeşilçam'dan" 193).

condition is similar to the ways in which those in Emmi and Ali's entourage change in the second part of *Fear Eats the Soul*, when their treatment of the couple turns out to be confirming a market logic, driven by economic need. The return to the neighborhood in Haşmet's case after his attempts at finding a better paying job in the city, to outdated modes of conduct and to poverty<sup>66</sup>, ultimately constitutes a rejection of this modern identity.

Before again sinking into melancholia, the temporary dissolution of his ties to the past during his day in the new parts of the city allows Haşmet to devise an idea that would make them rich overnight, repeating Ayşe's mistake in the first two episodes. In an effort to outmaneuver the status quo while retaining his former identity, he markets Ottoman classical music with smart, street-inspired lyrics to the emerging bourgeoisie of Istanbul. He spontaneously composes a song appropriating an old Ottoman classical song, asks Ayşe to sing, and introduces her and the new song to friends. Ayşe becomes a star overnight and mingles with Istanbul's elite, caricatured in each scene in which they appear. When Haşmet asks her not to attend the party given in her name and reject the clothes that were sent to her for the evening, she leaves Haşmet for the third time, this time in tears, claiming that this is the moment she has been waiting for all her life, and blaming Haşmet for the way things have turned out. Alone in his shack once again and ashamedly looking down at the floor, Haşmet delivers another monologue to claim that what has befallen him and Ayşe is "the revenge of the old [Ottoman] music"<sup>67</sup> (author's trans.) Later that night, after drinking with his neighborhood friends in their usual spot,

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<sup>66</sup>*Yeşilçam* films often enact a proud but poor existence in their portrayals of wealth, especially the display of wealth as something to be shunned. Wealth accumulated in an honest manner often seems to be an impossibility in this framework.

<sup>67</sup> "eski müziğin intikamı."

he politely leaves them when they begin to argue that he needs a "proper girl", drunkenly retreating into the seclusion of his shack.

Istanbul as a central motif acquires another dimension in this segment as Haşmet realizes that the city, the source of his melancholia and of his subjectivity, has become foreign to him over the years. His attempts at becoming one with it are not only futile but also impossible. At this juncture, the film suggests a tragic outcome for Haşmet and the once-soothing melancholia turns cruel. In the next shot, we see the wooden shack that was once the space of nostalgia laden with items from the past and filled with the sound of classical Ottoman music, evoking a harsh picture of poverty as Haşmet sleeps in a corner hidden under the blankets. The scene cuts back to Ayşe in her stylish outfit holding a poodle at *the* iconic modern space of *Yeşilçam* films, the Istanbul Hilton.

Haşmet tracks Ayşe's unprecedented rise to stardom from the magazines. An encounter with her at his work place in the old town of Istanbul enables him to see the now famous Ayşe in person. She has bought a car on credit and seems happier than ever, asking him to come and see her at the Hilton, mispronouncing and misusing English words. Convinced that Ayşe is irretrievably lost to modern Istanbul, he drinks heavily, seeking solace on his fisherman friend's rowboat, bottle in hand. The same Istanbul view he used to observe to find his bearings disintegrates into a background devoid of past resonance. Low-angle shots of Haşmet and the grayish waters of the Bosphorus replace the uplifting landscape and its monuments. Suner claims that until the mid-1960s in *Yeşilçam* melodramas "Istanbul takes on the role of a background that has become all too familiar and domesticated, almost becoming an interior space"<sup>68</sup> (Suner, "Hayalet" 218-9;

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<sup>68</sup>"İstanbul, fazlasıyla aşınlanmış, evcilleşmiş, neredeyse bir tür iç mekana dönüşmüş bir arka plan işlevi üstlenir" (Suner, "Hayalet" 218-9).

author's trans.). Shot in 1965, towards the end of this era in *Yeşilçam*, the first three quarters of *O Beautiful Istanbul* represent such an interiorization of the city with its landscapes even in their derelict conditions, in order to sustain a familiar depiction of Haşmet full of pathos.

Suner further suggests that in the same period Istanbul began to receive waves of internal migrants and *Yeşilçam* melodramas responded to the subsequent demographic shifts in the city. This response came in the way of "changing the narrative axis of the films from the center of Istanbul to its periphery, exchanging an interiorized and familiar look on the city with one that is alien, coming from the outside. This is the look of the newly arriving migrants"<sup>69</sup> (219-220; author's trans.). This change in the perspective and narrative axis of the films transforms the image of Istanbul, where the city "renders the narratives of the films full of pain and sorrow, wearing down their protagonists. Now depicted as the center of evil, it is a city that one tries to hold on to, rather than simply live in"<sup>70</sup> (qtd. in Suner, "Hayalet" 221; author's trans.). The last episode of *O Beautiful Istanbul* reverses the internalizing quality of Istanbul, specifically when Haşmet recognizes his tragic condition, and hints at the fact that the city may no longer possess the legible cultural markers of its former civilizations. Portrayed as a space fit only for the alienated subjectivity of its former inhabitants, Istanbul changes its outlook once again to become a strange host for immigrants such as Ayşe.

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<sup>69</sup>"...filmlerin eksenini İstanbul'un içlerinden dış çeperlere kayacak, kente içeriden ve aşına bir bakışın yerine dışarıdan ve yabancı bir bakış almaya başlayacaktır. Bu bakış, kente yeni göç edenlerin bakışıdır" (Suner, "Hayalet" 219-220).

<sup>70</sup>"...artık İstanbul film öykülerini acılaştırmakta, kahramanlarını öğütmektedir. İstanbul artık kötülüğün merkezidir. Yaşanılan değil, tutunulmaya çalışılan bir kenttir" (Suner, "Hayalet" 221).

The episode begins with Ayşe catching up with Haşmet while he is on a fisherman's rowboat in the middle of the Bosphorus in an unexpected manner. Ayşe stands on the bow of a larger motorboat in a dramatic fashion attired in stage costume, enacting the part of a star in her real life. She asks him for another song that hybridizes Haşmet's knowledge of Ottoman classical music with contemporary motifs. Haşmet refuses and in his bitter sermon emphasizes that both their paths are now equally condemned as they have forsaken their love. Haşmet's rowboat slowly moves out of the frame in a long shot that encompasses both boats, leaving Ayşe in the middle of the Bosphorus with a cold, cloudy skyline in the background. Ayşe's foreshadowed artistic failure thus becomes imminent. Overwhelmed by mounting financial debt, she attempts suicide. Awake, she finds journalists surrounding her as her manager gives Ayşe a text with talking points on what to tell reporters in order to reclaim her popularity.

Gledhill claims that melodrama's normative drive is not “how things ought to be but how things should have been” (21). The film's normative message at this point is presented as a conundrum wherein both sides--the new and the old, the modernized, capitalistic Turkish identity and the Ottoman heritage equally condemn their protagonists. The popular demand for a happy ending in *Yeşilçam* films through an improbable plot twist remedies this conundrum with a utopian hope similar to Fassbinder's conclusion in *Fear Eats the Soul*. Reading about Ayşe's attempted suicide in a newspaper, Haşmet runs through the streets observed by curious neighbors who have never seen Haşmet behave so impetuously. He boards the ferry and crosses to the European side. He arrives just in time to listen to Ayşe delivering the talking points and acting her part as a star fallen on hard times due to a lover who has cheated on her. But upon seeing Haşmet she acts out of

character and hysterically narrates her true story to the journalists including her working-class background, real name, and failed suicide attempt caused by her realization that her stardom is merely a pipe-dream and that this time she will not be able to return to Haşmet. Haşmet's demeanor changes. The journalists depart, leaving the couple alone in the hospital room. In a dialogue of only thirty seconds, he invites her back to his shack with the same words that he used to invite her the past three times, as they embrace.

The scene cuts to a shot of Bosphorus' waters, this time on a sunny day as the couple returns to the Asian side. The same Ottoman classical song that plays during the credits is reintroduced, implying a return to that initial state of Haşmet's melancholic yet proud demeanor. A mid-shot of Ayşe depicts her looking down at the floor on the side of the ferry, followed by a mid-shot of Haşmet, a cigarette dangling from his mouth, gazing from the ferry with a serious and thoughtful look as if contemplating the future. A reverse wide shot reveals Istanbul's old city in the background as ferries and seagulls pass in the foreground. Cut to a shot of the couple, Haşmet holding Ayşe's chin and gesturing towards the city with his hand, saying "Take a look at this beauty, you can't find anything like this anywhere else in the world"<sup>71</sup> (author's trans.). Haşmet asks Ayşe not just to look at the city, but to see it as he does. Recognizing that this gesture had failed in prior turns of the narrative, Ayşe asks what they will do next. The scene cuts to a shot of the couple from behind, turning around to sit with the Istanbul panorama behind them as Haşmet responds, "I don't know, but we are alive, we are two people and we are in love. Do not be afraid, one can always find something firm to believe in this world"<sup>72</sup> (author's trans.).

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<sup>71</sup>"Şu güzelliğe bak, dünyanın hiçbir yerinde böyle güzellik yok biliyor musun?"

<sup>72</sup>"Bilmem, ama yaşıyoruz, iki kişiyiz ve birbirimizi seviyoruz. Korkma, dünyada her zaman inanılacak sağlam şeyler bulunur."

In experiencing the vicious cycles of the narrative and exhausting all modalities of existence that the capitalist, modernizing spaces of Istanbul can offer, the couple appears to have landed at a place where they lack the past supports for their identities. The film ends as the non-diegetic Ottoman classical song grows louder, accompanied by the sounds of the seagulls and ferries.

Ayşe seems to achieve her goal of erasing her poor, working class background by migrating to Istanbul. But as Haşmet's alterity harks back to a nostalgic register of the Ottoman past, he is unable to fulfill the *Yeşilçam* trope of helping her adjust to the changing modes of being in the city. The aural and visual depiction of the city transitions from helping constitute an identity for Haşmet to acting as an inhospitable, violent and unjust external force. The utopian moment embedded in Haşmet's words and reinforced in Ayşe's acceptance of this promise in the final shot seems again to rely on the sounds and images of Istanbul. The initial internalizing character of Istanbul persists, enabling Haşmet to reject modern subjectivities. Realized in an indeterminate subjectivity, such a position is construed by a memory of Istanbul and the absences that memory elicits. The melodramatic resolution whereby all these contradictions are subsumed in a narrative of love negating the ungrounded narratives that national identity has offered them. The film foregoes a gesture toward defining who they will need to be, instead opening a possible space for their alterity.

**C. Nomadic Kurdish Subjectivity at the Juncture of  
Realist and Melodramatic Modalities:  
Yılmaz Güney's *The Herd* and the Ideological Borders of the Turkish Nation State**

**1. Alternative Paths to *Yeşilçam*: The Neorealist Turn of the 1970s**

Scripted by Yılmaz Güney while he was in prison on politically motivated criminal charges, *The Herd* (1978) is directed by the assistant director of *O Beautiful Istanbul*, Zeki Ökten. The film debuts at a point in the histories of *Yeşilçam* and Turkish national history at which left-wing politics achieved a popularity never previously witnessed in the country's history. Filmmaking was under national scrutiny, in terms of governmental constraints/control of permissible themes, narratives, and modalities. Perceiving class conflict as the primary dynamic shaping the country, directors such as Zeki Ökten and Yılmaz Güney opted for a language regarded as political, believing it would serve the cause of the working class. The identification of their films by Turkish film scholarship as well as the intelligentsia that followed these films in the second half of the 1970s as revolutionary cinema following a neorealist stance encouraged the categorization of earlier *Yeşilçam* films as escapist works shaped by bourgeois ideals.

Fundamental changes to the nation's social and political climate primarily stemmed from increased domestic and international migration of the rural population to cities within Turkey. The same decades also saw three military coups: one in 1960 commenced an era of limited artistic freedom with a new constitution; the 1971 coup's swift military intervention illustrated the outcome to be expected if such freedoms veered too drastically from the national narrative; and, lastly, the most violent and insidious of the three, the 1980 coup that ended this era of relative freedom by crushing Turkey's Left



through mass incarcerations, wide-spread torture, and hangings. These changes were reflected in the films of Güney and other directors around him.

Before assuming the roles of director and producer with his own film-production company, Güney had already been a star in *Yeşilçam* during its heyday in the 1960s. Working as an assistant director for important names in *Yeşilçam*, including Lütfi Akad and Atıf Yılmaz, Güney was embraced by Turkish audiences with his violent and down-to-earth working class protagonists. Embodying the political character of Güney's oeuvre is *Hope* (1970), which he scripted, directed, and in which he starred in a narrative of a carriage driver from the slums of Adana, his native city in Southern Turkey. *Hope* was followed by a medley of socially aware films whose production coincided with the decline in film production in *Yeşilçam*. Güney's popularity, however, enabled the domestic and international success of most of these films, while solidifying his status<sup>73</sup> as one of the most prominent artists in the nation's history, to this day<sup>74</sup>.

Although the waning industry of the 1970s continued to produce films similar to the particular language of the previous decade's melodramas, films of that decade recycled and transformed formal structures and content in conjunction with the changes in the social and cultural spheres, suggesting that "after the second half of the 1970s the

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<sup>73</sup> In a 2011 interview with the German newspaper *Die Welt*, Fatih Akin disclosed his pre-production process in the making of a documentary on Güney in collaboration with Güney's wife. In the same interview he calls Güney a unique artist, closest in his estimation to R.W. Fassbinder. (Rodek, Hans Georg, "Fatih Akin will WORD? Yılmaz Güney's Lebenverfilmen" <<http://www.welt.de/kultur/kino/article13383668/Fatih-Akin-will-Yilmaz-Gueneys-Leben-verfilmen.html>> 20 May 2011.Retrieved 10 October 2013)

<sup>74</sup> Contemporary discussions on Kurdish Cinema often point to Yılmaz Güney as the first prominent Kurdish director from Turkey, effectively inaugurating Kurdish Cinema alongside *Yeşilçam*. Due to the 1980 Military coup that dismantled the Kurdish political movement, Kurdish Cinema in Turkey could only re-emerge in the 2000s.

codes of *Yeşilçam* ultimately changed"<sup>75</sup> (Akbulut, "Kadına" 346; author's trans.). One such change has been a shift towards a more realist film language, taking its cue from Italian neo-realism, a move evident as well in *The Herd*.

## **2. Transitions between Realism and Melodrama: A Quest for the Moral Legibility of Alterity**

*The Herd*, while foregrounding a realist modality, uses elements of melodrama that persist in the tradition of the melodramatic genre of *Yeşilçam*. Within the dual use of these modalities occurs a tripartite narrative: beginning in Pervari in Southeastern Anatolia where the clan travels in nomadic cycles with its sheep; followed by a train journey from the outermost periphery of the Turkish nation to its center; and the tragic conclusion in the nation's capital Ankara.

From the standpoint of genre, *The Herd* is not melodrama but neorealist epic, a portrait of a Kurdish clan, the Veysikans, from southeastern Anatolia. The family is once again embroiled in a long-standing blood feud with a neighboring clan, the Halilans. The Veysikan's only source of income, sheep-herding, is strained as grazing lands are lost to agricultural production, increasingly reducing the number of nomads and obliterating the nomadic way of life. The clan is forced to transport and sell sheep in far-off Ankara. Driven by their tyrannical patriarch Hamo<sup>76</sup>, the family, which includes the oldest son Şivan, his wife Berivan, and the youngest son, encounters misfortune and corruption at every turn on their journey. When they finally reach their destination, the family is

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<sup>75</sup>"Buna göre çalışmanın sonuçları, ...türün, 1970'lerin ikinci yarısından itibaren kodların değiştiğini göstermektedir" (Akbulut, "Kadına" 345-6).

<sup>76</sup> Originally a theater actor, Tuncel Kurtiz plays the role of the Kurdish patriarch. He is one of the most prominent actors of these neorealist films, having worked with Güney on many film projects.

engulfed and betrayed by a rapidly changing modern state and its society. The film continues to show the disintegration of the family as it loses its only livelihood, its flock of sheep. The death of Berivan at a construction site is followed by Şivan's arrest, who has a violent outburst brought on by desperate anger and grief; the film concludes with the patriarch Hamo scouring the congested streets of Ankara for his youngest son who has vanished into the crowd.

The realism of *The Herd* often alternates with a poetics of loss depicting the family's migration from rural spaces to Ankara. It is in this depiction of loss that Güney's film often resorts to a melodramatic sensibility. Pivoting its plot on an impossible love relationship between Şivan and Berivan, two young people from rival clans, blurs the line between the modalities of realism and melodrama. Gledhill, in articulating the dynamic relationship between melodrama and realism, claims that “[r]ealism is not static... .And as realism offers up new areas of representation, so the terms and material of the world that melodrama seeks to melodramatise will shift. What realism uncovers becomes new material for melodrama” (31). *The Herd* depicts what had never before been narrated in a realist register<sup>77</sup>, Kurdish nomads, and their disappearance in the face of modernity<sup>78</sup>.

The film opens with a sequence of wide-angle shots of three men on horseback wearing long garments, traversing a mountainous countryside. With a non-diegetic Kurdish elegiac song in the background, each shot reveals the barrenness of the land and

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<sup>77</sup> The fact that their story is the first of its kind in the cinema of Turkey arises from the categorical absence of Kurdish identity from the Turkish public and cultural sphere, an absence that only began to be reversed in the last two decades.

<sup>78</sup> Included in the Turkish Republican Project was the transitioning of the nomads into rural societies, as the nomadic cultures were considered to be harder to control. The categorization of all ethnicities under the term Turk was also key to this project, specifically during its first seven decades; a tendency that has only been recently challenged with the ascendance of the Kurdish political movement. Both these processes were accompanied by an abundance of state violence, displacing people and obliterating minority cultures.

the camera discloses a part of Turkey never previously depicted on film. Among these wide-angle long shots solely of rural images and riders, one in particular emerges in terms of its content, occurring in mid-sequence: a tractor in the foreground moving from right to left as it plows the land while the riders in the background pass in the opposite direction.

These shots culminate in yet another wide-angle long shot of a small village with mud brick houses next to a calm river. Tracking down to one house where people of all ages and genders have lined up, the camera shifts to mid-shots of ailing Kurdish men and women afflicted with various diseases, all seeking the help of a sheikh and his powerful prayer to regain their health. One young person remains in focus longer than the others and is later revealed to be a younger brother of Şivan, holding a rifle in his hands. In a shot-reverse-shot sequence, we gather that he has seen the riders. He moves inside a dimly lit compound as the sheikh and Berivan kneel in one corner, as the sheikh recites prayers in Kurdish and Arabic, pulling on his beads and throwing handfuls of water on Berivan's face. These prayers are the only diegetic use of Kurdish language<sup>79</sup> in the film. The absence of Kurdish among the film's protagonists is perhaps one of most significant discrepancies concerning the film's claim to realism, since the narrative takes place primarily amongst individuals who would have used minimal, if any, Turkish in daily conversations. The same absence could also be read as compounding the plight of its subjects, as part of the Turkish State's demands for assimilation. A sequence of close-ups reveals an elderly sheik deeply concentrating on his prayer, and, through the whole ordeal, a solemn, downcast Berivan. The younger brother leaves the compound, and as

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<sup>79</sup> Kurdish language was officially banned in Turkey in public discourses and spaces until 1991, and advocating for its free public use has been a major part of the Kurdish political movement.

the three riders emerge from the outskirts of the village, Şivan and Berivan join him outside. Everyone quickly disappears from the house as we sense an impending violent episode. The riders, whom we learn are Berivan's three brothers of the feuding clan, begin to shout their desire to speak with their sister.

In this brief exchange, the dynamics of the blood feud are laid bare; we learn that the truce established in the marriage of Berivan to Şivan has been recently broken by Hamo, Şivan's father. Berivan's older brother begins with an appeal to Şivan's common sense, arguing that what ails Berivan hurts them as well. Şivan's younger brother, mad with rage, shouts back at Şivan, warning him not to listen to their enemy, the Halilans. A close-up of Berivan's eyes through her headscarf reveals her deep sadness. The small entourage of the Veysikans moves on, leaving Berivan's brother's plea unanswered.

We then turn to Berivan's brother's evaluation of what has transpired under the sole tree growing in a barren field. This conversation provides one of the most important motifs of *The Herd* that what afflicts Berivan is her inability to bear children. Berivan's "sickness" is referenced throughout the film, both as a medical condition and metaphysical curse, assuming a role in the melodramatic modality that pervades Şivan and Berivan's relationship. The brother's conversation further elucidates the stakes of the long-standing blood feud as hinging primarily upon the stubborn patriarch Hamo's hatred of their clan.

In these three introductory sequences, the film maps out a realistic register in a hierarchy of victimhood amongst the characters, ordered with respect to their lack of agency to alter their circumstances. The negatively constructed subject position that Suner has pointed out concerning the protagonists of *Yeşilçam* melodramas underwrites

those of *The Herd* as well. Berivan emerges as the most helpless of these protagonists, refusing to say a word throughout the film, and enacting the fact that she has nothing to say even when she is given the chance to speak her mind. When she does "speak", she does so only with her eyes and body, reassuring Şivan of her devotion to him, and little else. The film in this sense binds her victimhood with that of her husband. Her muteness embodies the silence of this subaltern identity; as a Kurdish woman of nomadic heritage, her identity stands at the opposite end of all the major vectors of difference in the construction of Turkish national identity.

She is followed by her husband Şivan, bound by tradition to the patriarch of the clan, his father Hamo, even though he severely beats him. Nevertheless, despite this unwavering devotion, Şivan is closer to assimilating to a more modern identity than Hamo or Berivan, clinging to the hopes of securing a government job in the city and of healing Berivan through the help of the doctors that the state provides. The narrative unfolds to shatter these hopes, making him unable to cure Berivan's illness, as it eventually ends her life.

Hamo does seem to enjoy a power unchecked by anyone else in the domain of the clan, obsessed with the fact that he is still the leader of a strong clan with a proud history, blaming every misfortune on Berivan and her bad blood. This obsession allows him to brutalize the couple at each encounter, draining their life physically and psychologically. Yet as the film moves out of the clan's locality to present Hamo and his family in transit, first on the train ride and then in Ankara, he, too, becomes a victim as we see them crushed by the modern Turkish state and its different institutions, and by the capitalistic modes of exchange over which the Kurdish patriarch has no say. Lacking the emotional

complexity of his son Şivan, Hamo seems never to display any emotion other than anger. Hamo's hubris regarding his status as a patriarch is never diminished by the loss they suffer throughout, foregrounding the tragic structuring of the film's realist register, concluding with the depiction of a helpless Hamo who has clearly lost his bearings.

Berivan's sickness operates as a metaphor through the narrative, enabling a reading of her ailment as symptomatic of the sickly relationships that pervade the film. These include the family members within the clan as well as the enmity that has once again sprung up between the two clans, pointing towards a sick Kurdish geography suffering under the Turkish nation state demanding an assimilation that is cultural as well as economic. Contrary to the pathos and the ensuing sympathy attributed to the protagonists of *Yeşilçam* melodramas, the film "takes away the halo of victimhood, leaving the victims face to face with reality and in slowly pulling up the curtains of an organic community, presents its protagonists' with solitude and poverty"<sup>80</sup> (Arslan, "Mazi" 44). This trajectory of victimhood in turn provides the realist modality of the film with its tragic drive.

During the first of the film's three parts, extensive documentary footage depicts the Batuyans, an actual nomadic clan: the women milking sheep, making cheese, and carpet-weaving as the men herd the flock<sup>81</sup> while professional actors establish the protagonists' fictional characters. Complementing the realist register is a peddler selling goods and travelling through these mountains with his donkey, often cheating the nomads while providing news otherwise unavailable to them. Meanwhile, Berivan, Şivan, and his

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<sup>80</sup> "...mazlumluğun halesini çekip alarak gerçeklik hükmüyle başbaşa bıraktığı, organik cemaat perdesini ağır ağır kaldırarak kahramanını yalnızlık ve yoklukla karşı karşıya getirdi" (Arslan, "Mazi" 44).

<sup>81</sup> The men shout in the way that Kurdish nomadic people shout at their sheep, thus thwarting the ban on Kurdish language in a creative instance of defiance of that law.

younger brother leave the sheik and Berivan's brothers behind and reach the tents that their clan has set up. Hamo is seen herding the sheep with the help of several family members. When the younger brother breaks the news of their encounter with Berivan's brothers, Hamo is enraged, first beating the younger son and then running to Berivan and Şivan's tent to scold them. This father/son motif reveals the feudal values upon which this nomadic society still stands; the father harasses his son for not shedding the opposing clan's members' blood on sight after which he turns to Berivan and calls her a murderer for having killed her children in the womb. Throughout this sequence, the camera tracks Hamo in his furor. Yet once he accuses Berivan of being a murderer, she is captured in low- angle shots, first watering the only tree in their vicinity, a thin oleaster on barren land, followed by a close-up of her feeding two small partridges, enclosed in tiny cages, their beaks protruding. These attempts by Berivan, who remains mute throughout the film, to nurture other beings around her provide the few clues to her character.

Şivan retorts by saying Berivan is the honor of their family and his wife, Hamo responds:

"She is not the honor of our family, she is our disgrace. Her brothers killed our brothers and sons. This sister of theirs also comes from their shitty lineage. For she carries the same blood! A Halilan would never bear a child to a Veysikan, she would not give a child that would one day turn his guns on them. Berivan is an enemy, Şivan, an enemy!"<sup>82</sup> (author's trans.)

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<sup>82</sup> "O bizim ailemizin namusu değil, yüzkarasıdır. Onun kardeşleri bizim kardeşlerimizi, çocuklarımızı öldürdüler. Bacıları da aynı bokun soyudur. Aynı kanı taşıyor çünkü! Bir Halilan bir Veysikan'a çocuk doğurmaz, düşmanın eline silah tutacak bir çocuk vermez. Berivan bir düşmandır Şivan, bir düşman!"



Şivan, looking straight in his father's eyes, responds that it is they who are in the wrong concerning this situation. He points to the fact that the truce that was established after his marriage to Berivan had been broken when Hamo sent armed men after the opposing clan. Leaning on his stick, Hamo rejects this accusation with authority: "What you are saying is not the truth. They broke the truce, not us. Isn't Berivan their daughter? Why didn't she bear us a child, why? It makes no difference whether you kill a child at birth, or you kill him when he is twenty years old. What is the difference?"<sup>83</sup> (author's trans.) Hamo's reasoning underlines a vital distinction between the values of this feudal society and those of his relatively more modern son. Şivan refutes his father, telling him that no one would kill their own child and that they have not been able to find a cure for her sickness. He repeats the words "Berivan is sick"<sup>84</sup> as his father resolutely continues. When Şivan claims that they want to leave, Hamo's anger spirals out of control; he beats his son in a sequence of shots of 60 seconds duration. Intercut with the shots of his beating is Berivan's helpless gaze. Even though Şivan is twice the size of his father, he never defends himself, curling up on the ground as he silently submits to his father's blows.

As Şivan slowly gets up to walk to his tent, the scene cuts to a shot of three local musicians clad in local white dresses arriving at the camp-site of the nomads. The sun slowly setting in the background, the musicians traverse the camp playing the Kurdish frame drum "*erbane*" without looking at the nomads. A sequence of shots ensues, first of the amateur actors looking at the musicians relaxing on the ground, followed by Hamo

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<sup>83</sup> "Söylediklerin hakikat değildir, barışı onlar bozdu. Onların kızı değil midir Berivan? Neden doğurmadı bize çocuk, neden? Ha bir çocuğu doğarken öldürmüşsün, ha yirmi yaşına bastığında öldürmüşsün. Ne farkeder!"

<sup>84</sup> "Berivan hastadır."

and the remaining professional actors. Nobody speaks as the music moves from diegetic to non-diegetic, and, in a long-shot, the musicians leave the camp, walking towards the mountains. This sequence provides room for contemplating what has transpired between Hamo and Şivan, and the distinctions between feudal and modern norms, mirrored in the gesture of a prolonged shot of Hamo, deep in thought.

The realistic register faces a conundrum in this scene. For the audience, the screen provides a safe distance from the unfamiliar nomadic feudal cultural sphere. Yet the film seeks to portray all layers of suffering, familiarizing the audience with its manifestations. To accomplish this goal, *The Herd* resorts to the melodramatic modality in the next sequence, and the transition from melodrama to reality begins, alternating through the remainder of the film. This turn is noteworthy since, unlike the realist modality, the melodramatic modality "insists on the realities of life in bourgeois democracy and, at the same time, implicitly recognizes the limits (inadequacies) of conventional representation (for example, exposing the limits of language, its inability to express or articulate certain contradictions)" (Mercer 79). The contradictions in the realist register exact an emotional toll on the protagonist, especially on the love between Şivan and Berivan. In the next sequence, the film unfolds the melodramatic dynamics of this relationship framed under the pressure of gender roles, an ancient patriarchy and the thrust of modernity into their lives.

As the night sets in, the camera returns to Şivan and Berivan's tent. In a monologue Şivan declares a medley of emotions to his mute wife. This is the only nighttime shot of the episode in Pervari, lit by strong key lights that render the depth-of-field in darkness. The couple is shown kneeling in a mid-shot, the theatricality of the

mise-en-scène differing starkly from the realist use of light and depth of the field in previous shots. Şivan first asks Berivan to break her silence, insisting that he needs her help to stand up against his own clan. In response a single teardrop falls from Berivan's eyes and she looks down again. Şivan then reassures Berivan that he believes in her and is willing to defy his father whose "heart and eyes have been darkened by enmity"<sup>85</sup> (author's trans.). He stresses his firm belief in the fact that she will be cured and that they will have many children, putting everyone in the clan to shame. He has abandoned hope for assistance from the sheiks and local medicine, promising to take her to a "real" doctor in town. He wishes to leave not only to obtain medical treatment for Berivan but also out of necessity since, as he claims, all the grazing lands have been plowed, animal husbandry is diminishing, and everyone is migrating to the cities. Şivan's insistence on a word from Berivan grows as his words are intercut with the images of partridges in their cages. In acknowledging the hardships that will come from such a dramatic change in their lives, he expresses his love and belief in their love, asking for a verbal confirmation from Berivan. She looks into his eyes, opens her mouth, only to close it without making a sound, resuming her downcast gaze.

Infuriated by her inaction, Şivan begins to shout while physically abusing her, asking for a yell, a growl, or any sound in return. He pushes her around, as violently as his father had done earlier, and as Şivan slaps her, he asks her to at least scream in agony. Yet just as he did not move when beaten by his father, Berivan does not utter a sound and similarly curls up on the ground, absorbing his blows. Hearing their voices, Hamo appears in front of the tent, coming into the light, and says authoritatively that since she is

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<sup>85</sup> "...düşmanlık, içini, yüreğini gözlerini karartmıştır."

a Veysikan, Şivan will not be able to break her stubbornness. He grows angrier, shouting that she is sick, five times in a row, banging his hand on the ground. Without losing his composure, Hamo retorts, "She is not sick, she is an enemy; one does not grieve over the enemy's sickness, one does not believe the enemy's sickness"<sup>86</sup> (author's trans.) and moves back into the darkness. Berivan lies on the ground shaking; noticing her, Şivan bends down and caresses her, and the couple calmly lies down together.

In introducing the melodramatic modality to the film, the film gives rise to Şivan's conflicting emotions. He seems to have accepted Berivan's innocence, and from this point onwards, this acceptance determines all his actions. Just as his father is fixated on his belief that she is an enemy, so does Şivan believe that in curing Berivan, all other plagues to their existence will disappear. Their decision to leave their clan for a modern life in the town thus becomes one of necessity rather than choice. However, as the narrative unfolds, the critical look that the film imparts with regard to all modern aspects of Turkish society in a realistic modality will encourage the audience to view Şivan and Berivan's hopes as futile. This dynamic provides "the key to the narrative logic of melodrama", namely "the need to produce discrepancies between the knowledge and point of view of the spectator and the knowledge and point of view of the protagonists. This discrepancy is ultimately what produces the pathos" (Mercer 81). In widening this discrepancy, the narrative will follow the dual structure of realism and melodrama that feed one another, i.e., exploiting the viewer's emotional identification with the couple's plight so as to present a realistic depiction of the condition of the nomadic culture in a more layered manner.

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<sup>86</sup> "Hasta değildir o, bir düşmandır, düşmanın hastalığına üzülünmez, düşmanın hastalığına inanılmaz."

With the next episode, the narrative follows the second part of the tri-partite structure, the train ride from Pervari to Ankara, as the localized problem of nomadic Kurdish identity is transferred to national space. Since a weak economy exists in the neglected Kurdish parts of the nation, the clan is forced to bring all its livestock, hundreds of sheep, to the nation's capital. The realistic depiction in the form of documentary footage continues in these sequences interspersed with those of the melodramatic unfolding of the couple's plight; just as the sheep are brought to slaughter in Ankara, so is the family's journey doomed from the start. This premonition strengthens with each stop the train makes, first as corrupt state officials take their bribes in the form of a few sheep, then as train operators apply the brakes and deliberately break the legs of the animals in displeasure over their share of the bribe, while thieves board the train, slaughtering the sheep they throw overboard on the side of the road. A large portion of the sheep is poisoned since the train operators knowingly put them in carriages that had previously transported DDT. All these losses are read by Hamo as caused by Berivan's cursed presence; the more he attacks Berivan, the more ill she seems, rendered in a parallel cut sequence of shots in which the sheep perish and Berivan grows sicker.

Mourning the dead sheep, Hamo attacks Şivan once again at one of the stops; this time Berivan throws herself into the commotion. Hamo pushes and continues beating them both, but the crowd holds him back as he shouts "Leave me be, one of them is my son and the other is my son's bride, I can beat them or kill them as I like, no one can interfere!"<sup>87</sup> People and station guards do intervene and pull them apart while more affluent travelers look through the train windows with a smirk on their faces. Their

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<sup>87</sup> "Bırakın beni, bırakın, biri oğlum diğeri gelinim istersem döverim istersem öldürürm, kimse karışamaz."

reactions, unlike those of the earlier scene in the mountains in which Hamo's authority was unchecked, thus point towards the erosion of his violent patriarchal values as the setting becomes more modern, the patriarchy of the family exchanged for that of the nation state. The couple then return to their places, Şivan apologizes to Berivan for not striking back, explaining that after all Hamo is his father. They curl up together as Şivan says "Nobody understands us, we only have each other as friends"<sup>88</sup> (author's trans.), articulating one of the major tropes of *Yeşilçam* melodramas--that of the couple against the world.

As the train moves further West, a once-rural landscape now includes images of metal bridges, high-voltage electric wires, and small industrial complexes, albeit against a backdrop of rural poverty. Concurrently, the markers of class struggle appear in the form of young boys moving from carriage to carriage selling leftist newspapers, shouting their cause, graffiti on the walls of train stations, and a folk artist with the leftist moustache<sup>89</sup> boarding the train with two soldiers on each side, bound for prison. He sings folk songs harking back to older traditions of resistance, flanked by disinterested soldiers but surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd. As he disembarks from the train with the soldiers, the same crowd, gathering at the windows on the train, sings the "Austrian Workers' Song" in Turkish, fists in the air. The film thus sets up a dichotomy between two threads weaving through Turkish modernity: a corrupt bourgeois society and the state versus class-conscious workers and youth.

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<sup>88</sup> "Bizi anlamıyor kimse, bizim bizden başka dostumuz yok."

<sup>89</sup>Facial hair has long been a marker of political identity amongst males in Turkey; the whole spectrum of Turkish politics displays a different type of moustache to match their political position.

Hamo, Şivan, and Berivan remain oblivious to these events. The transition to the third episode first occurs aurally as a song from the Early Republic era, "*Ankara'nın Taşına Bak*"<sup>90</sup> ("Look at the Stones of Ankara"; author's trans.), begins to play non-diegetically. Şivan's face lights up as the first sight of Ankara appears in the train window, gazing at the poor shanty town houses and the dirt roads. As the train approaches the center, Şivan once again expresses his hope, repeating that in Ankara one can find a remedy to all ailments. We cut to a montage of the sights of Ankara, a heterogeneous mix of images shot with no camera movement, including statues of *Atatürk*, the founder of the Turkish Republic, the central bank building, the old and the new parliament buildings intercut with shots of bustling streets, busy traffic, shop windows and street beggars. The sequence includes a film poster of an erotic film from *Yeşilçam*, a genre movement within Turkish cinema that had reached its height at the time. The most iconic example, *Atatürk's Mausoleum*, *Anıtkabir*, is offered between shots of bank signs and posters of pop singers. The montage unites the heritage of the fifty-year-old Republic with signifiers of capitalist culture, the culprits of the couple's demise, and, by extension, that of nomadic Kurdish culture. The gesture exists in a clear dichotomy to similar montages earlier in the film of the Kurdish countryside. The events that follow until the film's conclusion suggest that this dichotomy will not be resolved in a synthesis but rather in the annihilation of the older tradition's resistance to modernity.

Following the montage is a sequence in which the family shepherd the remainder of their sheep through the busy streets towards their final destination, the municipal

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<sup>90</sup>Originally a Kurdish elegy, the folk song has been utilized by the Turkish Left with lyrics that ask the founder of the Republic, *Atatürk*, to look at the corrupt state of the Turkish Republic, framing the Independence War of Turkey that he waged with the nation as an anti-imperialist war that continues to this day in the Left's struggles.

slaughterhouse. Shots of the herd moving through the traffic are intercut with urban onlookers, some shocked, others amused, and most oblivious to the relocation of a rural scene into their sphere. The melodramatic modality is delivered in this realist sequence with Şivan talking to an exhausted Berivan, as he carries her on his back saying, "Here is our capital Ankara, Berivan. They taught us a marching song in the army 'Ankara, Ankara, beautiful Ankara- All those on whom the fates have turned their backs want to see you'. Here is our capital"<sup>91</sup> (author's trans.). Berivan's desperate gaze as she barely lifts her head to look around contrasts sharply with the hopeful smile on Şivan's face. His description of Ankara<sup>92</sup>, learnt while on mandatory military duty, is, when coupled with the realist montage of the previous sequences, ironic, while the melodramatic modality renders them pathetic.

The capital turns out to be the opposite of what Şivan's description suggests. Cheated by the livestock buyers, with only a fraction of the money his father promised, Şivan sets out to find a relative who lives in a one-room shanty next to a construction site whose job is securing the site. The couple briefly moves in with the relatives and settle on the construction site in an unpainted room with window glass still missing. With their relative's oldest son, they set out to obtain an appointment from the busy state hospital but cannot even get in line. With the last of his money, Şivan takes Berivan to a private doctor but Berivan's refusal to undress in front of the doctor puts them in an awkward position. Scolding the couple for their backward views, the doctor nevertheless prescribes

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<sup>91</sup>"İşte başkentimiz Ankara Berivan. Bize bir marş öğretmişlerdi askerde: "'Ankara, Ankara güzel Ankara, seni görmek ister her bahtı kara'. İşte başkentimiz."

<sup>92</sup>Certain parts from the rest of the marching song's lyrics put forth the chauvistic character of the march and further point to the irony of Şivan's position "Yurduma göz diken dik başlar insan/ Türk gücü orada her gücü yensin." ("The raised heads that want to take over my country shall all go down/ There, let the power of the Turk overcome all other powers"; Author's trans.) This song is in clear contradistinction with the earlier one playing non-diegetically with respect to its political message.



some medicine and takes their money. That night Berivan eats a little food and forces herself to take the medicine. To lift her spirits, they offer to take her to a tea garden where they listen to local songs and watch comedians performing on stage. En route home, they gaze upon household appliances in shop windows. Throughout the night, Berivan seems to be out of touch with all the attractions that their relatives try to present. Before going to bed, Şivan gives another monologue full of hope that things will improve from this point onwards, only to wake up in the morning next to Berivan's dead body.

The trajectory of this love affair ends with the death of Berivan, a loss that points toward the different levels of loss in the realist modality of the film, allowing us to trace "the movement of societal power structures in the realm of emotions"<sup>93</sup> (Arslan, "Mazi" 352; author's trans.). These different levels include Hamo's loss of his sons, his sheep, and ultimately his clan, and Şivan's loss of his beloved wife and all hope he had attached to her salvation by leaving behind his nomadic existence. The family's losses mirror the total loss of nomadic Kurdish culture as well as the loss of the geography bound to this culture, due to pressures exacted by the modern nation state.

The melodramatic modality embedded in these narratives of loss invokes the tradition of melodrama in *Yeşilçam* and, recalling Fassbinder's dual registers of distanciation and identification, provides the audience trained in this modality emotional access to a narrative ultimately quite distant from its own. Since "[p]athos involves us in assessing suffering in terms of our privileged knowledge of its nature and causes" (Mercer 80), the audience's immersion in the pathos of Şivan and Berivan becomes indispensable to reading the specific forms of loss and suffering. Following Linda Williams' assertion that a "quest for a hidden moral legibility is crucial to melodrama"

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<sup>93</sup>"...toplumsal iktidarın duygular alanındaki hareketi" (Arslan, "Mazi" 352).

(qtd. in Mercer 93), the film's dual modality offers the opportunity to render legible not only the alterity of realistic details and different moral norms of Kurdish culture but also elicit emotive reactions to them. Given the film's critical stance towards capitalist Turkish society and state, this legibility thus allows the critique to establish itself more persuasively.

### 3. A Marxist Perspective and Its Conundrums

In discussing three *Yeşilçam* films from the 1970s, including Yılmaz Güney's *Hope*, Arslan claims that these films "swap the national melancholia with the dominance of reality, leaving us alone with loss and the price of modernity" (308). In this vein, this strand of films that includes *The Herd* stands in contradistinction to the earlier narratives of *Yeşilçam* that "desire the lost past [of the nation] to rule over the present and the future, reinforcing the borders of societal norms". Instead, these films "enacted the dramatic language of alterity," inviting the viewer to ask whether they constitute "an opening of a space wherein we can pursue other societal dreams"<sup>94</sup> ("Mazi" 308; author's trans.). Opening a space for an "other" societal vision is achieved in *The Herd's* Marxist reading of the clan's plight through the critique offered by the oldest son of Şivan's relative living in Ankara, prior to Berivan's death.

In the final sequences that they take place in Ankara with Şivan and Berivan moving in with their relatives, the family that they move in with is depicted as having abandoned their identity as Kurdish nomads for menial work and the petty dreams of the

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<sup>94</sup>"...ulusal melankoliyi gerçeklik hükmüyle yer değiştirerek, kayıpla ve moderniliğin bedelleriyle bizi baş başa bıraktılar. Bu filmler, ... kayıp geçmişin şimdiye ve geleceğe hükmetmesini isteyen, ... toplumsalın mevcut sınırlarını idame ettiren anlatıların aksine, farklılığın dramatik dilini yaratmış oldular. Bu yeni duygusal yörüngeyi, öznenin yinelenmesi, başka toplumsal rüyalara imkan veren boşluk alanının açılması olarak da düşünebilir miyiz?" (Arslan, "Mazi" 308)

bourgeoisie in a modern, urban setting. When the oldest son of this now urban family scolds his father for giving Şivan false advice on how to make his way in Ankara, arguing that things operate differently in the capital, the young boy posits a reading of their condition from the point of view of class struggle wherein "the rich here and the feudal lord there is one and the same"<sup>95</sup>. The young son is framed in a mid-shot with a poster of Yılmaz Güney in one of his films lying on the ground, shooting a gun; over this poster hangs a smaller one of Karl Marx. His words point to the need for both rural and industrial masses to reach a level of class-consciousness that view their struggle against the capitalists as a shared one.

In realist and melodramatic registers, *The Herd* depicts the impact of modernity and capitalism on the losses of identity and human lives. With these scenes of Marxist rhetoric by the young boy, the film seems to suggest that individuals lacking class-consciousness are bound to disappear, moving in their vicious melodramatic cycles, tied to meaningless hopes. In the next shot, the boy advances his analysis when he sees his father, who has hopes of becoming the porter for the apartment once the construction is finished, showing the empty rooms and describing how each member of the family will have their own room in an apartment where hot water comes out of faucets on demand. Informing his father and Şivan that those who will inhabit these houses can only do so by exploiting people like themselves, he asks his father and Şivan to contemplate their own political positions. Instead of responding, Şivan diverts the conversation to the need to take Berivan to the hospital, losing interest in this class-based understanding of his situation.

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<sup>95</sup> "Buranın zengini de oranın ağası da hepsi bir."

The young boy's Marxist intrusions, coupled with the film's sympathetic depiction of the markers of class war ongoing in both rural and urban Turkey, subsume the ethnic, cultural and gendered alterity of Şivan and Berivan's struggles under the rubric of class struggle. The melodramatic modality familiarizes their plight, but in providing a Marxist message, the film erases the difference attributed to Şivan, Berivan, and other members of the nomadic Kurdish culture. Ironically, *The Herd's* assertion of a working-class identity mirrors the energies of the national project of the Turkish Republic--promoting a singular national identity within a liberal, capitalistic framework.

At the film's release, the Turkish Left of the late 1970s appeared to enjoy a popularity unsurpassed in the nation's history. Nevertheless, the Left's utopian hope that all dispossessed groups would attain class-consciousness and overthrow the capitalist state did not come to fruition. The 1980 military coup, in justifying its response to the violence on the streets between radical leftist groups and the reactionary right-wing paramilitary forces, crushed this hope for the foreseeable future, turning the country into an open-air prison, as Güney's next film, *The Road* (1980) would suggest. With the Marxist political nexus obliterated, the ways in which neorealist political cinema undertakes to transform the modes of *Yeşilçam* draws to a close. Nevertheless, just as *O Beautiful Istanbul* suggests an indeterminate subjectivity articulated in a utopian moment and promulgates a memory of Istanbul and the absences that this memory elicits, *The Herd* presents yet another utopian moment framed by the absence of the disappearing subjectivities of Kurdish identity, though gesturing toward a more determined subjectivity based on class struggle. Both respond to the rootless national narrative of Turkish identity, using melodrama in various forms. The ways in which they enact this

response constitute a branch of the genealogy occurring in Fatih Akin's filmic choices. Albeit in a different yet uncannily similar cultural context of Turkish German subjectivities in the German national narrative, Akin's works also have at their heart the struggle between tradition and modernity over representations of alterity.

## CHAPTER III

### ELUSIVE ALTERITY: TURKISH GERMAN SUBJECTS IN FATİH AKIN'S MELODRAMAS

#### A. A Critical Overview of Turkish German Studies

In this final chapter, I investigate the relevance of the melodramatic genre and mode in Fatih Akin's films. Focusing on two of his most renowned films, *Head-On* (2005) and *Edge of Heaven* (2007), I discuss how Akin's approach can contribute to Turkish German studies as well as comparative melodrama studies. These films harbor elements of what Thomas Elsaesser terms the "family melodrama," which focalizes "victimized heroes, conflict between generations, superficial plots and obscured (camouflaged) social criticism" (qtd. in Berghahn, "Introduction" 10). My intention is not to illustrate how Akin's films adhere to this model: instead, I analyze these films utilizing contemporary scholarship on melodrama that focuses on how emotions become markers that challenge set notions of identity (Ahmed 2004, Gledhill 2013). This approach allows me to map these films anew onto the field of Turkish German film studies, questioning ideas of identity/alterity as well as its performance in German, Turkish, Turkish German contexts.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith posits the genre's ideological failure to "...accommodate its problems either in a real present or an ideal future, but lays them open in their contradictoriness" (Landy 273). In the case of Akin, I read this aspect of melodrama not as a lack, but as a framework through which to question issues pertaining to Turkish German subjectivities. I argue that Akin's consistent deployment of the melodramatic mode in *Head-On* and in *Edge of Heaven* is closely related to the capacity of

melodramas to harbor contradictions represented in the ambivalent affective states of his protagonists, intricate plot-lines and *mise-en-scène*.

Akın's unique interpretation of the transnational/transcultural melodramatic mode places his films in tension with debates on multiculturalism and hybridity in Germany while effectively situating his protagonists outside the framework of victimhood. My analysis refers to the genealogy outlined in the previous two chapters in reading these films as transcultural/transnational, maintaining a comparative approach throughout. What results from my readings, however, is not a pronouncement of the successor (Turkish German cinema) to two precursor national cinemas (German and Turkish), but rather an exploration of these two cinemas' potential in depicting alterity through formal strategies. I focus primarily on their relationship to melodrama and the melodramatic mode, suggesting ways in which they engage in critical dialogue with the so-called 'stranded objects'<sup>96</sup> of their concomitant national narratives. Following the current scholarship on Turkish German studies with regard to "new lines of thought by studying varying configurations that reflect German guilt, shame, or resentment about the Nazi past, German fears of migration, Turkish fears of victimization, national taboos in both countries, and Turkish perceptions of German fantasies" (Esen 8-9), I situate Akın's work within such a historically and transnationally constituted constellation.

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<sup>96</sup> I draw on this concept from Thomas Elsaesser's work on Fassbinder's oeuvre (1994) and Carol Flynn's study on New German Cinema and music (2005). Both authors relate to how filmic works partake in the postwar 'mourning-work' of the German Nation. Even though Akın has been posited as responding to New German Cinema through his films, a critical response as to how he specifically deals with the ways in which this mourning work is done in his films is absent from readings of Akın's work. I address this relationship in more detail in my conclusion.

Against the backdrop of liberal policies of multiculturalism in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, the hybridity debates of the 2000s and their critique in current scholarship, the field of Turkish German studies has remained alert to "the dangers of reifying otherness and the procrustean nature of identity politics, whether in an aestheticizing framework or otherwise" (Mandel 196). This awareness<sup>97</sup> has prompted Turkish German cultural, literary and films studies to articulate identity as fundamentally fluid and reliant on performativity. Such an approach is rooted in a critique of multiculturalism, the counterpart to West Germany's self-articulation as a country of immigration during the 1970s and 1980s, which has "facilitated not only differentiation among immigrant groups, but also within them" (Hake 3). Multiculturalism responds to difference but rejects assimilation.<sup>98</sup> Yet it retains the binary between a host country and its immigrants, constituted respectively by Western and Eastern sensibilities while arguing that cultures exist side by side, but in their separate spheres--a gesture that reifies alterity.

In German cinema, films that depict experiences of foreigners in Germany can be traced back to late New German Cinema. Aptly named a "cinema of duty", victimhood of

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<sup>97</sup> Adile Esen, in her dissertation titled "Travels and Transformations in Contemporary Turkish German Literature and Film" provides a historical reading of this trajectory as well. Starting with the classification of Turkish German literary output in the 1970s as *Auslanderliteratur*, she claims that such a conceptualization "sets apart this literature as foreign, and constructs a binary of minor against major, accordingly, the very act of promoting cultural understanding inherently posed a paradoxical problem: namely, the notion of bridging two cultures through an exchange of enriching and educational messages to the Germans about and from Turks in essence reifies the isolation of Turkish culture and its differences as fixed and authentic" (Esen 6). Here and elsewhere in her manuscript, she concurs with the current scholarship critical of acts of reification. For similar historical trajectories see Daniela Berghahn's introduction to the special issue of *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* titled "Turkish-German Dialogues On Screen" (Berghahn "Introduction" 3-9) and Sabine Hake's introductory chapter to the edited volume titled "Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium" (Hake 1-16).

<sup>98</sup> This gesture of differentiation within the immigrants' cultural sphere and the positionality that one attains towards that culture remain key to the current scholarship as well. In fact, further attuning these two focal points constitutes the way in which later frameworks differentiate themselves from their successors.



foreigners<sup>99</sup>, especially of women, was dutifully represented on screen by filmmakers of German and Turkish German descent<sup>100</sup>. Such films "ended up reifying stereotypical views of foreigners as victimized and as torn between cultures" (Esen 8), while taking a 'social worker approach to ethnic relations, articulating social problems of marginalized groups of society in a documentary-realist fashion" (Berghahn, "Introduction" 141).

Leslie Adelson provides a gateway to a critique of multiculturalism by claiming that "[d]espite poststructuralist insights into the unstable nature of binary oppositions, there are those that abide in the arena of contemporary German Studies" (Adelson, "Opposing" 305). Challenges to binaries in literary, filmic and other media proceed in tandem with the reception of Turkish German subjectivities in popular and critical discourses, and articulated in cultural products. Adelson's critique, drawing from such cultural studies theorists as Homi Bhabha who view "the production of culture as fundamentally hybrid, liminal, and performative" (306), underlines a simultaneity in the production of cultural marginalities and national identities. The critical response points to this hybridity both in the public policy sphere (Ewing 2006, Kaya 2007) and in the interpretations of the works of second generation Turkish German artists. The shift from stereotyping to a discourse of hybridity accompanied a valorization of Turkish German

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<sup>99</sup> Fassbinder's *Ali*, as discussed in the first chapter and by others (Hake 6), remains critical of this paternalizing approach. In Sabine Hake's words, the film "straddles the tension between criticizing postwar racism as a continuation of the Nazi past and reifying the mute stranger as an object of orientalist fascination" (6). Fassbinder's personal relationship with Ali's victimhood is seemingly more complex than what Hake suggests. The couple's cycle of oppression points to a layered victimhood, rather than the one-directional benevolent gaze of his contemporaries.

<sup>100</sup> *Shirins Hochzeit* (1975) by Helma Sanders-Brahms is an early example of cinema of duty's initial phase, produced primarily by German directors. The film "while universalizing the suffering of womanhood, ...actually portrays the Turkish female character as a helpless and victimized figure- a representation continued in the 1980s in the works of Tevfik Başer. Başer's first film, *40qm Deutschland* (1986)" (Esen 8). His later works are part of the second phase of cinema of duty wherein we can locate other Turkish German directors. The films of "Hark Bohm, who in the 1980s explored the problems faced by Turkish labor migrants and, in particular, Turkish women in Germany" (Berghahn 141) are also considered within this framework, utilizing predominantly a cinema-vérité approach to reveal these problems.

identities that "succesfully occupy culturally 'in-between' spaces"(Ewing 285), rather than being trapped in that binary, and are viewed as an attempt "to open up a 'third space' between the celebration and the denial of otherness" (Burns 4).

In Turkish German cinema, there has been a shift towards a celebratory attitude with regard to the "pleasures of hybridity" accompanied by "the self-reflexive appropriation of generic conventions" (Ross 180). An "emphasis in many films is on playfulness and performativity," responding to the victimhood narratives of earlier films by underlining an "affective habitus... of empowerment and self-assertion" (Hake 5). Adelson and Göktürk's<sup>101</sup> warnings on the risk of reification follow critiques of the celebratory modality. The concept of a 'between two worlds paradigm'<sup>102</sup> that remains operational even in this hybrid format is often deployed "to articulate, freeze and naturalize difference" (Adelson, "Turkish Turn" 131). Furthermore, the term does not delineate different strategies for negotiating identity since "it does not explain how individuals manage inconsistency through a variety of cultural and psychological strategies that generate multiple, contextualized identities<sup>103</sup> ...hamper[ing] recognition of the actual heterogeneity of those who fall within a particular group" (Ewing 286).

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<sup>101</sup> Deniz Göktürk in her chapter entitled, "Turkish Delight German Fright: Unsettling Oppositions in Transnational Cinema" provides one of the earliest critiques of the hybridity approach: "...the experience of migration can be understood as a productive provocation which creates a transnational 'third space' of travel and translation where our traditional patterns of classifying culture are put into question. While celebrating this 'third space' however, we ought to be cautious to remember local specificities and differences as we create a third box for 'mixed pickles' and group all the hybrids together in a space of 'in-betweenness'" (Ross 180).

<sup>102</sup> One of the most renowned Turkish German authors, Zafer Şenocak's pieces are often utilized to challenge this discourse. One example is his claims to distancing "himself from this territorial conception of identity in his essay 'Beyond the Language of the Land': 'I am not in between, for I have lost my sense of direction'." (qtd. in Deniz Göktürk's chapter in Berghahn et.al., "European" 230-1)

<sup>103</sup> While responding to cultural strategies of negotiating identity, scholars tend to pay less attention to psychological ones in Turkish German works where each character appears to map out individually. My focus on how Fatih Akın weaves the specific melodramatic modality of his films investigates this point further.

Respondents attempt to locate and open up different modalities of alterity in literary works and films. Rather than coining yet another binding term, current scholarship deploys a multiplicity of concepts in the face of such heterogeneity. Notions such as ‘transmigrants’ are offered to designate "the more cosmopolitan, more syncretic, more rhizomatic, and more transnational" (Kaya 498) ways of having "multiple affiliations" (Gezen 29) that different Turkish German media depict. Alternative perspectives "that focus on the micropolitics of everyday life... [and on] how individuals, no matter where they are socially positioned, operate through multiple, contextualized identities in a wide range of social situations and manage an array of contradictions and inconsistencies in their lives" (Ewing 268-9), introduce diverse entry points through which to engage with this debate.

The multiplicity of spaces that Turkish German subjectivities inhabit/traverse also challenges "static and dichotomous notions of place" wherein the boundaries within and between the spaces that these subjectivities traverse "...appear porous and fluid—whether geographic (frontiers, waters), ideological (Orient/Occident), or physical (the Berlin Wall)" (Gezen 132). Venkat Mani's cosmopolitanism (Esen 9) serves as a key concept in elucidating this "increasingly multifocal existence" (Mandel 182). However, this progressive decentralization that absolves a sense of belonging to a stable epicenter for Turkish German subjectivities has a two-fold effect. While it liberates them from a Turkish and German national identity binary, the notion of a center, nevertheless,

often haunts them, remaining the elusive site where they cannot be. For [second generation Turkish Germans] this elusive center emerges more deeply in

discourse and in the negotiation of sometimes contradictory demands of competing institutions, be they familial, educational, or vocational. (Mandel 183)

In Fatih Akin's films, this double-bind of liberation and 'contradictory demands of institutions' surfaces. Mediating between the three sets of "narrative conventions and affective styles"<sup>104</sup> (Hake, "Turkish German" 5) outlined above, Akin's work remains cognizant<sup>105</sup> not only of different filmic traditions but also of the critical reception of Turkish German culture.

In what follows, I examine Akin's deployment of the melodramatic mode to elucidate the ways in which he borrows from and updates elements in the films analyzed in the preceding chapters. Similar to these films, I suggest that he contributes to a destabilization of the native-foreign dichotomy (as well as other dichotomies within German, Turkish and Turkish German contexts) while refraining from completely resolving the contradictions that result. Highlighting ambivalent affective states that the melodramatic mode harbors, and their links to Turkish German subjectivities of Akin's films, I aim to contribute to the current scholarship that underlines the prevalence of fluidity and destabilization in contemporary visual culture.

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<sup>104</sup> Hake's tripartite rendering of the history of critical reception of Turkish German cinema summarizes the background that Akin operates within: "First, the cinema of mute victims is predicated on a binary relationship that implies a paternalistic structure and exoticizing aesthetic. The embrace of multiculturalism and hybridity during the second phase resituates the films in a transnational context and responds to the performative quality of identity, thus moving beyond the earlier focus on topicality and social realism. Finally, in the contemporary configuration, the presumed link between filmmakers' biographies and filmic representation is further complicated, if not completely severed" (Hake, "Turkish German" 5).

<sup>105</sup> Karolin Machtans' chapter entitled "Marketing of Fatih Akin" explains how popular discourses around the films as well as the director's own interventions can be framed as a marketing strategy that celebrates difference in post-unification Germany (Hake, "Turkish German" 151). Framed in this manner, Akin's cultural categorization in German public discourse is situated between "the poles of his proposed ethnic Turkishness and his presumed role in pioneering a new, young German cinema" (153).

## **B. Representational and Affective Ambivalence in Fatih Akın's *Head-On***

My analysis of *Head-On* is divided into three parts. First, I track the film's narrative structure and thematics to illustrate its congruencies with elements of melodrama examined in the preceding two chapters. Next, I provide a close reading of the musical interludes that separate the film into six episodes. Focusing primarily on the first episode, I explore the dynamics Akın's embrace of hybridity. Finally, I concentrate on three specific sequences wherein Akın's articulation of affective states enacted by the protagonists' performances and elements of the *mise-en-scène* points to destabilization and ambivalence, and, subsequently, to an affirmation of the protagonists' alterity.

### **1. The Narrative and Thematics of *Head-On*: Affinities and Divergences**

*Head-On* follows two Turkish Germans who meet in a mental institution near Hamburg. Both are confined after suicide attempts: Sibel, due to her oppressive family, and Cahit, after the death of the love of his life. Sibel asks Cahit to marry her to free herself from her family's oppression. She assures Cahit that this is to be a fake marriage and that both will maintain their autonomy, especially in sexual affairs. Cahit consents, and the film's episodic structure begins to unfold. The couple's desire for freedom from society's constraints, as defined for Turkish Germans, eventually manifests itself as a desire for one another. Similar to the narratives of Ayşe and Haşmet of *O Beautiful Istanbul*, and Emmi and Ali in *Fear Eats the Soul*, Sibel and Cahit experience melodramatic impasses that raise the challenge of attaining selfhood while retaining their difference, in tension with fixed identitarian discourses. Cahit's past, despite our limited knowledge of it, becomes a key factor in these impasses, particularly in the first episodes

in Hamburg. Meanwhile, Sibel's background is communicated extensively, and her struggles to evade the role of the traditional female subject, one that is bound to a Turkish German domestic sphere, are highlighted. Like Effi Briest's mother and father, Sibel's parents' actions are prompted by their socio-cultural prerogative in their control over their daughter. Akin places the parents' pedagogical violence at the center of the viewer's perception of her predicament during the first half of the film.

Cahit witnesses her family's oppressiveness in their visits to the hospital, and hears about them through Sibel's accounts. Subsequently, he accepts Sibel's proposal to marry out of paternalistic instinct. Following a typical Turkish German wedding<sup>106</sup> that underlines Cahit's aversion to anything Turkish German, the couple moves in together. The wedding sequence also signifies a vital aspect of their subjectivity, namely their ability to perform Turkishness when there is overwhelming demand for it. At the same time, "the audience's awareness about the fake reality of the action at stake encourages both identification and distance" (Esen 209), establishing this duality at the level of the narrative. Similarly, in their enactment of Germanness, they blend in seamlessly with Hamburg's nightlife, showing "little concern with problems of acculturation; instead ... briskly defy[ing] social expectations and resist[ing] incorporation into any community" (216). Other instances of performativity unravel throughout the film, hinting at both aversion to, and affinity with, these two cultural spheres. Scholars frequently analyze these two protagonists through the framework of ethnic performativity, wherein ethnicity is viewed "as a representational, performative, discursive and historical category" (Hake 12), yet situate them on a bridge between Turkish and German cultural spheres, a claim I challenge later in this chapter.

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<sup>106</sup> For a cultural-anthropological reading of Turkish German weddings see Mandel 168-70.

Cahit appears to reject both German and Turkish German mainstream cultural spheres as exemplified by an existential anxiety that manifests itself in bouts of alcohol consumption, mirroring Ali's reaction in *Fear Eats the Soul*. Ali responds with his Moroccan vernacular utterance of *kif-kif* ("whatever", author's trans.) to all challenges and fatefully accepts them. However, not unlike Fassbinder's multifarious challenges to victimhood, Akın resorts to performativity to make his protagonists negotiate victimhood—including their own—in a multivalent manner. Sibel stresses her subjugation to provoke Cahit's libertarian sensibilities. Cahit elaborates "a poor but madly in love" male subject for Sibel's brother's approval. In this regard, Akın stands alongside Fassbinder "against 'victim thinking' and thus challenging also a key aspect of contemporary 'identity-politics'" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 35). With Fassbinder, he suggests that victimhood framed in this manner "may not necessarily be the negative state from which the protagonists try (and fail) to escape, but already a solution, a way of repositioning the whole dialectic of oppressor/oppressed which refuses the complicity of the power struggles over sexual or class [or ethnic] identity" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 250).

The initial six months of their marriage pass as Sibel had envisioned them. She explores her sexuality fully while Cahit uneasily watches her 'grow'. This evolution mimics that of *O Beautiful Istanbul* in which Ayşe trades her familial sphere for freedom and Haşmet is caught between his desires and his need for control. As the narrative unfolds, Sibel and Cahit begin to have feelings for one another. Progressively, Sibel's desire to live life fully, manifested primarily as promiscuity, evolves into a monogamous life with Cahit. We see them in bed, on the verge of intimacy. Sibel, however, stops short, fearing they might become a real couple reined in by the boundaries of monogamy. The

following day, Sibel realizes that she is in love with Cahit and spontaneously buys him a cake with "I Love You" written on it. Meanwhile, out of jealousy, Cahit kills a close friend who is also one of Sibel's sexual partners, foreclosing all potential future happiness. Cahit is imprisoned while Sibel travels to Turkey. She fears reprisals from her family, who prefer preservation of the family honor to helping their daughter, reenacting a similar gesture of the von Briests. Sibel and Cahit meet for one last time in prison before she departs as she informs Cahit that she will wait for him. In her promise to wait for him while living on her own in Istanbul, Sibel enacts the qualities of a female subject that *O Beautiful Istanbul* also portrays: a subject who has "been saved from being Eastern but nevertheless maintains her chastity" (Arslan, "Bu Kabuslar" 50; author's trans.). Her chastity takes the form of working as a hotel maid in downtown Istanbul with the help of her aunt Selma who aspires one day to become a manager at this hotel.

After several months in Istanbul, Sibel impulsively quits her job, accesses drugs and immerses herself in Istanbul nightlife. Sibel's transformation is communicated through her aversion to her aunt's life driven solely by professional ambition. Akın seems to forego the moral universe of *Yeşilçam* in Sibel's insistence on hedonistic acts and on assuming ownership of her body and will. Yet, he concords with a melodramatic morality when she is raped by the bartender and later beaten brutally by random men on the street. Her transgressions thus punished within the moral universe of the film, the film seems to come to its conclusion. Akın re-visits *Yeşilçam's* melodramatic mode as Sibel faces new moral dilemmas involving her love for her unborn child and Cahit's support. The legibility of the moral universe, a key aspect of earlier melodrama theory, is challenged



here as the contours of Sibel's moral choices, and those that the film affirms, oscillate in tandem with the emotive states of the protagonists.

Sibel's crafting of her own selfhood resembles Effi Briest's gesture of reordering her priorities when she says "Love comes first, but right after it comes brilliance and honour, and then come diversions - yes, diversions, always something new, always something to make me laugh or cry. The thing I can't stand is boredom" (Fontane 23). Initially, Sibel focuses on what Effi calls 'diversions'-- what life offers in its complexity in unexpected ways. Yet, as the melodrama progresses she begins to prioritize her love for Cahit. Subsequently, however, she immerses herself once again in Istanbul's nightlife, namely in 'diversions'. At the end, she forgoes everything for a settled, domestic life. As Christof Decker suggests,

melodramatic structures are subject to a 'fundamental ambivalence of feeling', constantly oscillating between 'a stimulation and a control of affect'. Melodrama ... does not so much aim at a fulfillment of desires but rather at their creation, it epitomizes 'the fundamental insight that a return to the state of innocence' is impossible. (Gledhill, "Gender" 43)

Similarly, Akın's protagonists move through transnational circuits in pursuit of their desires while never fully managing to satisfy them.

The narrative leaves Sibel stabbed and lying on the street in Istanbul. Cut to Cahit leaving prison after three or four years<sup>107</sup> as the camera follows him en route to Istanbul to search for Sibel. Sibel has by then recovered and leads a happy domesticated life with her child and middle-class husband. Cahit finds Sibel's aunt; his conversation with her ends in a clash of wills over who is to shape Sibel's future as Cahit seeks her help in re-

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<sup>107</sup> I deduce this by gauging Sibel's daughter's age as the film does not indicate how much time has elapsed.

connecting with Sibel. Yet the conversation ends on an ambivalent note, positing Cahit primarily as a destructive force in Sibel's newfound domesticity. While Cahit spends long hours waiting either in a hotel room<sup>108</sup> or pacing the hotel's vicinity, one day, Sibel calls unexpectedly.

In the following episode, in Cahit's hotel room where the couple spends one last day and night together, Cahit asks Sibel to follow him to Mersin, his birthplace. The following day, Sibel begins to pack her bags to leave with Cahit. But her husband's and child's voices from the adjacent room prompt her to stay, illustrating "the ambivalences of a mobile and a settled life, the ultimately irresolvable tension between desire, which drives perpetual movement, and responsibility, which requires at least provisional grounding" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 222). Reminiscent of Fassbinder's framing of Effi's decision to marry Innstetten as "taking advantage of an opportunity this society offers and accepting it, and still knowing that it's basically wrong" (Töteberg 154), Sibel ends up forsaking her love for Cahit. The film ends with Cahit leaving Istanbul alone, gazing into the camera as his bus departs the terminal while at the same time it absolves Sibel of a multiplicity of potential victimhood narratives, thereby portraying an emotively ambivalent character who nonetheless exercises agency and control over her life. The

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<sup>108</sup> This is the hotel that Akın revisits in his two subsequent films; Alexander Hacke, the narrator of the documentary *Crossing the Bridge*, stays in the same room overlooking the same view as Cahit in *Head-On*. The hotel becomes moderately famous after these films and renovates its rooms; Hanna Schygulla, in *Edge of Heaven*, stays in one of the renovated rooms, again overlooking this very view. It is interesting to note that while the hotel purports to be a venerable one, with the name "Grand Hotel de Londres," it has actually been operational only for the past 40 years, having mimicked the décor of its more famous neighboring "Pera Palas". Both are situated on a hill that overlooks the Golden Horn rather than the more iconic Bosphorus.

audience is denied a homecoming scene<sup>109</sup> in Mersin, suggesting that Akın is not invested in redemptive gestures tied to territorial notions of belonging.

## 2. The Precarious Representational Ground of the Musical Interludes

Cahit's final direct gaze at the audience, the soundtrack's direct allusions to the narrative impasses, the protagonists' performance of Turkish and German cultural markers, and the director's allusions to Turkish and other filmic traditions render *Head-On* a melodrama that simultaneously inscribes the dichotomy of identificatory and distantiation devices. Musical interludes offer ample examples of this interplay. The interludes commence with the opening shot and divide the film into six episodes. These interludes<sup>110</sup> lie outside the diegesis of the film and represent elements, as delineated by Akın, of a Turkish cultural sphere. I argue that they are instead built on a precarious representational ground and that it is not possible to mark their cultural/territorial borders and roots, working in tandem with other filmic gestures of Akın's that destabilize Turkish German identities.

Asuman Suner (2005) and Deniz Göktürk (in Berghahn 2010) interpret these musical interludes as an interplay between distantiation and identification. Suner points to instances of Brechtian distantiation, while Göktürk's work points towards elements of

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<sup>109</sup> I concur with Göktürk who reads the ending against any interpretations of a redemptive homecoming (such as Burns 2006 or Savaş 2010) and affirm that the ending is left open, particularly for Cahit, but also, to an extent, for Sibel, since "visually, the narrative does not reach any closure, no image of a happy family is assembled in one frame, and we merely hear the sound of a musical clock, which accompanies the soft-spoken voices of a man and a child playing in the background and carries over into the next scene at the bus station where Cahit is waiting. We understand that—at least momentarily—responsibility weighs in more heavily than desire, or perhaps desire has faded" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 222).

<sup>110</sup> Fassbinder's intertitles in *Effi Briest* operate in a similar manner, even though on the surface they look like an altogether different gesture, allowing the directors to punctuate the flow of the narrative and directly comment on the film's content. Fassbinder selectively reads parts of the novel in relation to the film and Akın includes songs that elicit specific emotive contents through their lyrics and music.

music video aesthetics and the framework of Indian cinema that seep in to "provide emotional relief, and underscore or counterpoint the narrative" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 220). These scholars also focus on the space in which the music is performed, namely Istanbul, that "features as a locus of the imagination that opens up a realm of overlapping sensibilities" (Suner, "Dark"), allowing for a "convergence of intertwined traditions that challenges any nation-based definition of music and, more generally, of culture" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 228). Yet a closer look at Akın's staging of these interludes uncovers certain contradictions that cannot be fully explained by "overlapping sensibilities" or "polyphonic coexistence of cultures" (228), pointing towards a *mise-en-abyme* in the face of attempts at reading the interludes with certainty concerning their referentiality.

The film commences as its title "Gegen Die Wand" appears, in red, on a black screen that fills the entire frame. With the title still on screen, we hear an off-screen voice counting in Turkish, "Bir, ki, üç, dört" (One, two, three, four), cuing in the musicians. As soon as the counting ends, the music begins and we cut to a static long-shot of six male musicians sitting on chairs and a female singer standing up at the middle. In the background is a panoramic view of Süleymaniye Mosque in the center with the Beyazıt Tower to its left. Between them runs a waterway, namely the Golden Horn (*not* the Bosphorus). The musicians are in Galata<sup>111</sup> and the backdrop is Istanbul's old city. All these landmark locations are in Europe. Contrary to convention, the image of the line of boats that slowly bring passengers to the Old Town omits representing the Bosphorus Bridge. This, incidentally, is the only movement in the background, thereby complicating

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<sup>111</sup> Galata was an Italian enclave of the Byzantium Empire, which later became a predominantly Christian neighborhood during the Ottoman Empire.

interpretation of this image as a metaphor for integrating Europe and Asia. This is an outdoor shot and the musicians' shadows hint that it takes place early in the day. In the later interludes with the exact same set-up, the shadows change, together with a brief transformation in the lighting, to indicate the passage of time throughout one day, countering the geographical and temporal dispersal that the diegesis of the film enacts throughout.

During the final era of the Ottoman Empire, musicians who performed Ottoman classical music<sup>112</sup> began to dress like Western classical music performers. Here, the male musicians are attired in tuxedos. The female singer wears a long, red dress and red shoes, and they all stand on "Turkish"<sup>113</sup> rugs with red hues, overlapping at various angles. This depiction of Istanbul recalls pictures in tourist guidebooks, which might be interpreted as an intent to portray an authentic Turkishness; however, close attention to further details suggests something quite different.

The lyrics, all in Turkish, begin after a forty-second instrumental introduction. Images and sounds conjoin to enact a 'Turkish' space. Yet as Göktürk comments, the musicians are of Roma origin. Selim Sesler, the clarinetist and band leader, comes from Keşan, a town on the Greek border with the highest Roma population in Turkey. The singer is İdil Güner, a Turkish German actress who also appears in Akin's previous film *In July* (Im Juli, 2003). The music itself is a Roma arrangement, and maintains a different rhythm from that of Ottoman classical music, lacking certain traditional instruments of

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<sup>112</sup> Here, we need to recall the already cosmopolitan character of Ottoman classical music as discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>113</sup> It is impossible to identify the motifs on the rugs and therefore impossible to ascertain which cultural sphere they might belong to. Shops in Istanbul often sell rugs that come from other countries, together with Turkish ones.

Ottoman classical bands. Rather than hinting at a convergence of traditions, Akin proves that the act of identification may not be entirely straightforward. In *Crossing the Bridge* (2006)<sup>114</sup>, Brenna McCrimmon, a Canadian musician, conducts archival research to select the songs to be performed in *Head-On*'s interludes. She speaks an accented but fluent Turkish and recounts her trip to Turkish villages in Bulgaria in search of old records to find these songs.

Akin's choice of songs for the interludes does not represent the canonical Ottoman classical *oeuvre*. Nor are the songs part of the Roma musical tradition in Turkey. Found in a Bulgarian village, the records include songs in Turkish<sup>115</sup>, but the music itself cannot be classified as belonging to a national culture. It is, in fact, from a geography where cultural syncretism has been the norm for more than a millennium; the Balkans. In re-arranging them, Selim Sesler and Brenna McCrimmon add further musical elements to these songs that enhance their Roma character. It becomes increasingly challenging to analyze these songs from within a discourse of "authentic origins". The elusive project of marking which cultures are invoked by which garb, and how they come together, further complicates a discourse of hybridity, making it difficult to convincingly delineate which ethnic or national cultures are hybridized. These gestures thus point towards the aforementioned *mise-en-abyme* that confronts the scholar attempting to interpret such cultural enactments. A final layer in this ambiguity arises from the fact

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<sup>114</sup> *Crossing the Bridge* is Akin's documentary on Turkey's musicians and music culture. It was shot in 2006, following *Head-On*.

<sup>115</sup> The fact that the lyrics are in Turkish does not render the songs themselves a part of the Turkish culture. In a record that Professor David Lenson provided me with from the archives of WMUA, University of Massachusetts-Amherst radio station, titled *Istanbul 1925*, there are songs played by an ensemble of Greek, Turkish and Armenian musicians and sung in Turkish by a Greek singer with a heavy Greek accent. Similarly, records of Greek musicians from Turkey performing in Athens during the 1920s and 1930s often include songs in Turkish.

that, for the most part, our knowledge of the songs in the musical interludes derives from *Crossing the Bridge*, thus gesturing toward the mediation of this information by the director himself.

Akın's staging of these musical interludes counters two key tendencies in the critical reception of Turkish German cultural products by current scholars: first, that of uncritically accepting them as authentic representations of Turkish German identity<sup>116</sup>, and, second, that of conceiving of the director as a repository for enacting discourses of identity. Instead, Akın declares cinema<sup>117</sup> to be his country of origin<sup>118</sup>, downplaying all notions of national belonging<sup>119</sup>, and offering a universalist/humanist discourse as an alternative to identitarian ones.

At the same time, however, Akın often invokes a narrative of authenticity in recounting the sources of his stories<sup>120</sup>. His narratives rely on a multitude of Turkish

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<sup>116</sup> Pointing out a tendency in critical and popular discourses, Deniz Göktürk claims that in critical responses to minority cinemas we often find a "collapsing of actor and role, fiction and social reality – equations that are common in critical or celebratory approaches to migrant or minority cinema, where staged and enacted representations tend to be read as mimetically representative of the experience of a disenfranchised group" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 216).

<sup>117</sup> For example, he invokes the fact that he has been directly influenced by Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* in creating the musical interludes in *Head-On* (Akın, "Sinema" 131). Such allusions to different cinemas and specific films abound in the interviews he has given to German, Turkish and international press.

<sup>118</sup> In an interview with Volker Behrens and Michael Töteberg, Akın poses the question "Where do I belong?" and answers it unequivocally: "This question has never existed for me. As an artist national identities are of no importance to me... Today I can say that cinema is my country of origin" (Akın 30, author's trans.). ("Ben nereye aitim? Benim için bu soru asla varolmadı. Bir sanatçı olarak benim için ulusal kimliklerin öyle büyük bir önemi yoktur... Bugün sinemanın benim memleketim olduğunu söyleyebilirim.").

<sup>119</sup> See "The Perception and Marketing of Fatih Akın in the German Press" by Karolin Machtans and "Hyphenated Identities: The Reception of Turkish German Cinema in the Turkish Daily Press" by Ayça Tunç Cox in Sabine Hake's edited volume "Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium" for accounts of how Akın actively intervenes in the construction of the matrices of belonging for his persona as a director in the German and the Turkish context, respectively.

<sup>120</sup> For example, as he comments on the sources of and inspirations for *Head-On*, he recounts a personal story in which a Turkish female friend of his asked him to fake a marriage with her (Akın, "Sinema" 118).

German characters, a move that in turn places him in the contradictory position of insisting on his "status as [an] unhyphenated filmmaker but willing to speak out on Turkish German issues" (Hake 11). To this conundrum I offer a reading of Akin that claims not an ethnic authenticity but rather an authenticity of emotions, especially the affective states of desire as articulated through his protagonists and his mise-en-scène. Nonetheless, Akin's framing of these emotions as authentic does not necessarily render them clearly legible.

### **3. Affective States as Boundaries: A Reading of Emotions in Three Scenes**

To assess the ambivalences in the affective states depicted in *Head-On*, I intend to follow not only the protagonists and their portrayals of emotions but also how elements of mise-en-scène partake in their articulation. Akin forgoes binary oppositions in favor of a transculturalism through active negotiations of performing identity. Hence he further attempts to absolve the idea of 'identity as performance' by illustrating how this notion effaces itself within a melodramatic context. I contend that *Head-On* does not allow us to neatly (and consistently) map certain affective states onto certain identities, breaking certain presumed links to reveal the protagonists' alterity rather than their presumed Turkish Germanness.

My analysis locates the affectivity of the subjects that encourages audience identification through the evocation of pathos, primarily within this ambivalent sphere. Following Linda Williams, I assert that the audience's identification process is "never merely a matter of losing oneself... but, rather, a complex negotiation between emotions



and between emotion and thought" (Browne 49). Tracing emotions in this framework<sup>121</sup> allows us to explore further the ideological implications of Akin's affective ambivalence and uncover his ways of negotiating identity and difference. In what follows, I turn to three segments of the film. I commence with the diegesis that follows the first musical interlude, continue with an analysis of the sequence in which Sibel prepares a Turkish dinner for Cahit, and conclude with the couple's final meeting in a hotel room in downtown Istanbul.

The opening shots consist of a rapid cut of three strong lights switching on. Shot from below, they indicate set lights. The camera pans to reveal audiences leaving a concert hall/night club, allowing the viewer to deduce that a musical performance just ended. We cut to handheld shots of Cahit picking up bottles and half-empty glasses of beer from the floor. He licks his lips as he finishes two of these half-empty glasses. His eyes reveal his drunkenness and he slumps as he sits. A voice asks him, in Turkish, if he is all right. In the next shot, we cut to Cahit and a Turkish colleague who had picked up glasses and bottles with him. They sit at the bar as the bartender asks in German what they would like to drink before closing. The two guys are shot from across the bar, framed by the glasses and the bottles above and by the bar itself below. In Turkish, his friend comments that Cahit looks really thirsty. When Cahit replies in the affirmative, he advises him to drink water instead. This ensues as a long shot as the two men's framing

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<sup>121</sup> Caryl Flinn comments in her "*The New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style*" that "melodrama's affective features, as well as those of cinema more generally, remain undertheorized". Linking this absence to a claim over the premises of field during its inception in the 1970s and 1980s when academics working in this field "[e]ver the good modernist soldiers, ... distrusted people's emotional connections to film texts, arguing that emotional involvement meant depreciated analytical abilities, and a lack of critical 'distance'" (64-65). Scholars seem to be responding to this absence in current works, as attested by the centrality of emotions, for example, in the edited anthology published in 2013, "*Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*".

remains intact. Yet they appear far smaller, as Cahit responds, "You see I am no animal"<sup>122</sup> (author's trans.), in a Turkish noticeably more accented than his friend's nuanced use of the language, as he cryptically intimates that he is a troubled soul.

Apart from Cahit's need to drink incessantly, we are given no clues as to the motive of his passive-aggressive behavior, with the exception of the song that ceases a minute earlier in the musical preface. Its lyrics depict a pastoral image; a desperate lover who goes to the river seemingly to watch the fish. The song communicates that he is in fact waiting for his lover, knowing she will not come<sup>123</sup>. Akin interweaves internationally popular songs with local genres from past and present whose lyrics and the emotions the songs elicit comment on and construct the affective staging of the shots. He deploys this strategy throughout this sequence and indeed the entire film as well as in *Edge of Heaven*.

With a brief sound bridge that contains a diegetic loud car engine and a non-diegetic German post-punk anthem by the band *Abwärts*<sup>124</sup>, we cut to a car racing down the street, running over bicycles on the sidewalk to park, scaring the passersby. The song continues through the subsequent shot as Cahit barges into a bar after kicking the door of his car. He scans the bar irritably, ready to pick a fight. The patrons seemingly know him and keep their distance. As he enters, the song becomes part of the diegesis as if playing in the bar as well. Cahit sits at the bar, sipping beer, lost in thought. The bartender

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<sup>122</sup> "Ben hayvan değilim işte, hayvan değilim". Throughout this sequence and others, the English subtitles in the DVD version follow closely when Turkish is spoken.

<sup>123</sup>The lyrics unfold as follows in Turkish, "Çaya iner gezerim, aman aman, çayda balık izlerim / Balık da değil efkar, sancak saçlı Saniyemi beyhude gözlerim." ("I hang around by the creek, looking at the fish / It is not fish but the melancholia that [interests me], for I am waiting in vain for my wavy haired Saniye" (author's trans.)).

<sup>124</sup> *Abwärts* ("Downwards") is a West German post-punk group from Hamburg. Members Mark Chung and FM Einheit left the group in the early 1980s to join the Berlin-based band *Einstürzende Neubauten*, the band that Akin's friend and colleague Alexander Hacke is also a part of. Their albums are regarded as classic in the West German post-punk scene.

observes him nervously. A woman approaches him and asks how the concert went. Cahit replies curtly, telling her to get lost. After an exchange of curse words, she leaves hurriedly and the camera focuses back on Cahit. A man at the bar tells him he must be gay to refuse such a beautiful lady. Cahit, framed in the frontal plane of the shot to the left with the guy harassing him in the background, takes a drag from his cigarette and walks towards the door as if leaving. He suddenly pulls the stool from under the man; the man falls. The bartender rushes to push Cahit out while he kicks the man on the floor in the face. Outside, the bartender who is friends with Cahit, tells him to go home<sup>125</sup>. The bartender finally manages to re-enter the bar after pushing Cahit to the ground. Again, there are no clues as to Cahit's anger or rejection of his friend's help, apart from the lyrics<sup>126</sup> thematizing loss<sup>127</sup> and a melancholic sadness that turns into anger.

We then cut to a tracking shot, from above, of an asphalt road, followed by rapid cuts to a car's headlights, to the streetlights and to the road again as a popular song from the band Depeche Mode cues in along with the images. Cahit is next seen driving, his eyes half-closed, talking to himself. The camera is at a low-angle and with each cut we

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<sup>125</sup> This remains a motif unfulfilled: Cahit never goes home, not even at the end of the film.

<sup>126</sup> The German lyrics are as follows: "Jetzt sei ruhig und halt den Kopf ganz still / Heut ist die Nacht wo ich es wissen will / Und jetzt tu nicht so als wenn du gar nichts fühlst weil du dann mit meinen Gefühlen spielst / Denk an Torpedos und an U-Boot Krieg Und daran dass auf dir eine Leiche liegt / Denk an Feuer und Maschinen gewehr und an den Sieg vom Deutschen Heer / Beim ersten Mal tut's immer weh Und manchmal tut es nur noch weh" ("Now be silent and hold your head straight/ This is the night where I want to know it/ And now do nothing like when you feel nothing when you play around with my feelings/ Think of Torpedoes and of a U-Boat War and because that in you lies corpse/Think of fire and Machine gun and victory of German Army/The first time always hurts and sometimes it only hurts" (author's trans.))

<sup>127</sup> The last line of lyrics ("Beim ersten Mal tut's immer weh Und manchmal tut es nur noch weh") along with how little the film tells us about Cahit's past might indicate that the pain Cahit has felt in the loss of his first wife and that her memory will always exist as a source of scathing pain. At this point in the narrative, however, the evocation has almost no content in relation to the diegesis.

see Cahit laughing, shouting or crying in close-ups as the lyrics<sup>128</sup> begin with the words: "I feel you", in English. The images that cue in with the music evoke a music video aesthetic. The car accelerates and the cuts become more rapid; the car swerving left in a long shot, a mid-shot from above as it accelerates further, and a close-up of Cahit's face looking straight ahead with his eyes wide open, driving straight into a wall. The crescendo of the song coincides with the crash, and is shown by a shot from above that persists as the song continues until the scene fades to black.

In an attempt to read Cahit's predicament, the song's pop sentiment provides little insight other than the fact that he is feeling the loss of a loved one who purportedly brought meaning to his life, once leading him 'through oblivion'. Yet the images of Cahit experiencing a medley of emotions and the fact that he has consumed copious amounts of alcohol do not uncover the specifics of his emotions or his motive. In this first segment, I commit to reading emotionality as interiority, as the effects of individual self-expression. But these readings fall short of connecting to any emotional state in a concrete manner, let alone becoming markers of Cahit's identity through the cultural registers of Turkishness or Germanness. The lyrics comment ambivalently on his predicament as an agonized lost soul.

Cahit rejects sympathetic pleas from both Turkish German and German friends from similar backgrounds during these sequences, further discarding the possibility that the sources of his pain could be remedied by an affinity to the respective cultural spheres they represent. In the sequence that follows the crash, Cahit ridicules an empathetic

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<sup>128</sup> The lyrics are in English and are as follows: "I feel you / Your sun it shines / I feel you / Within my mind / You take me there / You take me where / The kingdom comes / You take me to / And lead me through Babylon / This is the morning of our love / It's just the dawning of our love / I feel you / Your heart it sings / I feel you / The joy it brings / Where heaven waits / Those golden gates / And back again / You take me to / And lead me through oblivion".

psychiatrist who asks him to change his life if he cannot change the world, advising him to help others or to go to Africa. His rejection of a liberal, institutional German approach, coupled with his rejection of friends, presents him as having closed off all communicative ties to the German sphere. Rather than assimilating into the German sphere as Turkish German, he faces complete alienation. A key aspect of the melodramatic narrative from this point onwards lies in preventing Cahit's alienation from life altogether, communicated primarily through his emotional hollowness.

The second sequence comes at a juncture when the relationship between Sibel and Cahit is developing as Sibel had imagined it, giving her the freedom she seeks, while Cahit suspects that he is falling in love with her. Rather than analyzing this segment through a reading of the couple's emotions towards one another, I follow a contemporary critical gesture where "scholars have begun to argue 'that emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices'." (qtd. in Gledhill, "Gender" 48) Sara Ahmed, drawing on feminist and queer scholars

who have attended to how emotions can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination, ... [in turn present to us] how social forms (such as the family, heterosexuality, the nation, even civilization itself) are effects of repetition. As Judith Butler suggests, it is through the repetition of norms that worlds materialize, and that 'boundary, fixity and surface' are produced. (Ahmed 12)

Akın presents Sibel's dinner preparations for Cahit in their domestic space through *mise-en-scène* with an editing style that renders these preparations ritualistic, pointing to the relationship between repetition (preparing 'Turkish' food) and social form (enactment of middle-class, 'Turkish' domesticity). His images, on the one hand, create an affective

state of happiness tied to norms of 'Turkish' domesticity. On the other hand, a careful reading of the cultural markers here once again leaves this connection ambiguous.

After a day with Sibel's in-laws, the couple returns to the city. Sibel decides to prepare a homemade dinner to thank Cahit for bearing with her relatives. The sequence opens as Sibel walks past a fruit stall, smiling, packages in hand. Sibel maintains her content expression until the final shot of the sequence. A song by Sezen Aksu enters non-diegetically. Again, the song is cut with the images in a music video aesthetic. The rhythm section of the song cues with the cuts. Sibel scans the stalls, but just as the lyrics commence her eyes catch what she has come for, a bottle of raki<sup>129</sup>. The camera pans up to focus on the bottle and quickly pans to the right to show larger bottles of the same brand. In the next shot, we see Sibel buying the larger bottle, smiling more broadly. Cut to their kitchen, a sequence of subsequent close-ups shows Sibel's hands preparing a 'Turkish' dish, stuffed bell peppers. Each ingredient is exhibited in a separate shot, along with details on how to 'properly' prepare the dish including the pinching of the peppers, and making of the red sauce. As she finalizes the dish we see a shot-reverse-shot sequence of Sibel smiling at Cahit, who, like a stereotypical Turkish patriarch, watches his wife prepare the dish while smoking a cigarette. A rare shot of Cahit smiling cuts back to the final touches to the dish and then in a shot from above that shows the couple's hands, their wedding rings visible, we see them spread a rose-patterned nylon table-cloth. Close-ups of the dinner table being set and of Sibel's meticulous slicing of feta cheese and melons follow.

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<sup>129</sup> An alcoholic beverage whose variations one can find across the Mediterranean, rakı and its the accompanying foods appear in almost every feature film of Akin.

Lyrics give way to an oud solo as a close-up of a glass of rakı appears. As water is added to the rakı, its color transforms to a milky white. The song's volume diminishes and in a mid-shot of the couple eating at opposite ends of the table. At the center of the shot is the bottle of rakı. Cahit, smiling, admits that it was not a bad idea to marry her. With a warm smile, Sibel comments that she learned how to cook properly from her mother. She mentions that her mother asked when they plan on having children. Cahit, after a pause, says they should have some. Sibel laughs at the idea, comforting him that she could tell them he is impotent if the inquiries persist. Cahit's smile vanishes and he stops eating. Sibel prolongs the topic by declaring that they can take advantage of his fake infertility to facilitate their divorce. The conversation pauses for eight seconds as Cahit stares down at the table. Meanwhile Sibel continues to eat and asks whether he wants to go the night club 'Taxim'<sup>130</sup>. Cahit suddenly gets up and leaves the frame. We hear him put on his jacket and pick up his keys. Sibel reaches for a second serving from a dish. He rushes past Sibel and exits the frame once again from the right, banging the door as he leaves the house. Sibel stands startled, the dish in her hands. Three rapid cuts follow as Sibel pours stuffed peppers down the toilet, rather than in the trash bin, then flushes. With the sound of stuffed peppers falling into the toilet bowl, the music stops. Sibel then puts on eyeliner, touches her hair in front of the mirror, and prepares a line of cocaine on a small hand-mirror, snorts it and rubs her nose, in a rare sequence without music.

Throughout the film, the couple remains in a "constant play and negotiation of multiple identity roles which they sometimes more readily take on and freely play" (Esen

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<sup>130</sup> Referencing the district that is considered to be the center of Istanbul, Taksim, the club turns out to be a Turkish German space with tough Turkish German bouncers who refuse entry to men without female partners, and where loud Turkish pop hits play. It appears to be a place to which Cahit would never have gone prior to meeting Sibel.

215). The sequence above purports to portray a performance of Turkishness. Their performance seemingly exudes a shared, culturally-constructed domestic happiness. I challenge this interpretation in two ways. First, I analyze cultural markers of 'Turkishness' more closely. Secondly, I explore what the diegesis offers with regard to the couple's affective responses within the domestic sphere. I begin with the non-diegetic song, "Yine mi Çiçek", an arrangement of an instrumental ethno-jazz piece by composer/virtuoso oud player Ara Dinkjian, an Armenian-American musician whose grandparents, from Dikranagerd<sup>131</sup>, escaped persecution during the Armenian genocide. Onno Tunç, a Turkish Armenian musician who created a medley of Turkish diva Sezen Aksu's songs, arranged the song.

The Turkish lyrics invoke nostalgia for a cosmopolitan Istanbul. The city's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural past was radically altered following the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Armenian genocide (1915), the Greek-Turkish population exchange (1924) and the Greek and Jewish pogroms (1955). The song narrates a conversation in a tavern<sup>132</sup> named after and operated by "Madam Despina,"<sup>133</sup> a Greek woman who refused to leave Istanbul for Greece with her parents in 1934 and even after the pogroms. The lyrics depict a scene of Istanbulite hedonism, imbued with melancholy. Rakı-drinking

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<sup>131</sup> Dikranagerd is the Armenian name of the city of Diyarbakır in southeastern Turkey.

<sup>132</sup> Located in a part of Istanbul that is one of the last two remaining Armenian neighborhoods, Kurtuluş.

<sup>133</sup> A cultural icon for many, Madam Despina was born in 1919 in the predominantly Greek island of Gökçeada on the Aegean Sea in what was then under the Ottoman Empire rule before the population exchange of 1924. She established the tavern in 1946, moved it to its original location in 1970 and would be seen cooking, or greeting customers until her death in 2006. The place remains a relic of how Istanbulites socialized in the past two hundred years, with every customer required to uphold the decorum of such places, and has even figured in literary accounts.



accompanied by *mezes*<sup>134</sup> occupies center stage in which gastronomic choices are communicated in detail in an effort to underline the degree of refinement<sup>135</sup> of this ritual. The voice that sings is happy not only to drink, but to do so in the company of his friends in a shared space. The cultural sensibility articulated on screen mainly through this song is akin to what Haşmet stands for in *O Beautiful Istanbul*<sup>136</sup>. In both its production and evocation of images, the song therefore references cultures, events and ethnicities antithetical to a unitary idea of Turkishness. It is unviable to point to one specific national or ethnic culture as the source of the songs in the musical interludes. Similarly, it becomes untenable to isolate a specific ethnic culture that frames this sequence.

Given Sibel and Cahit's distinct trajectories of their desire for one another, they each respond differently to one another's enactments of domesticity. The happiness that ensues from the theatricality that promises a contented domestic existence catches Cahit unprepared. He finds himself in a double bind. He is angry at Sibel for not partaking in this domestic dream, but also furious at himself for being lured into it after having abhorred such aspirations until this point in the narrative. Cahit's reconciliation with himself comes to a dead-end as the narrative offers him no escape through the redemptive value of love. Noticing the impasse, he is alienated from the theater of domestic existence, rushing out of the house and away from the shared affective state of happiness.

Meanwhile, Sibel remains oblivious to Cahit's predicament and is capable of responding only to his rude exit from the house. As is conventional in melodrama, the

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<sup>134</sup> Meze is the Turkish counterpart of the Spanish *tapas*.

<sup>135</sup> The voice in the lyrics asks for not just any brand of rakı but *Altınbaş*, the best quality rakı one could find in Turkey until recent years, not just any classical music performer but Müzeyyen Senar, and not just any *meze* but the famous Armenian one, *topik*.

<sup>136</sup> Haşmet's reliance on a similar Istanbulite cosmopolitanism over and against over-arching definitions of Turkish identity remains at the heart of how he posits his alterity throughout *O Beautiful Istanbul*.

audience possesses more information than the protagonists, responding empathetically to their pathos. Sibel's flushing of the stuffed peppers is indicative of her alienation from the domestic sphere she has setup. As she prepares for a night out, she puts on heavy make-up and snorts cocaine. The codes switch again to indicate a cosmopolitan self. She abandons her perceived performance of Turkishness (i.e. cooking like her mother), which temporarily elicits a mutual sense of happiness between Cahit and her. From Sibel's perspective, preparing dinner for one's husband is a proxy for the of confinement women to the domestic sphere, and consequently, of their oppression. She realizes that this was precisely the position she was trying to evade in the first place in marrying Cahit. Ultimately, both protagonists are angered and question their counterfeit marriage. This scene raises the stakes of melodrama and enhances audience immersion in it. While the protagonists' affective states remain legible at the end of the sequence, interpreting them as embodying the state of being caught between cultures remains incomplete and obscures the layers of alterity the scene elicits. Neither adheres to ethnically defined identity performances, instead alternating from one to the other. At the same time, they seem satisfied to perform within a domestic sphere. Cahit further illustrates his contentment by announcing his desire for children. Yet the brief dinner scene reveals the impossibility of maintaining this state. Oscillating between joy surging from a negation of their respective identities' norms while also seeking the happiness that these identities seem to emulate, their desires for a certain kind of life remain illegible, thereby advancing the melodramatic unfolding of subsequent events.

The final segment that I analyze concerns the developments in Cahit's hotel room in Istanbul in the final episode of the film. This section is framed by a conversation

between Sibel and her aunt Selma. The narrative reveals that Sibel now has a child and is reconciled with her aunt whom she had previously called a workaholic without feelings. Sibel responds that she is at a loss when Selma asks whether she knows what she is doing in going back to Cahit. We then cut to her entering Cahit's hotel in a long shot. Next, the couple sits on the bed across from one another in the hotel room, naked and looking intently at each other. In the ensuing shot-reverse shot sequence that focuses on the couple's gazes, a silent conversation appears to ensue. As they begin to make love, the point of view cuts to a close-up and then to a medium shot. Non-diegetically we hear the couple embark upon a conversation. Sibel asks Cahit about his plans, to which he responds that he does not intend to stay in Istanbul, planning instead to return to his birthplace, Mersin. Their dedication to living in the moment appears to vanish as they converse about the future. We cut to them lying in each other's arms, as Cahit says "Ich mach mir keine sorge" ("I do not worry about anything"; author's trans.) to which Sibel silently responds, "Das ist schön" ("That is nice"; author's trans.), intimating that she does have responsibilities and commitments to worry about.

This entire sequence stands in stark contrast with the rest of the film both visually and aurally. Rather than the heightened emotionality of preceding segments, the sequence creates a calm and serene atmosphere. The monochrome room and the lack of music or notable sonic design, with the exception of an occasional external ambient sound of Istanbul, elicit this mood as the polyphony of the film transitions into a silence. This silence is briefly broken by a conversation that spans two days and two nights but is condensed into a three-minute aural sequence that oscillates between diegetic and non-diegetic. Shots of window frames recur several times in the sequence, differentiating

interior (the room) and exterior (the city). That the love between this couple hinges on potentially being subsumed by a sense of responsibility and security is contrasted with Istanbul itself as the locus of these worries shaping Sibel's decision.

Cahit's lack of apparent concern persists. Even in this final instance he fails to explain his future plans. He simply points to a direction, his birthplace, without qualifying it with any markers. Sibel is different. Motherhood increasingly defines her and her modes of alterity are now molded within the confines of this identity, pointing to how Akın suggests gender roles as more obliging than ethnic ones. Sibel and Cahit's love was conditional on their shared pathos in the face of their alterity. The closing exchange reveals that this common ground no longer exists. The love between them seems to evaporate.

In the subsequent shot, we cut to the couple sitting on the hotel terrace looking down at a wide view of the Golden Horn, their backs to the camera. Cahit attempts to delay their separation and asks Sibel to accompany him. After a prolonged silence, she responds: "Lass uns wieder rein gehen" ("Let's go back inside"; author's trans.). We then cut to a more passionate love-making sequence with the camera focused only on Sibel's face. As they awake the following morning, Sibel dresses and calls her daughter. Cahit lights a cigarette in bed and stares blankly. They converse for what seems to be several hours until Sibel looks out the window at night and asks him how they can be together<sup>137</sup>. Cahit is concerned only by their departure from the city, offering to meet Sibel and her

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<sup>137</sup>Akın imagines this shot to be the point where they understand that they no longer love each other: "The love that they have for one another flies out the window, melding into the night. This is the end of a love affair. But it is not the end of their lives. Life goes on. They have held onto life, and that in itself is no small feat" (author's trans.; Akın, "Sinema" 129) ("İkisinin aşkı pencereden uçup, kente, geceye karışır. Bu bir aşkın sonudur. Ama yaşamlarının sonu değildir. Yaşam devam ediyordur. Yaşama tutunmuşlardır ve bu da az şey değildir.")

daughter at the bus terminal the next day. No further projections for their future are communicated.

Sibel showers in preparing to leave. As she dresses, Cahit enters the bathroom. We cut to a shot of Cahit looking at Sibel, puzzled. He then moves next to her as the camera frames them in the mirror, contemplating their image together, expressionless. The shot persists for fifteen seconds. The only words uttered comprise Sibel's asking when they will meet. Cahit succinctly responds: "At noon". Sibel then exhales silently and we cut to a shot of Istanbul's streets, showing Sibel's current neighborhood. Their tableau appearance in the frame becomes yet another instrument of distancing, reminding the viewer of the film's conversation with the audience, warning against any hopes for a happy ending. In her article "The Melodramatic Mode Revisited", Ruth Mayer claims that "[t]he specific achievement of literary and filmic melodrama might well be to symbolically enact conflicts and problems that seem irresolvable at the time of their enactment, thus not so much mapping a way out of a cultural predicament rather than staging it in the manner of a tableau" (13). This staging nevertheless undergoes a complex mapping out of the emotional exchange between the couple as understood from within a discourse of sociality of emotions. Complementing the dual understanding of emotions as interiority and/or exteriority, Sara Ahmed suggests that

emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. (10)

Sibel and Cahit's silent enactment undergoes such a negotiation of their love for one another, and at the same, time this negotiation constitutes the surface and boundaries of their subjectivities. Rather than mapping out an enactment of love or its absence through cultural signifiers, the film gestures toward how the relationship between Cahit and Sibel (contact with others) and its trajectory of 'fake', 'real' and 'absent' love between the couple allow them to position themselves within their worlds, overcoming modes of identification through ethnic or national ties, and grounding their subjectivities.

Akın's representational strategies and portrayal of emotions throughout allow the alterity of the couple's "positional, conditional and conjunctural" modalities (Esen 214) to be tied to such a multi-layered and ambivalent articulation of emotions. Given the above parameters, the melodramatic structuring of *Head-On* "imagines Europe [and Turkey] as a space of proximities and entanglements, transcending territory-bound conceptions of national (German or Turkish) identities" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 231). In turn, it is to the economies of desire and love that the film binds its narrative, instantiating ways of overcoming in-betweenness and notions of hybridity for these Turkish German subjectivities.

### **C. Lost and Found in the Transcultural Space of Fatih Akın's "*Edge of Heaven*"**

Akın's *Edge of Heaven* maintains a complex narrative structure in which first- and second-generation Turkish German, Turkish and German protagonists' tales intersect. The film pivots around three families: Yeter (first generation Turkish German, born in Turkey) and her daughter, Ayten (born in Turkey and remains in Turkey until the age of 20); Susanne's German family, played by Hanna Schygulla, and her daughter Lotte; and

Ali, played by Tuncel Kurtiz who plays the patriarch Ramo in *Sürü*, (first generation Turkish German born in the northeastern Anatolian city of Trabzon), and his son Nejat (second generation Turkish German born in Germany). In each, either a mother or father figure is absent. These families separate and reunite in various configurations where certain protagonists become a surrogate family figure for others while Yeter and Lotte die accidentally.

It becomes difficult for the protagonists to sustainably adhere to set definitions of the self and to stable identities given the film's complicated matrix of intercultural exchange. This film of Akin's engages in a similar gesture of effacing identificatory discourses as in *Head-On*. The protagonists who survive to the end of the film transform their ideas of themselves and their perceived others. The film concludes as the German literature professor, Nejat, absorbs this transformation in a silent sequence as he stares out at the Black Sea in a village in northern Turkey. Meanwhile, Susanne, the German mother who projected the prejudices of a certain German identity onto her daughter's lover Ayten, settles down in Istanbul to run Nejat's bookstore. She also reconciles with Ayten despite Ayten's indirect responsibility for Lotte's death. The patriarch, Ali, settles in his hometown by the Black Sea after accidentally murdering Yeter in a drunken fight, estranging his own son. He is last seen crying as he finishes Selim Özdoğan's "The Blacksmith's Daughter." The book which Ali refuses to read until the end of the film, is given to him by his son and tells the story of a first generation Turkish German female immigrant's struggles in Turkey and in Germany. The film pivots on the pathos of these protagonists' familial melodramas to reveal tales of reconciliation that transcend the "between two worlds paradigm. The characters' stories of mobility between ethnic,

national, and cultural boundaries subvert the Turkish/German binary, as well as reveal Turkey and Germany and individual identities as inter-connectedly evolving” (Esen 221).

In this polyphony of exchanges and transformations, melodramatic tropes persist, revealing ruptures within the construction of identities. In what follows, I trace the familial reconfigurations in the film by reading it as a domestic melodrama saturated with intergenerational conflicts. I suggest ways in which these domestic spheres are constructed and dissolved throughout Akın's narrative. His novel approach to articulating Turkish German subjectivities complicates simple definitions of hybridity understood as the melding together of two national cultures. Again, my focus remains on the ways in which Akın situates his work within the genealogy and traditions of Fassbinder, Yılmaz and Güney. More specifically, I examine Akın's approach to Fassbinder's dual utilization of distanciation and identification techniques. I then analyze his methodology for blending the melodramatic modality with emphasis on a realistic and authentic representational scheme similar to that of Güney's *Sürü*. Finally, I explore his tendency to remain in constant conversation with Yılmaz's melodramatic modality of *Yeşilçam* and his mapping of Istanbul through cinematographic allusions.

My inquiry into affective states is centered around the film's insistence on a pervasive sense of loss, coupled with nostalgia, and its attempts at reconciliation in the final episode. I argue, together with Richard Dyer, that the re-articulation of the melodramatic tropes of Turkish and German cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s *via* the aforementioned circuit of directors enables the film's framing in the melodramatic "genre [to possess] 'generative powers,' powers the film uses 'to create a certain kind of world and feeling'. Memories of genres past are returns to familiar structures of feeling”.



Furthermore, such a "historicity of emotions" works "against individualization of feeling, [where] Dyer argues that the history of feeling is not about the feelings we alone feel, but rather about shared feeling, or "living within the limits of cultural construction of thought and feeling" (qtd in Gledhill, "Gender" 19). Adopting this approach, I bridge my analysis of the protagonists' affective states articulated through filmic references with their various responses to Turkish, Turkish German and German identities. Second, this framework enables me to analyze Akın's work genealogically beyond noting his casting of Tuncel Kurtiz (a regular in Yılmaz Güney films) or of Hanna Schygulla<sup>138</sup>. Instead, I turn my attention to a historicity of affective states articulated by a certain filmography, shared by a transcultural film audience.

Finally, I deploy a critique of Akın's inclusion of a political subtext that attempts to understand the 'stranded objects' of both countries' histories. Specifically, I single out the ways in which he presents his views on the Turkish Left, his contention that the Turkish and German states relate to these protagonists' lives, and his complex articulation of what it means to be free under familial, cultural and national ties.

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<sup>138</sup> Akın does not dwell on the cinematographic affinities between him and these directors, stating only in passing that "I'm a Turkish-German film-maker and Fassbinder and Güney are my heroes...because I'm a son of both cinemas, I could bring the two together" (qtd. in Esen 189). Thomas Elsaesser offers one of the few claims amongst English and Turkish scholarly work on Akın that goes beyond specifying the director's influences when he claims that "the dense plotting is in keeping with the genealogy of Sirk-Fassbinder melodrama into which Akın is inscribing himself. Schygulla as the matriarch presides over more than the film's liberal conscience: she is the guardian of this pledge to continue the generational burden of the German-German-"Hollywood" dialogue (Sirk was German-born), extended now into a German-Turkish-"European" dialogue" (Elsaesser, "Ethical" 35). I focus on this idea of the generational burden in more detail in my conclusion.

## 1. Intergenerational Conflict in the Turkish German Domestic Sphere: The Case of Ali and Nejat

*Edge of Heaven* begins with a sequence that we later understand to be a flashforward of Nejat stopping at a remote gas station during his trip to his father's village<sup>139</sup>. After a conversation with the station owner, Nejat hits the road and we see him in a moving shot driving through several tunnels along the Black Sea Highway. After passing through the third tunnel, all the lights are switched off and the next scene is set at a May 1<sup>st</sup> parade in Bremen. The abrupt cinematographic movement foreshadows the mobility that awaits all protagonists.

The events that lead to the creation of the first domestic sphere in the film begin as Ali strolls around, a smile on his face, in Bremen during the celebrations. After several documentary shots<sup>140</sup> of the parade intercut with Ali walking, we realize the guest worker's smile is not in solidarity with the parade but due to the experience he is about to have in the city's red light district. With this first glimpse, the viewer is given more insight into Ali-- that he is, in fact, not interested in the issue of class-consciousness. In a tracking shot inside the red light district, he passes two men who later re-appear as the Turks threatening Turkish prostitutes, asking them to repent their dishonorable ways. By

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<sup>139</sup> For a close reading of this sequence see Deniz Göktürk's article "World Cinema Goes Digital: Looking at Europe from the Other Shore" (Hake 199-204) in which she underlines how in this first viewing the audience is allowed only a tourist's gaze upon the localized subjects. She further points out how the scene is scouted, designed and staged by Akin, becoming "a good example of the mediated and affective production of place in the interplay of image and sound" (204). The locality is important as it becomes the point of return for Nejat at the end of the film, (starting with an exact repetition of the sequence that nevertheless moves further in time and space), culminating in the final gesture of Akin where he negotiates notions of *Heimat*, a point to which I will return in the conclusion of this chapter.

<sup>140</sup> Just as Yılmaz Güney's documentary sequences detailing the lives of Kurdish nomads, or the residents of a small Kurdish town, or the capital of Turkey, Ankara, introduce each new episode of his film *Sürü*, Akin includes a similar sequence of shots of the residents of Bremen during the May 1<sup>st</sup> parade. These differ from his introduction of Istanbul at the beginning of the second episode, utilizing news footage as well as his own shots. The police presence in the latter render the tone much more tense and serious while in Bremen May 1<sup>st</sup> appears as a day of joyful celebration.

coincidence, Ali spots Yeter and following a brief conversation in which he confirms that he is able to engage in all kinds of sexual activity, he moves inside. After securing her fifty Euros, she plays Neşe Karaböcek's record "Son Hatıra"<sup>141</sup>, a choice that puzzles Ali. He asks, disapprovingly, if she is Turkish, to which she responds ambivalently that she might as well be Turkish. Ali switches to Turkish, saying "Bak şimdi utanmaya başladım" ("I now begin to feel embarrassed"; author's trans.), exemplifying that Turkish German males' views on prostitution hinge upon the prostitute's ethnic identity, an issue that Akın also touches upon in *Head-On*.

The next long shot mirrors Fassbinder's use of doorways as a framing device as Yeter stands in the frontal frame, her red leather dress filling the left side of the frame. The mid-frame reveals a dimly lit golden hallway and in the background is Ali, slightly out of focus and sitting on the bed. The details on Yeter's walls do not clearly indicate a German or a Turkish background. The LP from the late 1970s reveals Yeter's age, or perhaps her longing for a time in her life when everything was peaceful. These ambivalent cultural markers accompany the various identificatory performances that Yeter and Ali enact throughout the sequence.

Ali asks Yeter her name for a second time, and she once again says "Jessy". At this point, their conversation reverts back to Turkish exclusively. When insisted further, she reveals her name as Yeter, which literally means "enough". Often, families who wish to avoid further pregnancies name their last baby Yeter, which also underlines their

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<sup>141</sup> Akın is again very particular in his selection of the music for this sequence. The song is one of the earliest Tango compositions in Turkey, by the composer Fehmi Ege who is the first person to bring this genre of music to Turkey in 1925. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, he has been an important part of Radio Istanbul. The Ege version of the song has been used in a 1954 *Yeşilçam* film by Lütfi Akad, sung by Secaattin Tanyerli, and in the 1970s was utilized in several other films, sung by other singers from Turkey. The version that we hear from a record in the film is performed by Neşe Karaböcek, a singer whose fame coincides with the heyday of *Yeşilçam* films thus invoking a similar sense of nostalgia.

perceived lack of agency in determining family size in Yeter's culture. When Ali asks Yeter where in Turkey she is from, a common and critical question in the Turkish context whose answer determines whether the conversation becomes more intimate or ceases altogether, Yeter diverts the dialogue to the original reason for his presence. As she brings him a glass of cold water, she asks him what he wants to be called, and in jest, whether she should call him "Dear Husband". Introducing this trope of prostitutes, commonplace in contemporary Turkey and in filmic representations in *Yeşilçam* films<sup>142</sup>, signals enactment of a game of domesticity in a brothel.

The camera leaves the deep-focus shot to disclose the small room where Ali is sitting on the bed. This time, Ali occupies the left frame and, in the middle stands Yeter, framed by the doorway. To their left is a mirror covering the entire wall that only reflects Ali looking up. In the background is a wall covered by a carpet with a tiger-skin design, and, in the middle, another large mirror divided by a crack that displays the couple in odd angles. The shot's intricate use of doorways and mirrors again recalls Fassbinder's possible influence on the framing and the *mise-en-scène*. When perceived as a distantiating device, these formal choices, coupled with Ali and Yeter's ironic distancing from their identities through role-playing, elicit a self-reflexive domestic scene.

The intimacy of their conversation intensifies as both Yeter and Ali revert to colloquial slang, debating whether Ali is capable of an erection at this old age. As the camera moves, framing the couple engaging in oral sex, the volume increases as the diegetic music, a Turkish Tango from the 1950s, is performed by a pop singer from the 1970s; the camera cuts away just as the singer shouts "Ateşli dudakların" (Your fiery lips;

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<sup>142</sup> Atıf Yılmaz's film *O Beautiful Istanbul* has one such instance in the "Civilization Hotel" where earlier in the film Haşmet goes to rescue Ayşe, as one prostitute tells her client "Akşama geç kalma kocacığım" ("Do not be late tonight dear husband"; authors' trans.).

author's trans.). Akın maintains this ironic reference to *Yeşilçam*'s melodramatic mode in several other instances throughout the film. Yet as the film relocates the narrative from Germany to Turkey in its third episode, there is no longer a *mise-en-scène* reminiscent of Fassbinder, opting instead for wider angles and more open spaces. The sequence ends as Ali leaves the room, looking very satisfied, in a shot from Yeter's point-of-view. Their final exchanges in Turkish are overheard by two men who confirm to each other that Yeter and Ali indeed speak Turkish, a motif that haunts Yeter later in the episode.

We are then introduced to Ali's son Nejat in a sequence in which the son visits his father in Bremen over the weekend, leaving for Hamburg on Sunday afternoon. Many hints reveal the distance between the two men on moral and cultural grounds while simultaneously signaling a caring, and perhaps even loving, relationship. They share a meal prepared by Ali from his hometown's cuisine, drink *rakı*, and the following day, win at the horse races. Nejat initially emerges as having thoroughly assimilated; a German literature professor accustomed to refraining from public display of emotions, a trait initially attributed to Germans in the film. Meanwhile, Ali makes immature jokes and inquires into his son's love life. In contrast, Nejat gives his father a book "*Demircinin Kızı*," by a second-generation Turkish German author, Selim Özdoğan. Although the book is originally published in German, Nejat offers his father a Turkish translation, the language with which he perceives his father to be more comfortable. Ali's uncaring promise to read it further stresses their differences.

The portrayal of Nejat in his workplace, lecturing on Goethe's political attitudes in a large auditorium in a detached but scholarly manner, convincingly confirms that he is perfectly capable of performing the role of a German scholar. With this characterization,

he stands in this first episode as that "prime figure of mediation [that] is the modern Turkish youth who manages to succeed in German society as a cultural hybrid" where "the trope of hybridity operates as a mediator between the irreconcilable opposition of Turkish and Islamic traditional values with modern democratic values" (Ewing 274). Further in the narrative, Akin negotiates Nejat's stance versus both camps. When asked to question his rejection of his father later in the film, Nejat claims that he would categorically reject anyone who murders someone, underscoring his humanism; he then, throws the books on his desk, alone in the shot, seeming to notice his longing for his father, and the importance of familial ties. The gesture of reconciling these seemingly opposing poles gradually precipitates a familial reconciliation. Akin's ambivalence in moments of reconciliation does not suggest that he embraces either pole, instead leaving open the question as to which values are affirmed in this gesture of hybridity<sup>143</sup>, leaving us capable of responding only to his depiction of such ambivalence as a mode of alterity.

Ali invites Yeter to move in with him, offering to pay her as much per month as she makes as a prostitute. Akin stages yet another marriage of convenience in which the motivation for Yeter is initially only financial, whereas for Ali it is the 'comfort' of having a woman only to himself. The possibility of love between the couple is easily dismissed in the ensuing conversation. The construction of a first domestic sphere is thus put in motion. This domestic space is bound by the dynamics of a Turkish German identity and provides the framework for the melodramatic impasses of miscommunication between members of this newly established family. While Yeter takes her time in responding, Akin gives her another motive in the subsequent sequence when

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<sup>143</sup> Here the hybridity is not an ethnic one but one between familial ties and an adherence to humanist values forcing the individual to make moral choices.

the two men who have seen her speaking to Ali earlier on greet him on the tram trip home. Their Islamic greeting, "Selamnaleyküm", ("Greetings in the name of Allah"; author's trans.) is first dismissed by Yeter as she says "Nix verstehen" ("Don't understand"; authors trans.). They covertly threaten Yeter, reminding her that she is "a Turk and a Muslim" and that she should quit prostitution and find an occupation that respects her heritage.

Later, we discover that Yeter is from Maraş and had lost her husband in one of the most violent pogroms in the history of the Turkish Republic, "The 1978 Massacre of Maraş"<sup>144</sup>. Having already suffered from the actions of fascists that combine fundamental Islamism with Turkish nationalism, massacring the Alevis<sup>145</sup> in the region, she encounters them once again in the German setting. This incident prompts her to make a decision and the next day Yeter stops at a bar at the horsetracks<sup>146</sup> to find Ali. She accepts his offer after they agree on the finances. An older man marrying a younger first generation Turkish German prostitute reconfigures the dynamics of *All that Heaven Allows* by recourse to *Fear Eats the Soul*. But the public and familial outcry of these two

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<sup>144</sup> Yeter does not explicitly state that her husband was murdered during the pogrom in Maraş in 1978, instead only saying "Ben de kocamı 78'de Maraş'da kaybettim". ("And I have lost my husband in Maraş in [19]78" (author's trans.). Yet, I perceive her mention of the year with the place, rather than stating only that her husband is dead, as indicative of the husband's death during the pogrom. Read this way, the event becomes key not only to her identity but also to that of her daughter, a point that I did not encounter in the literature on Akin.

<sup>145</sup> A branch of Islam, Alevism is tied to Anatolian folklore culture and shares certain practices with the Shia belief, remaining distinct from Sunni traditions of Islam. Alevis are one of the largest Muslim groups in Turkey and were persecuted during the Ottoman and the Turkish Republic era.

<sup>146</sup> Adile Esen interprets Ali's capacity for alcohol consumption in the company of other Germans in the racetrack's bar as a gesture that "breaks away from the original image of a personhood in clash with the German dominant culture" and presents him as "assimilated, living at ease with two languages and with both Turkish and German cultural realms" (Esen 231-2) through these markers. Yet, drinking and watching horseraces is a very common practice in Turkey as well, where, for the most part, the only place to drink in a small town in rural Anatolia would be a racing club. In larger cities, there are many beer pubs dedicated solely to racing fans. The act is therefore hard to identify as specifically German, rendering Ali's assimilation in my perception hard to establish.

films is absent in Akin's narrative, indicating that his critique lies elsewhere. At the same time, this marriage of convenience references that of Sibel and Cahit's in *Head-On* where the female protagonist takes advantage of the institution of marriage to evade the violent patriarchy that engulfs her, only to experience as violent episodes in the hands of different modes of patriarchy.

Having laid the groundwork for an odd configuration for a nuclear family, Akin follows through with its dissolution. In the first scene where Nejat is introduced to Yeter over dinner, conflicts arise between Nejat and Ali as Ali drinks too much and tells his son not to touch his woman. The scene ends with Yeter and Nejat bringing Ali, who has had a heart attack, to the hospital. The subsequent hospital scene unites them through their care for Ali, and this tendency is solidified during the tram ride home when Yeter mentions her daughter whom she is trying to financially support through college in Turkey. The melodramatic tone is further enhanced during their conversation, figuring Yeter's trajectory in life as one that sacrifices everything for the love of her daughter and prefiguring her death later in the film as the sacrifice that will bring Ali and Nejat together at the end. When Ali recovers he turns into a bitter old man against whose patriarchal tyranny Nejat and Yeter ambivalently unite. The emotional relationship between them is elusive given Akin's reluctance to provide lucid clues other than suggesting that each protagonist seeks--and apparently finds--a warm embrace. This trope of human warmth is to be reiterated in different configurations later in the film, in turn becoming central to Akin's project to critically reflect on national, gendered and intergenerational conflicts and their ensuing identity formations.



Nejat and Yeter's potential for engaging in an affair while he is in the hospital strongly solidifies in Ali's mind. Instead, a bitter and jealous Ali provokes Nejat upon his return home as Nejat prepares to leave, thereby infuriating him. The domestic drama seems to dissolve when Nejat, rushing through the door to leave, is stopped by a now maternal Yeter. She hands him a bag of pastries she has just baked, looking straight into Nejat eyes; he returns the warm gaze. By the time Nejat reaches Hamburg, Ali is already drunk on rakı that he has asked Yeter to prepare for him. There is a shot of Nejat in his study, framed to the right and left by bookshelves in the foreground, with books in stacks on the ground and displayed on the walls. Remembering the pastries, he opens the package and eats them absentmindedly. Consuming homemade 'Turkish' pastries in this particular space illustrates how the German scholar's otherwise orderly life is unavoidably upset by elements of his father's melodramatic life and the presence of a maternal figure that had been absent throughout this life.

Ali makes advances toward Yeter and is rejected for drunkenness in mid-day. The conversation begins when Ali asks Yeter whether she had sex with his son, in the same crude manner as he had done to Nejat. Yet the undertone in the former prostitute's response is decidedly distinct from Nejat's furious tone. Desire, Ali's primary motive in forming this relationship, quickly turns into a jealousy that harbors resentment towards his son for not aligning with his values. The scene concludes with a fight in which Ali's slap pushes Yeter to the ground. She hits her head and dies instantly. Ali loses not only Yeter but also Nejat who refuses all contact and leaves Germany in search of Yeter's daughter, Ayten. As in *Head-On*, a film whose melodramatic modality regulates its moral

legibility, these coincidences that demarcate the melodramatic form dissolve the newly found family of Ali, Yeter and Nejat, punishing and victimizing each to varying degrees.

Ali intersects with Yeter's family in search of Ayten, but they seem to have no idea as to her whereabouts, nor do the police provide him with any clues. In the days that follow, he posts fliers around the city center, persisting despite the fact that a cousin on his father's side who helps him navigate the city points out the futility of his efforts. They stumble upon a German bookstore whose German owner is homesick and wants to sell it to leave for Germany. Nejat decides to buy the store on a whim. The episode ends with another flash-forward to the end of the film where Nejat travels to his father's village, this time driving through open spaces of the north Anatolian hinterland, ending on a moving shot at dusk that fades to black.

## **2. Intergenerational Conflict in the German Domestic Sphere: The Case of Susanne and Lotte**

The second episode "Lottes Tod" commences in Istanbul during 1<sup>st</sup> of May celebrations. Unlike the opening sequence of the first episode in which the celebrations are a mere backdrop to Ali's stroll around the city, this sequence focuses on multiple Leftist factions in Turkey. Images include Kurdish women supporting the PKK and chanting for its leader Abdullah Öcalan, followed by shots of a Maoist group named "Partizan". Intercut with this documentary footage are shots of the riot police. We then cut to a shot of the street with Leftist radicals holding red and black flags showing the face of a renowned martyr of the Turkish Left<sup>147</sup>, İbrahim Kaypakkaya<sup>148</sup>. Unlike the

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<sup>147</sup> Adile Esen takes, drawing from the placards of the Kurdish group PKK, "how the Turkish government identifies Ayten's group of affiliation as a terrorist group, and the threats on Ayten about group members coming from Eastern Turkey who want to have the gun back – which Ayten hid" (223; footnote 236) as

shots in the previous documentary footage, there are no words inscribed on the flags, nor any indication of the name of the faction. A skirmish begins and an undercover policeman fires his gun, then is beaten by the crowd and drops his weapon. A young woman wearing a mask picks it up and runs away with it, chased by another undercover cop and police officers. We then leave the celebrations and are introduced to Yeter's daughter, Ayten, who turns out to be the person who picked up the gun. She hides the gun on a rooftop but drops her phone while on the run, instigating her comrades' arrest and her decision to flee the country with a fake passport.

Akın does not specify Ayten's political allegiance, which hints that he is not particularly interested in a specific commentary on the Turkish or the Kurdish Left. He merely creates a scene to introduce another protagonist with a Left-leaning background. Throughout, her ideological outbursts remain ambiguous, making it impossible to define her ideological identity. Akın appears to forego clearly defined and legible markers of identity in this sequence as well<sup>149</sup>.

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clues to her probable involvement with the PKK. I perceive this assertion to be unfounded. There are many leftist groups in Turkey labeled as terrorist organizations by the government and many have members from Eastern Turkey. Furthermore, the pictures in the house that the police raid include no PKK related images, books or slogans, nor a word of Kurdish is uttered throughout the film. The group that we first see Ayten in during the parade carry flags with the image of İbrahim Kaypakkaya- it would be misleading to conflate PKK with his legacy in the Turkish and Kurdish Left. Finally, we can claim that Ayten is a survivor of the aforementioned "Maraş Massacre" whose target was primarily Left-leaning Alevis, making it hard to sustain the claim that she is a member of the PKK. The documentary footage shows supporters of PKK, then the next three shots are of the faction called "Partizan", followed by Akın's staged beating of the cop with leftists holding flags of İbrahim Kaypakkaya. All this suggests more strongly that she is a member of "Partizan". Yet, even this assertion is not made entirely clear in the film.

<sup>148</sup>Kaypakkaya was the founder of the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist(TKP/ML) and died in prison in 1973 after being tortured for over 4 months and later being shot in the head by his interrogators. He is revered to this day as a symbol of resistance by many by both the Turkish and the Kurdish Left. This choice is an interesting one in that Ayten's adherence to this faction makes it even harder to identify her through ethnic, religious or regional lines. An offshoot of the party is still considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish Government.

<sup>149</sup> Elsaesser in his article in *Film Comment* also calls Ayten "a radical Kurdish activist" (Elsaesser, "Ethical"), even though the film never references her as Kurdish. In fact, the only reference to Kurds

Ayten flees to Hamburg and, after arguing with her comrades there, searches for her mother without success. Sleeping on the streets without money, she coincidentally meets Lotte at Hamburg University when she asks her for money in English. After lunch, Lotte finds out that she is sleeping rough and invites her to stay with her and her mother, Susanne. Her mother seems unhappy to host this 'stranger', but is reprimanded by her daughter, revealing the first layer of intergenerational conflict to ensue prior to Ayten's deportation from Germany. Throughout the sequence, Susanne's caution against illegal acts that might endanger their family contrasts with Lotte's unconditional benevolence towards Ayten. Overnight, Lotte and Ayten become lovers. The next morning Ayten and Susanne fight over why Ayten partakes in these political demonstrations. Against each claim that the Turkish State persecutes those who fight for workers' or ethnic rights, Susanne responds by saying in English that "Maybe things will get better when you get into the EU". Differing conceptions of Germanness clash in Susanne's and Lotte's enactments. The former maintains unreserved adherence to the notion of legality and by extension to State and European Union institutions, while the latter is guided by a humanistic, liberal stance to help those in need.

This political clash and a violent fight with her mother prompt Lotte's departure for Turkey. She travels there to help Ayten who was deported after her car was stopped and she was searched by the police, and subsequently, when her request for asylum is

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outside of the previously mentioned Kurdish women protesting, is through a rather benevolent police officer that Nejat converses with at one point in the film, who asks Nejat to spend his money financing some of the uneducated urban Kurdish youth that the officer has direct contact with, rather than seeking Ayten to finance her education. While most political asylum seekers in Germany are of Kurdish descent, there is still a considerable group of people that associate with other identities. Perhaps the more interesting question is why Akın tends to make this case ambiguous.

rejected<sup>150</sup>. Lotte arrives in Istanbul and seeks ways to help Ayten in prison but grows increasingly more frustrated with the prison system.

Without anyone else to turn to, Lotte calls her mother from her hotel. The next shot reveals the climax of the intergenerational conflict between Susanne and Lotte. In a low-angle long shot that showcases an old staircase extending down to the right, we see the phone booth in the lobby, which is filled by Lotte's voice. There is no one in sight apart from a receptionist. Lotte asks her mother for money to pay for Ayten's lawyer fees, but Susanne bluntly refuses. When Susanne asks Lotte to come home, she refuses, claiming to be doing something meaningful for the first time in her life. Their ties break completely when Susanne declares that Lotte is on her own from now on, and hangs up. A shocked Lotte shouts "Mamma" at the phone, throwing the device against the wall as she cries. Through the conversation we only see Lotte, first in a shot that tightly frames her in the phone booth, sitting on the floor. The camera then slowly pans outward to reveal Lotte in a long shot framed by the doorway to the hall, doubling the framing and revealing another Fassbinderian shot with a high emotional content.

Akın establishes an interesting allusion to *Head-On* by filming at the same hotel where Sibel and Cahit meet. The affective states associated with this hotel in *Head-On* provide us with a certain historicity of emotions. Akın references one of his own films to elicit this historicity. Precarious ties that hinge upon a delicate balance, albeit this time

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<sup>150</sup> The next scene in which a German judge reads the verdict on Ayten's case resembles Fassbinder's use of legal German language in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* when the judge's verdict, in its detached legal language, becomes a voice-over in the following scene when Susanne and Lotte fight as she leaves for Turkey. Fassbinder utilizes the same trope that operates as a distancing device from the images of the plight of Franz Biberkopf where he lies in his room in a drunken stupor as a lawyer reads to his typist a legal letter in the earlier parts of the film's 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, titled "A Handful of People in the Depths of Silence".

within a familial framework, re-appear here. How the characters are to proceed from here onwards remains ambiguous.

Lotte looks for an apartment and stumbles upon Nejat in his bookstore. After an entire day spent reading a book on the Turkish Judiciary System in the bookstore, Nejat tells her that he has a room for rent in his apartment, into which Lotte moves. Coincidences resume when Lotte visits Ayten in prison where Ayten asks her to retrieve the gun that she had hidden in the attic, and to take it to her comrades. Lotte's bag containing the gun is stolen by a gang of children and following a long chase sequence she gives up the struggle to retrieve it. On her way home, she encounters the children, high on paint thinners. When she confronts them one takes out the gun, shoots and kills Lotte. The police interrogate Ayten in prison about her connection with Lotte. The episode ends as the police inform Ayten of her right to the "Law of Repentance" if she cooperates in this case, rejects her former political alliances and that she could even be set free.

The idea of repentance and the ensuing reconciliation between the remaining protagonists in newly configured familial set-ups becomes the theme of the third episode. Thomas Elsaesser suggests that while the plot structure is complex and woven with improbable encounters, there is nevertheless a subtlety to "the moral fabric being spun, ... 'transgressions' (of whatever kind: sexual, political, ethnic, religious) are punished. But as the action continues to unfold, a willingness to commit acts of sacrifice and self-sacrifice arises in response to those transgressions—not from the perpetrators themselves but rather by way of their stand-ins and substitutes" ("Ethical" 36). In the next and final segment, I trace the above trajectory in order to explicate the ways in which these acts of

familial and personal reconciliation are evoked: through notions of *heimat*, in the case of Nejat and his father Ali, and, for Susanne and Ayten, through gestures of self-discovery that overcome set notions of identity.

### **3. Transcultural Reconciliations in Istanbul– Delocalized Reconciliations in Trabzon**

The third episode begins with Susanne's arrival in Istanbul where she checks into the same hotel that Lotte had chosen. The film traces Susanne's incremental reconciliation process, starting with her repentance for abandoning her daughter. A shot follows of her entering the room adjacent to the one occupied by Sibel and Cahit<sup>151</sup>. While Sibel and Cahit reconcile within a Turkish German framework, Susanne and Lotte negotiate from within a German background in the same space. Hanna Schygulla's performance spans an entire day beginning when she first opens a bottle from the minibar, and lies on the bed. The passage of time is indicated by the light outside the windows as well as by dissolves. The camera remains still during the entire sequence, situated on the uppermost corner of the room, gazing downward on her. The dissolves evoke her spectral presence, suggested in the way she walks and talks until later in the film when her reconciliation with her guilt is completed. She drinks more, and at one point in the middle of the night, cries out loud in a heartbreaking manner, beating herself up. The affective staging of the loss passes through several markers that are impossible to identify as simply German.

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<sup>151</sup> One can discover this detail by visiting the hotel as it has become a marketing tool for the hotel management. Indeed, the look of the hotel alters from *Head-On* to *Edge of Heaven* with the rooms and the lobby renovated. The hotel administration admits that Akın's films helped its popularity increase.

Caryl Flinn claims that, "Schygulla evinces a specifically German performativity on the basis of her relationship to Fassbinder alone" (18). Akin's casting of Schygulla in turn becomes a way of updating such a notion of German performativity as it is rendered increasingly less legible as German, with a remorseful Susanne traversing the streets of Istanbul, longing for her daughter. She meets up with Nejat the subsequent day and asks to see Lotte's room, refusing his offer of dinner. Alone in the room, she begins to read Lotte's diary<sup>152</sup> and falls asleep with the lights still on as she caresses the diary. The next morning Susanne awakens to see Lotte sitting in the corner of the light-filled room. Pleasantly surprised, she returns Lotte's gaze as she rises from the bed, looking straight into the camera. A reverse shot of Lotte smiling is followed by a mid-shot of Susanne lying on the bed, staring at the blank wall. She lies down again, revealing a moment of resolution of Susanne's sadness. In this silent exchange of gazes Akin's cinematographic gesture can be read as Susanne's way of reconciling with her loss. For the remainder of the film she attempts to empathize with her daughter's reading of her mother's persona<sup>153</sup>, suggesting that the two are very similar. This transformation maps out the steps of the aforementioned reconciliation with her past and the ensuing guilt.

The aftermath of this moment is marked by her wish to stay in Nejat's apartment for a few more days. Ultimately, she decides to stay in Istanbul indefinitely to help

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<sup>152</sup> The part she reads from the diary is conveyed non-diegetically in Lotte's voice: "These steps, my steps, I want to take with strength. With courage, even if Mama doesn't always understand that. This I find surprising. She was just like that herself. Or rather, independently of her story, which I've learned only gradually, I find myself taking paths very similar to hers. Perhaps it's that. She sees herself in me" (author's trans.).

<sup>153</sup> Both Susanne and Lotte have visited India once in their lives. Susanne refers to her trip as a quest shared by all at the time, suggesting her soul-searching *via* such trips. Lotte visits India around the same age as her mother, though her journey is prompted by humanitarian motives. Lotte's words in her diary suggest that she also engaged in a similar search outside the German cultural sphere. Susanne's reading of Lotte's diary and her later attempts at reconciling with her negate the norms she adhered to later in her life.



Ayten, just as her daughter had wished to do. Akın frames this decision through a scene in which Nejat and Ayten go for dinner in one of Istanbul's most famous *meyhanes*, *Yakup*, where they order *mezes* and raise their glasses to "death" upon Suzanne's suggestion. As in *Head-On*, Akın once again gives a detailed account of this culinary ritual, which is not from the cultural milieu of either Nejat or Susanne. Both, however, seem to be at home in this locality and in their respective performances, listening to Ottoman Classical music and, following the Turkish saying, "drown their sorrows" in raki. The diegetic music comments on their predicament once again as the song starts with the words "It would be a pity if I died without cherishing you enough, without having wrapped my arms around you" (author's trans)<sup>154</sup>. Employing a similar trope to the raki-drinking scene in *Head-On*, Akın moves this newly formed duo across a cultural threshold with ease. They relate to each other through their loss, and he binds them "in their human likenesses and similarities instead of distinguishing ethnic or cultural associations" (Esen 222). The next morning, Susanne leaves to visit Ayten in prison, igniting the events that will lead to Ayten's repenting her former headstrong ways (and at the same time turning her back on her comrades) and the two women's reconciliation in the form of a surrogate mother and daughter at the end of the film.

Paralleling Susanne's gesture of reconciliation with her late daughter through the written word, Ali is reading a book when we cut to his last shot in the film (following Susanne's vision of her daughter). In a tea garden by the Golden Horn in Istanbul, Ali is crouched on a small stool in the foreground. The background resembles that of *Head-*

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<sup>154</sup> The song "Ölürsem Yazıktır Sana Kanmadan" is an Ottoman classical one hailing from the Republican era, composed in 1929. The singer, however, is Sezen Aksu, and the version is from her album from 1978. She is arguably the most important musical figure alive in Turkey today and a personal favorite of Akın's (Akın, "Sinema" 48-49).

*On*'s musical interludes which invoke songs of loss and longing. Having read the book halfway through, Ali places it on the table. A close-up of him removing his glasses is followed by a shot of the book, revealing it to be the very book his son had given him after their weekend together in the first episode. We then cut to a close-up of Ali again, intently gazing tearfully across the Golden Horn, nodding in a moment of understanding.

Both acts reveal, through recourse to reading, the guilt felt by the parents in their recognition of their misdeeds against their children. The revelation, however, is across identities and genders, in yet another instance of reconciliation achieved without prescribed protocols in a given culture. Yet, Ali does not mimic Susanne, opting not to confront his son, and the rapprochement of father and son hinges on Nejat's willingness to release his grudge against his father.

The paths to the final act of reconciliation commence as Nejat finds out that his father had passed through Istanbul and has already left for his hometown on the Black Sea. The rakı dinner with Susanne becomes a similar turning point for him as well, as the ritual figures as a moment in which Nejat seems committed to making a decision that night. Raising their glasses, Susanne apologetically declares her wish to drink and Nejat says that he will accompany her.

A final thrust comes two days later, early in the morning, when Susanne and Nejat stand together in front of a window in Nejat's house as she asks him about the crowd of men walking down the street. The scene is preceded by shots of minarets of local mosques, three in total, the last shot framed so that a minaret stands next to a church tower. Nejat explains that it is the "Feast of Sacrifice" according to the Islamic calendar and that the men are going to the mosque to pray. He then narrates the story of Abraham

sacrificing his son, to which Susanne responds, saying that they share the same story and mirroring the gesture of framing the two religions earlier in the same shot. From this parable, the conversation reverts to Nejat's father when he mentions the anxiety this story of sacrifice evoked in him as a child; he would often ask his father whether he would sacrifice him. Nejat's memory of his father saying that he would make even god his enemy to protect his son seals his decision to go on the road in search of his father. The tone of the scene remains detached and almost silent as they whisper to one another. Nejat's tense demeanor throughout, however, reveals the intensity of the affective state that Akin is inscribing. Within the delicate balance of this silent sequence, Susanne slowly and indirectly guides Nejat towards his decision with questions and references to affinities between their cultures, underlining " the twofold commitment to both critiquing the weight of socio-symbolic regimes of difference and affirming a horizon of transnational, transfaith connection" (Breger 86) that the director attempts to maintain throughout. Akin uncovers an affinity between their acts of reconciliation in the last shot of the sequence, shot from behind where the couple is framed by the window as the camera slowly tracks backward, leaving the duo's silhouette against the backdrop of the light from the window.

Nejat's journey to his father's village conflates two strands of longing. One is a reunion of two people; the drive from Istanbul brings him back to his father who has been with him all his life, notwithstanding their differences. There is also a homecoming, albeit an ambiguous one, to a locality that Nejat shows no interest in throughout the narrative. Berghahn discusses Nejat's negotiation between this reunion and homecoming through this car trip. The process ends in an imaginary *heimat* where this notion is

"understood as a structuring absence as well as a utopian promise" ("No Place" 143) While pursuing an absent father figure, he simultaneously searches for the homeland he had never previously contemplated. The same space also holds the utopian promise of reconciling what differentiates him from his father. Viewed in this manner, the father-son duo seems to evoke the bridge metaphor for Turkish German identities once again wherein the first generation leans towards the Turkish identity and the second generation is constructed through recourse to a German identity. The pathos on the surface of the melodrama surges in tandem with the anticipation of reconciliation. Yet, the filmic ways in which Akın articulates this journey and the ensuing ambiguity prompt us to view these protagonists outside of these paradigms.

The journey begins with a cut to the same gas station as Akın repeats, visually speaking, the exact same sequence as in the first sequence of the film. At the level of sound there remains a minor difference. The non-diegetic music that becomes diegetic at one point during the sequence serves as a self-reflexive device in its own right, since the song that plays in the introductory flash-forward sequence at the gas station is deployed here again, this time performed by another singer. Again, Nejat asks who the singer is and receives the same reply. This time, however, the answer is wrong. Just as the gas station is a film set<sup>155</sup> so, too, is Akın's depiction a mediation rather than an authentic representation yet it nevertheless reinforces a "(quasi)documentary socio-geographic specificity into the closing sequence" (Breger 86). Akın intensifies this gesture by inscribing his own homecoming into the narrative indicated by displaying only one location sign along the road, that of his own father's hometown, Filyos.

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<sup>155</sup>Deniz Göktürk provides a detailed account of how the abandoned gas station was crafted into the film set. (see Chapter 15 in Hake et.al.)

Akın provides no other specific markers along the rest of the road, presenting the Black Sea coastline as a single space that elicits only brief affective responses from Nejat; his facial expression remains detached except for a few grins along the way. He appears to be thinking as he drives but the content of his thoughts is not revealed. Without specific reactions from him or any other visual indicators it becomes difficult to view this experience as one that celebrates his journey as a homecoming. The familial burden situated at the heart of the trip, namely facing a father figure who has violated a most fundamental precept of Nejat's life, to not murder, becomes more ambiguous and amplified as Nejat approaches the village. What he discovers is a locality rather than a sense of national belonging. Yet even the affective responses to this encounter remain muted, leaving the viewer with only a single clue as to the specific emotion embedded in the sequence. The only hint that remains is the song that plays non-diegetically throughout with its theme of longing for a lover who refuses to reciprocate the love.

As Nejat approaches the village, Akın resorts to the earlier visual strategy of inserting documentary footage (of this village). Before Nejat reaches his destination, Akın uses wide-angle still shots of the village in the foreground with the Black Sea in the background, followed by a mid-shot of a local musician playing his instrument at a downtrodden village bus stop. The area is filled with new houses. Nevertheless, Akın opts to include only the old wooden mansions along with an old lady in local attire harvesting the region's cash crop, tea. Due to Akın's filmic choices, we are left with an ethnographic, almost exoticized, view of the village, which underlines Nejat's distance from this locality, perhaps corresponding to the images that he selects from a medley of images and encounters.

When Nejat enters the village he asks the old lady about his father. She politely tells him that he is out on a boat, fishing. In the next shot, we see him pose the same question to fishermen on the beach who inform him that his father should return soon. Nejat's plain and polite Turkish makes him stand out only briefly from the locals, suggesting his ease with travel despite his status as an outsider. Gezen claims that, "in the Turkish-German context, *heimat* is not an exoticization of another segment of one's own society, or of a past state of affairs, but rather a form of self-representation" (85). Following this assertion about *heimat* allows the spectator to move beyond a superficial reading of the village's exotic details, diverting one from an interpretation that pivots around Nejat and Ali's past miscognitions to be resolved in this imaginary homeland. Rather, as a form of self-representation, Nejat's journey itself becomes the means to "an infinite process of mediation, never a return to stable grounds and roots" (Hake 199). Having established mobility as the foundational mode through which protagonists negotiate novel means of subjectivity, bound to various reconfigurations of their familial spheres, the village becomes not a teleological end-point for Nejat's search. When Nejat sits down on the beach to wait for his father, we are left with the final shot of the film framing Nejat from behind, a small harbor and the Black Sea in the background. The shot lingers for almost seven minutes; half-way through, credits begin to roll. Ali never arrives, yet Nejat keeps staring at the sea; Akin leaves open the specifics of this reconciliatory gesture, read primarily through the calm that permeates the scene as well as Nejat's affective state, contrasting with his earlier depictions full of anxiety. Nejat's calm demeanor overlooking the sea indicates, however, that this ambivalence has been and remains the norm for him. No longer a victim of his circumstances as a Turkish

German subject, his ease standing on a foreign yet familiar shore marks his cosmopolitan subjectivity. The nature of that subjectivity remains as open-ended as the image of the Black Sea stretching to the horizon.

## CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation by asking how a genealogically constructed melodramatic modality might operate in different national and transnational filmic contexts without reifying subjectivities into static identities. I responded to the above question through a genealogy comprising Fontane's novel "Effi Briest", Fassbinder's films *Effi Briest* and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* in Chapter 1, and Atıf Yılmaz's *O Beautiful Istanbul* and Yılmaz Güney's *The Herd* in Chapter 2. In these works, I identified key melodramatic tropes and analyzed how the directors transformed them. I sought the filmic texts' relationships to gendered and ethnic subjectivities that were in tension with their local, national and transnational cultures, foregrounding how each film's melodramatic modality helped it elaborate difference towards my reading of Fatih Akın's films in Chapter 3.

Fassbinder's filmic strategies, informed by Sirk (identification) and Brecht (distantiation), were central to his approach to narratives in which a victim positionality<sup>156</sup> questioned both the oppressor and the oppressed, all the while posing the same set of questions to the viewer. For instance, in *Effi Briest*, Effi's understanding of the mechanisms of oppression and her ensuing transgression prompt both the audience and the narrative to question these devices and to reflect on how the 'victim' herself is implicated in each oppressive act. Such a reading of the novel and its adaptation by

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<sup>156</sup> My reading of the films in question is framed by Elsaesser's perspective on Fassbinder's subjects that binds his politics to a singular critique of identity politics and its ensuing narratives of victimization: "A different reading of the figure of the victim arises from the assumption that victimhood in Fassbinder may not necessarily be the negative state from which the protagonists try (and fail) to escape, but already a solution ... What appears to be defeatism or mere self-abandonment, in fact, finds another truth of identity and thus corresponds to a different - differently gendered and in the present society unlivable - morality ... Against a belief in the transcendence of struggle, or the assumption of a subject speaking from "full knowledge," Fassbinder's harsher view of subjectivity and death admits only of immanence, an immanence bereft, furthermore, of the tragic hero's anagnorisis or recognition" (Elsaesser, "Fassbinder's" 250). That these subjects are left 'bereft of recognition' at the end of each narrative is important in that in Fassbinder's universe such a recognition would always construe a position of power for that subject, requiring repetition of the melodramatic narrative. In fact, Fassbinder's resolutely mediated filmic narratives move forward until they reach this moment of immanence.



Fassbinder enabled me to conceptualize ways in which issues pertaining to Germanness in its gendered- and class-based configurations translated into Fassbinder's specific film language. Insights into Fassbinder's filmic approach in adapting Fontane and his reading of German society became fruitful sites for deconstructing the relationship between the novel's realist register and the film's melodramatic modality.

When Fassbinder attempted a similar strategy in the context of a migrant's experience in Germany in *Fear Eats the Soul*, a complex web of oppression surfaced wherein each vector (between Emmi and Ali, between each protagonist and German society, and Emmi and Ali as a couple against German society) pointed to a continuous negotiation of victimhood. Each protagonist who challenged German norms asserted a new set of morality through their struggle. Fassbinder's repurposing of the melodramatic genre and modality in this context thus became a tool for articulating these subjectivities, despite each protagonist's tragic end, in ways that left their alterity open.

I read Turkish cinema from within the trajectory of the 1960s-1970s to articulate the transformation in political attitudes through my analysis of *O Beautiful Istanbul* and *The Herd*. What consistently surfaced in my inquiry was a negotiation of Turkish identity that clashed with a heterogeneous society (through markers of class, gender and ethnicity) and the past (in its negotiation of the Ottoman Empire's legacy, its multi-ethnic and multi-religious background). In *O Beautiful Istanbul*, the protagonists' understanding of what Istanbul stands for is central to the melodramatic impasses they encounter and to their subsequent negotiations. Meanwhile, Haşmet's encounter with modernity becomes a disruptive force in this process. With a strong sense of historical belonging to the city, Haşmet's inability to conform to the changing norms of capitalist exchange stands in

contradistinction to what Istanbul means for Ayşe. With a working-class background and having grown up with images of film stars, Ayşe traverses the film's melodramatic impasses through her resolve to become initially a film star and, later, a pop-singer who re-appropriates classical Ottoman music. In five episodes, when the couple finally unites, in accordance with melodramatic tropes, the love between them becomes the motif that obliterates their incapacity to conform to the ways of being readily available to them. The film validates a moral ground that nevertheless only has its filmic counterpart in a melodramatic register wherein remaining true to oneself is conflated with remaining true to love for one another. With their indeterminate subjectivities, the couple relies on a memory of Istanbul and the absences this memory elicits, which offers them recourse to their links to the past, thereby negating ungrounded national identity narratives. The film does not define who they are to be; rather, it opens a space for their alterity.

*The Herd*, while depicting an entirely different setting and modes of belonging, maintains the clash between modernity and traditional ways of being. Within the context of the dissolution of Kurdish nomadism, the film operates as social realism to illustrate how the clan's encounter with modernity and capitalism obliterates both its class and ethnic affiliations. The melodramatic modality deployed in the relationship of Şivan and Berivan, however, reveals a more complex set of moral negotiations *via* aspects of victimhood, operating as a subtext to the tragic trajectory of the protagonists' march towards their end in Turkey's capital. The film's dual modality articulates the ways in which realism and melodrama operate together<sup>157</sup>. Despite the documentary sequences

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<sup>157</sup> The ability of melodrama to address forms of social injustice has been debated in various contexts in melodrama studies. (Skvirsky 2008, Williams 2001) Arguing that, "the melodramatic mode is the formal complement of identity politics" he presents the melodramatic mode as speaking primarily "in the moralizing language of social injury, individual blame, and exclusion." (Skvirsky 110) The critique,

that depict a realist picture of Kurdish nomadic existence and its potential for enabling the viewer to adopt an objective distance, the affective states in the melodramatic love between Şivan and Berivan paradoxically draw the audience closer. Ultimately, however, the film's Marxist denunciation of the couple's and the clan patriarch's subjectivities opposes the realist and melodramatic modalities.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated that these works, through their filmic strategies, articulated aspects of alterity in their narratives, form and relationship to melodrama, and explored how Fatih Akın's *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven* could communicate with these points of inquiry. Filmic assertions of the protagonists' alterities insistently reappeared as an important element in my readings in which I contend with Michael Taussig that, "alterity is every inch a relationship, not a thing in itself" (129). Rather than positing that these alterities create novel hybrid, rhizomic identities, or interpreting them as an overcoming of in-betweenness, I suggest that they relationally contest desired norms and/or set identities. For this reading, I am indebted<sup>158</sup> to the scholarship that challenges static notions of identity. Yet to confront notions such as hybridity only intensifies the dialectic of identity politics in which all identities are hierarchically bound

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however, relies on the assumption that in melodramas "virtue is equated with suffering; and victims, because they are victims, occupy the moral high ground" (110). In a more complex negotiation of victimhood starting with my analysis of Fassbinder, I suggest that a melodramatic mode can remain critical and subversive without instituting a moral ground.

<sup>158</sup> For instance, I adhere to Esen's qualification of hybridity when the term is utilized in my dissertation: "My use of the word hybridity acknowledges the multiplicity and inherent plurality on each side of the Turkish-German identity—that is, Turkish and German cultures are hybrid within themselves—instead of hybridity as a matter of a mixing of two fixed and homogeneous sides—one Turkish, one German" (Esen 228). In my critique, however, I discuss the shortcomings of the term rather than reject it.

to a Western, white and male one and each re-configuration of a new identity dialectically reinforces the dominant societal structure<sup>159</sup>.

As in the utopian drive in Fassbinder's films or in the protagonists' failure to firmly ground their identities at the end of *O Beautiful Istanbul*, all these films suggest a tendency to leave open the specifics of alterity. Rather than submitting that Akin's characters are transgressive or disruptive of German and Turkish norms simply through an underlining of fluid, hybrid Turkish German identities, I address each subjectivity separately to understand particular ways in which Akin leaves them *as different*. Since the notion of alterity is a relational one, each particular context the protagonists traverse introduces a new set of negotiations that the viewer is to navigate anew. Framing these narratives in this manner ruptures the cyclical nature of liberal identity politics.

Throughout Chapter 3, I read both films on the level of the narrative, mise-en-scène and their relationship to the melodramatic modality. Navigating through Akin's representational strategies in performing 'Turkishness' or 'Germanness', or constructing a German or Turkish space, I consistently demarcate ambivalences that underline the futility of identifying such markers through notions of ethnic belonging. Based on my reading of a cosmopolitan history of Istanbul in *O Beautiful Istanbul*, I maintain that what is often interpreted as the 'Turkish' space in Akin's films, namely Istanbul, harbors a cosmopolitanism embedded in its violent history of forgetting and erasure. I extend this approach to my examination of each protagonist's affective states in various sequences.

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<sup>159</sup> A critique of identity politics concurrently ensues along with critiques of multiculturalism in Germany as discussed in the introduction to Chapter 3. These include discussions by Slavoj Žižek (1997) whose work Skvirsky comments on to claim that "[p]oliticized identities gauge their social injury by this ideal's rights and privileges (e.g., educational and career opportunities, protection from hate crimes, the possibility of upward mobility in return for "hard work"). Thus, while politicized identities present themselves as self-affirming, in fact, they depend, for their existence as identities, on the very ideal (bourgeois, white, male) that they must universally deny while ending up reinscribing. Like Nietzsche's vengeful slave, the politicized identity deals not in political action, but in a "moralizing politics" (110).

Specifically, in my analysis of Sibel and Cahit's last scene together I suggest that it is the melodramatic articulation of their affective states that allows us to identify them as different.

Consequently, in *The Edge of Heaven* my analysis points towards a framework where the protagonists reconciled with their subjectivities in ways that evaded set identities. Again, it is the melodramatic uncoiling of the narrative that forces the protagonists towards these acts of reconciliation. For each set of protagonists, however, Akin pursues a different modality: while Ali, Susanne and Ayten experiences a transcultural one in the cosmopolitan space of Istanbul, Ali and Nejat's father-son struggle materializes as a delocalized one in Trabzon challenging notions of belonging and *heimat*. Both films operate to reveal, in Deniz Göktürk's words, a "cosmopolitan consciousness that destabilizes the dichotomy between the native and foreign" (Berghahn et.al., "European" 231), and my genealogical methodology provides the filmic nexus for Akin's elaboration of this consciousness.

Methodologically, then, it is to be hoped that this study makes contributions on two levels. First, by bringing together approaches from the fields of film studies, area studies and comparative literature, I underline the relevance of these fields and of their objects of inquiry to one another, deploying the scholarship on identity/difference to explore its applications to melodrama studies. Second, by providing a specific genealogical relationship between national and transnational cinemas beyond filmic allusions and shared actors and themes, I intend this study to consider the ways in which genre studies become relevant to the study of transnational cinemas. Utilizing a melodrama studies framework in a genealogical manner also allows me to participate in

the growing scholarship on Fatih Akın from the standpoint of filmically mediated worlds, complementing what Berna Gueneli calls "social-realist or ethnographic readings" and "freeing Akın's cinema from a purely representational reading of minority identities in Germany" (169). At the same time, a reflection on how films of *Yeşilçam* elucidate gestures that I identify in Akın's films offers further entry points into the often-neglected films of this era<sup>160</sup>. I hope at the same time to have address the demands that Ela Gezen's assertions pose at the end of her dissertation when she claims that "[t]ransnational cultural practices are not unidirectional" (170), opening up a dialogical space that speaks in multiple ways in time and space.

Randall Halle in his recent study claims that "we need to develop autonomous approaches that bespeak the reality of the social organization of the transnational ... [with r]esolutely comparative perspectives" (22). Throughout this dissertation I have maintained a reading of these films that seeks to critique notions of national cultures with presumably homogenous peoples and interests, and followed a reading of German, Turkish and Turkish German cultures the locus of "complex connectivities, alternative imaginative communities, and interzonal potentials" (22). The genealogical relationship I have maintained between these various films thus posits a response to the contemporary understanding of the transnational as a paradigm that only brings together different national cultures. Rather, the different subjectivities in each provides different localities over and above ethnic and national notions of belonging that are simultaneously in communication with various histories, constituting different contact zones between diverse subjects. How, we may ask, are we to explain the contact zone wherein one end

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<sup>160</sup> The past decade witnessed an unprecedented volume of scholarship on *Yeşilçam*, and I draw upon this corpus in Chapter 2. Informed by gender studies, psychoanalytical readings and genre studies, this body of literature, however, rarely goes beyond the national borders of Turkey and Turkish film history.

(Germany, Europe) is increasingly articulated by transnational paradigms and the other (Turkey) retains its national(istic) culture? How can we invert Halle's positionality that foregrounds an understanding of Europe (and concurrently other similar positionalities that utilized Turkish German cultural products as transnational works of art that question and transgress definitions of Germanness and Europeanness) to shed light on ways in which these films' critical readings relate to discussions of Turkishness as well as the 'Turkish' in the notion of Turkish German? The subcultural and minoritarian responses to notions of Turkishness offer critical potential for developing the scope of this dissertation along these lines to include different directors and actors from different films of *Yeşilçam*. In this vein, including the works of Ömer Lütfi Akad (*Vesikalı Yarım* (1968)) and Metin Erksan (*A Time to Love* (Sevmek Zamanı, 1965) in further research expands the melodramatic genealogy I proposed to include different modes of alterity and filmic responses to them. At the same time, I intend to investigate later films of Atıf Yılmaz who maintains a flexible approach to his utilization of melodramatic tropes that changes over the decades, especially in his films from the 1980s. These directions, while providing a more robust footing for my investigation of the melodramatic and notions of Turkishness, would also allow me to situate more contemporary works of Akın and other Turkish German directors in regard to their relationship to maintaining a fluid subjectivity in a transnational nexus.

In investigating this multiplicity of ways of being in the context of contemporary transnational cinema I aim to look beyond the Turkish sphere as well. A study in which I assemble a similar genealogy to read Akın's current film, *The Cut*, would allow me to explore Turkish national history with one of its most problematic stranded objects, that of

the Armenian Genocide through the genealogical methodology I proposed in this dissertation. In doing so, I aim to partake in the debates within national and transnational circuits about this event whose recognition and the ensuing debates around have been lacking a film historical inquiry to this day.

Finally, I aim to inquire into the growing field of Kurdish film studies that deploys the melodramatic mode in tandem with a social realist outlook. An abundance of films from the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe, first- and second-generation Kurdish migrants from Turkey, Iraq, and recently from Syria, as well as the reality of political asylum seekers of Kurdish descent from Iran, makes a comparative approach all the more relevant and productive. The growing field of melodrama studies and the melodramatic modality as a transgeneric mode, in their ability to respond to a multiplicity of transnational films, offer a novel horizon for an ethics of recognition. It is my hope that this ethics-to-come, in tandem with new film studies methodologies and frameworks, will prove to be promising approaches for elucidating the experience of loss and injustice endemic to my heritage.



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