

Cultural Encounters in Contemporary German Cinema: an introduction

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Only very recently, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared the failure of ‘multicultural’ policies in her country and stimulated a new debate about future scenarios of social inclusion and exclusion which re-opens questions of coexistence vis-à-vis cultural interaction as well as the potential need to revise established identity constructs.

The contributors to this special issue of GFL attempt to explore such questions from within contemporary cinematic productions, and most of them focus – just like the German Chancellor – on German-Turkish relations within the Federal Republic and particularly on the position of second and third generation German Turks. The wide spectrum of different German, Turkish and German-Turkish portrayals of the Self and the Other will have to be investigated in more detail if new solutions to the old challenge of integrating people from different cultural backgrounds are to be found. However, German-Turkish cinema is not only of interest with regard to its projection of popular fears and hopes from all those perspectives, but because of its impact on increasing numbers of viewers who have become very familiar with the cinematic landscape developed by Fatih Akin and other well-known directors.

Within this framework, Stefan Halft’s study focuses on paradigmatic changes in German-Turkish portrayals in the filmic discourse about migration (*Wandel deutsch-türkischer Konstellationen im filmischen Migrationsdiskurs*) and juxtaposes images of identity and otherness before German unification with hybrid constructs of German-Turkishness that have gained ground since the 1990s. As a result of these tendencies the author identifies new ‘intercultural constellations’ which include intra-cultural aspects like generational conflicts and life-styles and allow further investigation of structures of

power that continue to challenge cultural interaction. The same challenges remain obstacles in the development of contemporary German cinema to a *cinema of métissage*.

In her article *The Politics of Space in the Cinema of Migration*, Barbara Mennel analyses three films associated with migration and mobility between Turkey and Germany: Tevfik Başer's *40m² Germany* (1986), Yilmaz Güney's *The Father* (1973) and Fatih Akin's *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005). She argues that focusing on the politics of space rather than on national or ethnic identity allows us to account for larger cultural shifts from a national to a transnational framework for cultural production. Her comparison of the three films reads their spatial aesthetics as responding to the shift from national to transnational contexts and left-wing ideological to multicultural politics.

In his article *Calling All Migrants: Recasting Film Noir with Turkish-German Cinema in Christian Petzold's 'Jerichow'*, Jaimey Fisher points out that *Jerichow* addresses the issue of ethnic diversity in Germany, while at the same time positioning itself within world cinema by taking as its inspiration a US-novel and film cycle, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. He argues that the film thus engages specific national discourses while emphatically underscoring German cinema's place within the larger system of world cinema. The article analyses *Jerichow* in its multiple contexts, including the so-called Berlin School, the numerous German films about Germany's growing ethnic diversity, and the US film noir. Like Mennel, Fisher is particularly interested in the deployment of spaces in the film, both domestic space and what Edward Soja has called a "third space", which reflect Petzold's engagement with the genre of film noir, the tradition of Turkish-German films, and what theorists have called uneven geographical development, i.e. globalisation. Fisher sees the film as deliberately moving beyond the conventional German-host versus Turkish-guest relation and into one of reciprocal interaction and influence.

In her study *'Sameness' in Disguise of 'Difference'?*, Gözde Naiboğlu explores questions of gender and national identity in two key films by Fatih Akin: *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. In particular, the author investigates how Akin both subverts and resettles the sexual and cultural difference by revealing how gender, like nationality, is performed. She argues that the protagonists of *Gegen die Wand* demonstrate flexible identities that dissolve the clear-cut stereotypical representations,

while the universalist discourse in *Auf der anderen Seite* follows the reductivist discourse of nationalism by reducing 'difference' and highlighting sameness.

In their paper Vivien Silvey and Roger Hillman explore how Fatih Akin's film *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*) situates Turkish-German transnationalism within historical and contemporary frameworks. They see the film as reconfiguring paradigms of Eastern and Western relationships, positioning Germany and Turkey within each other's sights/sites, rather than following the traditions which cast Turks as Germany's cultural others. Akin's film, they argue, comments on and inverts traditions of the representation of Turkish-German relationships, repositioning Turks and Turkish Germans as constitutive of German culture and vice versa. In the same way as Fisher does for *Jerichow*, Silvey and Hillman argue that *Auf der anderen Seite* places transnational cinema in a global context. It reexamines relationships between the European Union and the rest of the world, putting Turkey under the spotlight politically and geographically, thus widening the periphery of European and global mediascapes.

Although Turkish-Germans have been by far the most productive group in dealing with intercultural issues in film, cultural encounters between other groups are, of course, also represented in recent German films. Relations between West and East Germans, which were treated in a number of films in the period following the fall of the Wall and German reunification, are interesting because they contain both intra-cultural and intercultural aspects. Elizabeth Nijdam's article *Rock statt Marx: Rock and Roll Narratives in Leander Haußmann's 'Sonnenallee'* examines one of the best-known of these films, which portrays generational differences and in particular the more liberal orientation of contemporary youth in Germany. Especially the latter seems to break with traditional binary constructs that continue to separate not only 'native' German from Germans with a Turkish background, but also East from West Germans. In this context, Nijdam analyses the ongoing interest in rock and roll as an example of a music culture that crosses the dividing line because it expresses nonconformity, a desire for personal freedom and liberal political values, at first on both sides of the actual Wall and then (up to the present) of the 'Wall in the mind'. The author focuses on the post-unification film *Sonnenallee* (1999) because of its new humoristic way of dealing with the East German experience in general and with the position of rock and roll in the fall of East Germany in particular.

However, while the Wall in the mind between East and West Germans seems to be crumbling as time passes by, it remains to be seen how far a shared music culture and other key transcultural aspects – such as the common language – are likely to help overcome the dividing line between native Germans and German Turks which overall has become stronger from the second to the third generation of German-Turkish diaspora. In any case, lamenting the failure of traditional multicultural policy is not going to be enough, but it is now time to visibly support and explicitly enhance such transcultural components – against monocultural voices from both sides, no matter how loud they are.

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