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Representations of and Reactions by the Turkish ‘Other’ in Germany, 1968-2006: A Critique of the Films of Werner Rainer Fassbinder, *Kanak Attak*, and Fatih Akin

On June 6, 2001, the city of Cologne, Germany held a celebration, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the first enlistment agreement (*Anwerbeabkommens*) between Germany and Turkey. Held at Cologne’s prestigious Philharmonic Center, many notable persons, including the mayor and local judges, were in attendance. Strikingly absent, at least in terms of guests, were Turks. In fact, the majority of Turkish attendees at the event were present only as caterers, suggesting possibly yet another subversive meaning for the term *gastarbeiter* (guest workers).

This not-so-subtle illustration of continuing cultural hierarchies at an event celebrating supposed integration was not lost on a group of young Turkish-German multi-cultural advocates present at the event. Members of the self-ascribed *Kanak Attak* movement, these individuals were present to film a faux-documentary of the event. Inverting questions often asked of Turks living in Germany, the interviewers, two young Turkish-Germans, asked a series of questions intended to startle German interviewees. After determining that a particular individual was not from Cologne, the interviewer would abruptly ask, ‘when do you want to go home?’ or would ask their interviewees to define *Leitkultur*, a term that refers to a ‘cultural environment’ or a ‘guiding or model culture’. The *weiße Exotisch* (white exotics), an inverted diminutive term applied to the Germans attendees by the Turkish-German interviewers, would then be asked if

violence towards women and habitual drug use were part of an essentialized German *Leitkultur*. By sardonically but by no means humorously inverting the manner in which Turks living in Germany were often represented to Germans, the creators of this faux-documentary sought to challenge essentializing tools often employed by Germans to make broad assumptions of another's culture and to illustrate the racist undergirdings that compose such an understanding.

Over the past fifty years the minority Turkish population in Germany has risen to over 2.6 million. This number represents three percent of the total German population and twenty-five percent of the non-Ethnic German population.¹ This essay will present a brief history of the growth of this minority population and reactions and responses to this changing cultural dynamics within both popular and independent German film. Gender has often been the located site of these representations. By exploring these films I seek to illuminate German film makers perceptions and intention of representation of the shifting ethnic and cultural composition in Germany over the past forty years. The varying attitudes towards Turks living in Germany have often been represented as issues of class, race, and gender. The intentioned categorization of this shifting cultural dynamic in these terms suggests the central importance of these nodal points in mapping the new cultural environment in 21st century Germany. I argue that interrogating interconnected representations of class and gender in the films of Werner Rainer Fassbinder, the *Kanak Attak* group, and Fatih Akin provides a useful lens to interpret social, cultural and political attitudes towards the growing minority Turkish population held within Germany over the past forty years.

¹ Carter Dougherty, "Turks in Germany are in a Bullish Mood," International Herald Tribune, 15, November 2005.

The German *Wirtschaftswunder* (literally, economic miracle) of the post-war decades in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was fueled by the importation of foreign labor or guestworkers (*Gastarbeiter*) from Mediterranean countries including Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey.² The oil crises of the early 1970s curtailed the rapid economic growth in West Germany and its importation of labor came to an unceremonious halt in 1973. However, many of the immigrant laborers and their families, in particular Turks who ended up representing seventy-five percent of foreign laborers in West Germany, choose to remain in their adopted homeland. Since that time the appropriate social position and even the very existence of this group of foreigners (*Ausländer*) in West Germany (and re-united Germany after 1989) has been hotly contested.

Over the past thirty years, conservatives increasingly saw the continued presence of non-Germans (in particular, poor non-whites) in Germany as a negative force in society both economically and culturally while liberals saw the existence of immigrant groups as an opportunity that, if cultivated, might dispel the spirits of a genocidal past. This assertion may be an overly simplified historical reduction but, I argue, that these ideological currents informed, at varying levels, the debates between Germans concerning the presence of immigrant communities in late 20th century Germany. Strikingly absent from this dialogue is the input of the foreigners actually living in Germany who, again, are primarily Turks or Turkish-Germans. The *Kanak Attack* group, the makers of the faux-documentary presented in the introduction of this essay is an example of Turkish-Germans recent response to this dialogue and the initiation of a response

² Sandra Hestermann, "German-Turkish Diaspora," in Monika Fludernik, Ed., *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments*. (Rodopi: New York, New York, 2003), 332.

in which they are asserting their social position and insist upon the value of their contributions to contemporary German society.

Scholars argue that the trajectory of this debate may be best understood as comprising three distinct periods over the past forty years. German cultural scholar Randall Halle describes these three periods as ex-habitant, co-habitant, and in-habitant³ suggesting that the social position (inclusion versus exclusion) of Turks in Germany has altered over the past forty years. During the 1970s Turks were referenced in media and artistic representations as being in need of social uplift (they were outside of society), during the late 1980s and 1990's Turkish-Germans began to assert their cultural uniqueness and cultural contributions to German society – they were interacting with and confronting society – and, more recently, the interaction of Turkish-Germans and Germans has resulted in a third way, the creation of a new culture that is neither uniquely German nor Turkish but a multicultural combination of the two.⁴

As stated above, strikingly absent until recently from this dialogue was input from the foreigners living in Germany. This silence was largely due to the lack of political representation. Citizenship, and thus the right to vote, continued to be elusive even for even long-term immigrants in Germany. The minority Green Party was the only German political entity to consistently challenge for *Ausländer* rights within the federal and state political realm. Within the cultural realm, the development of the so-called *gastarbeiter* literature appeared to be a

³ Randall Halle, “Beyond Between: Turks, Germans, and the Borders of Europe.” Panel 4 (Space and Identity in Turkish-German Cinema), 2005 German Studies Association National Conference, September 30, 2005.

⁴ Betigül Ercan Argun argues that the term *Deutschkei* (a combination of Deutschland and Turkei) is a more appropriate than the hyphenated Turkish-German to describe this new cultural reality in Turkey in Germany: The Transnational Sphere of Deutschkei. (New York: Routledge), 2003.

vehicle for *Ausländer* to enunciate their voices and concerns but while this literature has been the subject to extensive academic inquiry, popular reception never materialized.⁵ This is not to suggest that this body of literature has not had an impact on social thought in Germany, particularly within the political left, but it never reached a mass level of readership in which it might serve as an arena for broad social change.

Cinema is another cultural realm within which *Ausländer* in Germany have been represented, and thus exists as a possible site for social awareness. It is vital to indicate that, until very recently, German film makers exclusively constructed these representations of foreigners.⁶ The recent short-films of the *Kanak Attak* movement and the films of director Fatih Akin, born to *Gastarbeiter* parents in Hamburg, represent the first presentations of Turkish-Germans creating images of *Ausländer*. In earlier film productions, German film makers constructed images of *Ausländer* that often unwittingly reinforced the ambiguous and often racist discourse concerning foreigners prevalent in German society. I proceed with a investigation of three film makers over the last forty years to illustrate the change over time of presented representations of *Ausländer* in Germany and the possible intentions and motivations of these three film makers.

⁵ Rita Chook-Kuan Chin, "Rewriting the 'Guest Worker': Turkish-German Artists and the Emergence of Multiculturalism in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1961-1989" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999).

⁶ Arlene A. Teroka. "*Gastarbeiterliteratur*: The Other Speaks Back." In Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyds (eds.) *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. This article invokes the now classic argument of 'who speaks for the subaltern' within the context of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*. I argue that the lack of popular reception mutes this body of work but can be profitably used within the realm of *Ausländer* representations in German cinema, particularly when Turkish-German directors and filmmakers became responsible for the creation of the representations.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

The German film maker and social activist Rainer Werner Fassbinder made forty-six films between 1966 and 1982. Two of these films deal directly with or draw upon themes of foreigner worker living in Germany. *Katzelmacher* (1968) and *Angst essen Seele auf* (1973) represent a German vision of what it was like to be a foreign worker in Germany during this time.⁷ A close read of these films (or at least the pertinent portions) provide an initial frame to compare later representations of foreigner workers and immigrants by the *Kanak Attak* movement and Fatih Akin.

Katzelmacher – a pejorative term for foreign workers that literally means cat rutter – is a film centrally concerned with the morally bankrupt nature of Fassbinder’s conception of ‘late capitalism’ in West Germany.⁸ Although the title suggests a film about foreign workers in Germany, Jorgos – the Greek foreign worker played by Fassbinder – does not come on screen until the second half of the film. Fassbinder’s choice to cast himself, a German, as the Greek *Gastarbeiter* demonstrates Arlene A. Teroka’s contention of how a dominant group often supplants and presents minority voices.⁹ When Jorgos finally does make his screen appearance, his presence is immediately sexualized. Elizabeth rents a room to Jorgos and Franz, who shares the room with the Greek worker, immediately reports to his male friends that Jorgos sleeps in the

⁷ *Ali: Fear Eats The Soul*, dir. and prod. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 93 min., Tango Film Productions, 2003, DVD and *Katzelmacher*, dir. and prod. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 88 min., Antiteater-X Productions, 2002, DVD.

⁸ See Gail Wise’s 1995 UC Berkeley dissertation “Ali in Wunderland: German Representations of foreign Workers” for a detailed discussion of Fassbinder’s preoccupation with capitalism and how this was represented on screen – particularly through the constant discussion and transaction of money. Wise has a very good read of this film but does not explore the use of sexuality to ‘essentialize’ the representation of foreign workers.

⁹ Also see Günter Wallraff, *Ganz Unten: Erweiterte Neuauflage. Mit einer Documnetation der Folgen*. (Kiepenheuer & Witsch; Auflage: Erw. Neuaufl.), 1988 for an example of an ethnic German representing a minority.

nude and is particularly well endowed. A discussion follows among the male characters on how a large penis is normal for a 'savage people'. This is a humorous aside amongst the male characters until several of the female characters become sexually interested in Jorgos. Gunda makes a pass at Jorgos and, when rejected, proceeds to spread vicious rumors that Jorgos tried to rape her in the park. Helga, the girlfriend of Erich, also is attracted to Jorgos and leaving Erich begins a relationship with Jorgos. Jorgos, who was initially greeted with sardonic humor and verbally belittled – he is often referred to being from alternating Southern Mediterranean countries (as if they were all the same) and referred to as a *Fremdarbeiter* (a highly racialized term for immigrant/alien worker used in National Socialist Germany) – is now a 'danger' to the virtue of the German 'maidens'. The film concludes with the vicious beating of Jurgos by all of the male characters – even those that were initially ambivalent to Jorgos and his perceived transgressions. This final scene ties directly back to the film's opening quote by Berliner author and academic Yaak Karsunke: "It is better to make new mistakes than to perpetuate the old ones to the point of unconsciousness."¹⁰

Katzelmacher is intimately concerned with Fassbinder's perception that the West German variant of capitalism is the intellectual successor of fascism. Jurgos, the guestworker, represents nothing beyond an essentialized outsider, the Jew of Nazi Germany. Rather than providing a representation of the complex and oppressed situation of the *Gastarbeiter* in late 1960s West Germany, Fassbinder is presenting images that tell the story of the essentialized outside and the reactions of the 'good' Germans. What is particularly important, in terms of this being the first

¹⁰ Es ist besser neue Fehler zu machen als die alten bis zur allgemeinen Bewußtlosigkeit zu Konstituieren. Introduction of *Katzelmacher*, dir. and prod. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 88 min., Antiteater-X Productions, 2002, DVD.

film to treat post-1945 guestworkers in Germany, is how central linked this representation is to that of earlier outsiders and how perceived transgressive sexuality is used to construct the character.

In Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1974 film *Angst Essen Seele auf*, we see these themes continue albeit with more attention to the humanity of the guestworker. Accomplished actress Brigitte Mira plays the leading character Emmi Kurowski, a middle aged ethnic German widow of a Polish immigrant who falls in love with a man half her age. Worse, this man, Ali – a Moroccan gastarbeiter in West Germany – and Emmi decide to marry. Upon learning of this romance and resulting marriage, Emmi's grown children react with horror and dismay – one of her sons goes so far as to destroy her television set in a fit of anger. The reaction of her ethnic German neighbors is no less dramatic. The local shopkeeper ridicules Ali for his supposed poor German language skills and refuses to serve him and Emmi, a previously long-term customer. Her co-workers alienate Emmi, an office cleaner, and her immediate neighbors attempt to convince their landlord to terminate her lease. The undercurrent guiding these reactions is a perceived inappropriateness of a sexual relationship between a non-white (animalistic) foreign laborer and an ethnic German woman. From the stress, Ali and Emmi's relationship to falter and Ali develops a severe ulcer that ultimately kills him in the film's conclusion.

Even before the film begins the viewer knows that there is a disconnect between Ali, played by Fassbinder's then lover El Hedi ben Salem, and his adopted German home. The title *Angst Essen Seele auf* is grammatically incorrect and roughly translates as 'fear eat up soul'. The distance between Ali and Germany is clear for the onset as he is unable to utilize grammatically correct German to facilitate his assimilation. This disconnect is ever present throughout the film

and is further illustrated in the scene where Emmi, hoping to re-integrate herself to her co-workers, forces Ali to display his muscles to them as an animal in the zoo. The love between Emmi and Ali is real but it is fated to fail by the unbridgeable distance that exists between their cultures. This theme of foreign male lover and older ethnic German woman is foreshadowed in Fassbinder's 1970 *Der Amerikanische Soldat*.¹¹ In this film there is a brief scene that describes a love relationship between a Turk and an older German woman – the woman is murdered – who is the killer – a ‘crazed’ Turk or angry boyfriend? Again, the foreigner is portrayed as an animalistic individual unable to fully participate or integrate into German society.

In this initial presentation of foreigners in German film, the viewer is repeatedly confronted with the great disconnect between ethnic Germans and their growing foreign labor source. Fassbinder's intentions were not necessarily to illuminate the plight of the *Ausländer* in these films but his inattention, or his over-simplified categorization is illustrative of Randall Halle's first stage of ex-habitant. The representations are created by Germans without input from the *Ausländer* and the fixed presentation of inescapable differences or cultural appropriateness is evident in the films of Werner Rainer Fassbinder. I now turn to Halle's second stage, co-habitant.

Kanak Attak

While the concept of ex-habitant, co-habitant, and in-habitant may be more easily grasped as a temporally linear movement, there is significant overlap between the last two

¹¹ *Der Amerikanische Soldat*. Prod. and Dir. Werner Rainer Fassbinder. 80 min., Kinowelt Home Entertainment, 2007. DVD

stages. The *Kanak Attak* movement is one that is currently thriving as is the popularity of the Fatih Akin's films which I argue suggest the concluding in-habitant phase. With this said, the roots of the current *Kanak Attak* movement are best understood as evolving from the literary work of Feridun Zaimoglu during the 1990s. Zaimoglu, born in Anatolia in 1964, has lived in Germany for more three decades and is the author of *Kanaksprak* (1995) considered to be a central text informing the *Kanak Attak* movement.¹² Zaimoglu's literary work centers on being a

powerful manifesto of identity . . . [and] by including men and women from all areas of society, the Turkish diaspora groups represented in [Zaimoglu's writings] becomes another microscopic reflection of German society at large. Neither German nor Turkish, they set out to construct an alternative self-image that emancipates itself from both German and Turkish stereotypes, prejudices and clichés.¹³

While Zaimoglu focuses his writings primarily on the hyper hetero-normative male criminal milieus of ghetto areas in Germany urban centers¹⁴, the *Kanak Attak* movement that has arisen from his portrayal of an alternate interactions with the host culture beyond what Zaimoglu terms the happily assimilating "Ali-type"¹⁵ is more egalitarian and far reaching in its mission.

In its November 1998 manifesto, *Kanak Attak* states:

Kanak Attak challenges fundamentally the status of 'foreigners'. Even if there is a partial granting of civil rights, this would fail to meet our ideas. Without considering it as heaven on earth, if everyone has passports, a right to vote and similar socio-political rights, it is a necessary requirement that everyone receives at least, on a formal level, the same rights. That's why we welcome every attempt to reduce inequality. After all, citizenship is of great significance taking

¹² Sandra Hestermann, "German-Turkish Diaspora" in Monika Fludernik, Ed., *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments*. (Rodopi: New York, New York, 2003), 369.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 361 and also see *Kanak Attack*, prod. And dir. Lars Becker, 81 min., Concorde Home Entertainment, 2000, Region 2 DVD.

¹⁵ Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanaksprak: 24 Misstoöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1995), 31.

everyday life and sometimes even existential situations into consideration.¹⁶

Seeking to destabilize previous held stereotypical conceptions, the activities of the *Kanak Attak* movement, a group of Turkish-German artists and political activists centered throughout Germany's urban areas, engages in a variety of disruptive pranks, art happenings, films and demands for acknowledging the contributions of Turkish-Germans to contemporary German culture.¹⁷ The 2001 faux-documentary *Philharmonie Köln - 40 Jahre Einwanderung*¹⁸ discussed in the introduction is an illustrative example of how the Kanak Attak group seek to achieve their self set goals.

The film makers intentions in *Philharmonie Köln - 40 Jahre Einwanderung* is to make the German interviewees uncomfortable. This is initially accomplished by conducting the interviews in English. By asking the ethnic German interviewees questions in their non-native language, the interviewers seek to illustrate how the halting and often disjointed responses make the interviewees seem unintelligent. This is an attempt to illuminate how when Turks are interviewed by the German media often seem to be unintelligent because they cannot enunciate their ideas in a nuanced form.

Beyond language, the questions asked of the German interviewees were also intended to creating discomfort. The male *Kanak Attak* interviewer asked questions in regards to religion and the place of women in German society (questions often posed to Muslim minorities). In particular, the interviewer asked the interviewees to explain the biblical passage in Colossians 3:18: *Wives, submit yourselves onto your husbands, as it is fit in the Lord*. A number of the

¹⁶ available at <http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/about.html>

¹⁷ Cite newspaper ads [research]

¹⁸ Available at: http://www.kanak-tv.de/online_streaming.shtml

interviewees refused to comment on the passage stating that it is an archaic and non-relevant passage even if they did hold themselves to be Christians. One interviewee stated the response that I believe the Kanak Attak interviewer was seeking. The respondent indicated, “Das ist kein guter Ansatz, Informationen aus ihrem Kontext zu nehmen so das die Öffentlichkeit den Gesamtzusammenhang nicht versteht.”¹⁹ The inappropriateness of taking a piece of information out of context and applying to it a centralizing label to a whole culture is exactly what the *Kanak Attak* group seeks to illustrate and disrupt.

The next set of questions in *Philharmonie Köln - 40 Jahre Einwanderung* continue this agenda. According to the interviewer, the rate of women professors in Germany as compared to teaching professionals in Arab countries is 3.5% in Germany and 30% in Arab countries.²⁰ After presenting this assertion, the interviewer asks, “is there a systematic discrimination in your culture?”²¹ The responders provide a variety of answers, some in German and some in English. The more nuanced answers were given in German. Some expressed their concern that there is a continuing problem of sexual discrimination in the German educational system while others felt that the work force was more equally divided. One respondent, however, providing the golden nugget that the interviewer was seeking stated (in English) that “It is a biological problem for many women. They interrupt their studies to establish a family.”²² One wonders if terming women as possessors of a ‘biological problem’ would have been the respondents choice of words in his native tongue. Possibly but the agenda of the *Kanak Attak* interviewer is accomplished as

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ I have not been able to ascertain the correctness of this assertion. There is certainly a disconnect between “professors” in Germany and “teaching professionals” in Arab countries that might radically skew the numbers. With that said, the factualness of the assertion is secondary to the agenda of Kanak Attak and may even illustrate how media individuals shape questions to pursue specifically desired responses.

²¹ Available at: http://www.kanak-tv.de/online_streaming.shtml

²² Ibid.

the tables have turned and the German interviewee is presented as being archaic and discriminatory in his ideas much like the perception of Turks in the German media.

Kanak Attak has made a variety of other short films over the past five years. Among them are *Weisse Ghetto* (2002), *Das Märchen von der Integration* (2002), and most recently *Schland ist das Land* filmed in June 2006 during the World Cup tournament held in Germany. All of these short films (between 8 and 15 minutes) continue the agenda of the 2001 *Philharmonie Köln - 40 Jahre Einwarderung* to disrupt previous held self conceptions of ethnic Germans concerning the Turkish minority population in Germany. In *Weisse Ghetto* (literally the ‘white ghetto’), a number of white ethnic Germans are asked a variety of leading questions (this time in German) such as “Do you think this is a ghetto?, What is it like to live in a white ghetto?, Do you speak a ghetto dialect?”²³ The interviewer also inquired of a police officer walking by if he has difficulty controlling the population in the white ghetto. The respondents all react with a kind of humorous shock as they look around them and see the rather upscale neighborhood they are standing in (probably in Cologne) being described as a ghetto. The intention of the film makers is clear, however, as they are asking questions regularly asked of Turkish inhabitants living in such neighborhoods as Kreuzberg in Berlin or “little Istanbul” in Cologne. The only respondent to acknowledge in the affirmative is the one asked about “ghettosprak”. He responds proudly “genau, genau” (a semi-slang term for correct or exactly). This use of slang is suggestive of the *Kanaksprak* associated with Turkish-Germans who have purposely adopted a new lingo – not unlike eubonics in the United States embraced by some African-Americans – to demonstrate the uniqueness of their culture. This use of slang across cultures is illustrated in the next film to

²³Ibid.

be discussed, *Schland ist das Land*.

Filmed during the 2006 World Cup tournament in Germany, *Schland ist das Land* is an eleven minute short film depicting a variety of ethnic Germans – most of whom are young inebriated males – being asked whether they are in Germany or *Schland*. Most describe themselves as being part of the *Schland*. *Schland* is a relatively new slang term utilized initially by drunk footballers to describe their hyper-national conception of Germany. It has a literal meaning of previous useless items being utilized for a new and useful purpose. The film makers latch onto this double entendre and press the interviewees to enunciate how ‘their’ Germany is a new and dynamic one. The questions and intention of the questions are perceived by most of the interviewees but for some the double meaning is lost. The resulting buffoonery of the respondents – again mostly drunken football fans – is amusing but the intention of the film makers to push ethnic Germans to reconsider the place within which they reside is clear.

The final film I want to investigate in this section is the fifteen minute 2002 film *Das Märchen von der Integration*. Playing on the title of a collection of poetry by the Turkish-German poet Aras Ören²⁴, this film is the only in the series of films produced by *Kanak Attak Productions* that is not presented as a faux-documentary. The film begins with a young Turkish-German awakening to find a letter from the German government in her mailbox. The letter states that to remain in the country she will have to fully integrate to German culture. To accomplish this task she must complete a series of interviews with everyday ethnic Germans who will then sign off on her application to prove her assimilation to German culture. In the he following scenes the viewer watches as she amusingly engages Germans in conversation on *essential*

²⁴ Aras Ören’s 1978 *Deutschland: Ein türkische Märchen* (Düsseldorf: Claasen, 1978). Ören is one of the leading figures of the *Gastarbeiterliteratur* movement

German culture. These essential items include going grocery shopping and buying ‘good’ German foods such as sausage and copious amounts of alcohol, discussing the ‘hotness’ of a nude German women depicted in a copy of the daily paper, and watching a football match and being consumed with nationalist pride at the scoring of a goal. Along the way, the protagonist is collecting signatures to prove her assimilation.

The protagonist’s final task is to eat a *proper* German meal before she is fully assimilated. Composed of a huge slab of meat, sausages and various cheeses, the assimilating Turkish-German eats the food with mock relish as she sees the finish line of assimilation just ahead. Unfortunately, the meal makes her sick and she runs to the toilet to defecate. Finding no toilet paper in the bathroom, she decides to use her assimilation papers to do the job and as the scene fades the words *Integrier mich am Arsch* appears on the screen.

The message of the *Kanak Attak* movement is never clearer than in this moment. The over-the-top nature of this and other productions by the *Kanak Attak* group are designed to illustrate their dissatisfaction with the perceived status-quo of assimilate or get out message within Germany. The members of this movement assert themselves – through these films and various artistic happenings – as carriers of a vibrant culture, rejecting the social benevolence of liberal Germans whose they see as pursuing an agenda of assimilation, and confronting the hypocrisies of *Leitkultur* as a societal framework. This dramatic call for a change is done in an ‘in your face’ manner that has resulting in the Kanak Attak group receiving much negative press in the German media. In the actions of the Kanak Attak group we see Randall Halle’s suggestion of an co-habitant phase. No longer is there an unbridgeable divide between cultures or, if there is, then there are those who are ready to forcibly remove it like an old band-aid on a skinned

knee. This unsettling or distressing period of cultural competition and demand for acknowledgment of cultural vitality seen in the actions of *Kanak Attak* leads, I argue, to Halle's third stage in-habitant. In this phase, as we will see in the following discussion of Fatih Akin's films, there is a diminishing of cultural competition with a pronounced focus on cultural overlap and the production of a hybridity between cultures.

Fatih Akin

Born in Hamburg to Turkish *gastarbeiter* parents in the year of the cessation of the formal Guest working program between German and Turkey (1973) Fatih Akin, a 2000 graduate of the Hamburg College of Fine Arts, has directed and or produced ten films between 1995 and 2006.²⁵ Akin's work has been increasingly well-received by audiences in Germany, Turkey and throughout the world. Akin's two commercially successful films to date are *Im Juli* (2000) and *Gegen die Wand* (2004). A central characteristic to both of these films – and Akin's film corpus at large – is the developing overlap, interconnections and dismissals of previous taboos of Turkish and German culture as experienced by a new Turkish and German generation. I would like to investigate these themes in the context of Randall Halle's final stage of in-habitant.

Im Juli is the light-hearted love story of a young German student teacher named Daniel – played by German heartthrob Moritz Bleibtreu – who has secretly fallen in love with a young Turkish-German girl named Melek who traveling through Daniel's hometown of Hamburg from her home of Berlin, is going to Istanbul for the summer holiday. Daniel impulsively sets out to follow his new found love to Istanbul. Accompanied by Juli, a street vendor who is secretly in

²⁵ <http://www.filmportal.de/>

love with Daniel, the protagonist sets off on an adventure across borders to meet his true love under the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul. The famous Bosphorus Bridge, of course, literally and symbolically joins the continents of Europe and Asia. Setting this as the meeting place of cross-cultural love is not incidental item for the film maker.

There are two particularly poignant themes in terms of interactions between what I argue are increasingly indistinct boundaries between Turkish and German cultures. First, throughout the film, never at any moment is there even a minor suggestion of the inappropriateness of the love relationship between a Turk and a German that so centrally characterized the themes within the Fassbinder films discussed above. The fact that this is utterly absent is suggestive. This lack of inappropriateness – for lack of a better term – is also evident in Fatih Akin's 2002 *Solino*, a film that explores the generational changes of an Italian immigrants whose father had come to the Ruhr region in Germany as a *gastarbeiter* in the 1960s.²⁶ That sexual relationships between Turks – or other minority immigrants – with Germans is treated without any suggestion of transgression or inappropriateness is a dramatic change. In *Im Juli* the relationship is between a German male and a Turkish female and maybe, one could argue, that this is less transgressive than the earlier seen relationships in Fassbinder's films between minority males and ethnic German females. However, in *Solino* that is the nature of the romantic relationship: German female and immigrant male. The fact that this is not an issue in either film suggests the film makers intention to diminish older taboos and perceived appropriate boundaries in German society.

To accomplish their journey towards love, Daniel and Juli must travel across a variety of

²⁶ *Solino*. prod. and dir. Fatih Akin, 120 min., Warner Home Video, 2002, Region 2 DVD.

borders to reach their destination in Istanbul. To accomplish this they travel together and separately across a number of national border stations. Partly hijinks – remember this a light hearted romantic comedy – and partly social commentary, the two experience movement across pre-set boundaries difficult and must find ways to navigate and circumvent rules so that they may accomplish their desired goal. Expressing his predicament to a disinterested border guard, played by director Fatih Akin, Daniel declares that he needs the freedom to move, that old boundaries are much too limiting. Finally, finding themselves on opposite sides of the Romanian border, Daniel and Juli declare a marriage between them to be permitted to rejoin and continue their journey. Much has been made of this scene by other scholars of transnationalism²⁷ but the presence of this portrayal in conjunction with the normalcy of cross cultural love suggests that these old types of borders are becoming increasingly archaic.

As lighthearted as *Im Juli* is, Fatih Akin's 2004 tragedy *Gegen die Wand* is equally dark. *Gegen die Wand*, whose title was changed to Head-On for its release in the United States, is the tragic tale of love between two Turkish-Germans.²⁸ The two main characters, Sibel and Cahit Tomruk, played by Birol Ünel, meet in the mental ward at a hospital in Hamburg. Both running from their pasts – Cahit from the death of his first wife, an ethnic German, and Sibel, played by former porn actress Sibel Kekilli, from the patriarchal control of her first generation *gastarbieter* Father and brother – they enter a marriage of convenience.

Sibel is caught between two worlds, what she sees as the exotic freedom of the German

²⁷ Tom Cheesman, "Juggling Burdens of Representation: Black, Red, Gold and Turquoise" German Life and Letters 59 no. 4 (2006): 471–487. Katherine Pratt Ewing, "Between Cinema and Social Work: Diasporic Turkish Women and the (Dis)Pleasures of Hybridity," Cultural Anthropology, 21, no. 2 (2006): 265-294.

²⁸ Head-On, Prod. and dir. Fatih Akin, 118 min., Bavaria Media GmbH, 2004, DVD.

world and the stifling control of her traditional Turkish father. Her story can be seen in the frequent New York Times articles about the rash of so-called honor-killings in Germany over the past several years. It is only when she is able to negotiate between the two worlds that she finds some semblance of happiness albeit a short lived feeling. Sibel's inability to fully extricate herself from the patriarchal control of her father and later Turkey may illustrate a conflict between gender roles as Cahit is much more successful in his quest towards hybridity.

Early in the film, Cahit is represented as a Turk who has purposely forgotten his Turkish heritage. During the scene when Cahit asks for Sibel's hand in marriage, his poor Turkish language skills are probed by Sibel's brother. Asking where his Turkish speaking ability has gone, Cahit glibly replies, 'I've lost it' and stares coldly at the brother. Following this scene, Cahit's Turkish language skills slowly return and by the film's tragic finally, he is fluent once again. But, even with his return of 'Turkishness', Cahit is portrayed as a hybrid Turkish-German. It is a frequent tactic of Akin throughout the film to present dialogue that begins in German but shifts to Turkish and back again. The ability to move linguistically between German and Turkish and the nuanced way it in which it is accomplished is suggestive of Akin's intention to demonstrate a new hybridity.²⁹

Perhaps the most illustrative scene of this new hybridity is when Cahit travels to Istanbul to find Sibel and is in a taxi-cab with a Turkish cabdriver who had formally lived in Munich. Cahit's Turkish language skills are still marginal and so trying to express himself, he utters a frustrated phrase in German. Realizing that they can communicate in German, the taxi-driver

²⁹ See Leslie A. Adelson, The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) for a discussion of this sort of hybridity in German literature

begins to chat about a variety of mundane topics. Cahit asks the driver where in Germany he is from and when the driver replies from Munich there is an long awkward silence from Cahit. The reason for this is astounding. Cahit had lived in Hamburg for the past several decades and had adopted the stereotypical quiet disdain of the Northern German towards the Southern German. This is not unlike the palpable North -South rivalry that can still be found in some parts of the United States today. This sort of event could never have occurred in the films of Fassbinder, the viewer watches as two Turks – or more correctly, Turkish Germans – ride in a cab in Istanbul and literally enact a classic ethnic German trope! A change in the representations of Turks in German film has occurred.

Conclusion

An investigation of foreigners in German film over the past forty years demonstrates how these representations originated and evolved. German cultural scholar Randall Halle describes the place of foreigners in Germany (as represented in film and novels) as consisting of three distinct phases - ex-habitant, co-habitant, and in-habitant³⁰ suggesting that the social position (inclusion versus exclusion) of *Ausländer* in Germany has altered over the past forty years. During the 1970s Turks were referenced in media and artistic representations as being in need of social uplift – they were outside of society – or were used as a device to argue other social issues. This is evident in the films of Werner Ranier Fassbinder discussed above. During the mid-1990's Turkish-Germans began to assert their cultural uniqueness and cultural contributions to German society – interacting with and confronting society – as evidenced in the short films of

³⁰ Randall Halle.

the *Kanak Attak* group. More recently, the interaction of Turkish-Germans and Germans has resulted in a third way, the creation of a new culture that is neither uniquely German nor Turkish but a multicultural combination of the two.³¹ Investigating the intentions of German and Turkish-German film makers through their presentations of changing gender perceptions and interrogating these evolving representations over time allows the critical viewer to witness the movement through the three phases that Randall Halle describes as ex-habitant, co-habitant, and in-habitant. Interrogating the interconnected representations of gender in the films of Werner Rainer Fassbinder, the *Kanak Attak* group, and Fatih Akin allows an unique interpretation of social, cultural and political attitudes towards the growing minority Turkish population within Germany over the past forty years.

³¹ Betigül Ercan Argun argues that the term *Deutschkei* (a combination of Deutschland and Turkei) is a more appropriate than the hyphenated Turkish-German to describe this new cultural reality in Turkey in Germany: The Transnational Sphere of Deutschkei. (New York: Routledge), 2003.