Remixing Film Histories: Fatih Akın and the Creation of a Transnational Film History

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Fatih Akın is the recipient of a variety of awards ranging from the Bundesverdienstkreuz, to prizes from the European Parliament, to honors in international film festivals. His films are critically acclaimed and celebrated at film events and in the press worldwide, attracting a range of diverse appraisal and offering a plethora of critical starting points for discussion. In the last decades, the scholarship about his films has been dominated by thematic concerns related to questions of minorities, integration, and identity politics in Germany (and Europe). Yet by analyzing the aesthetic use of sights and sounds in Akın’s films, we encounter a variety of new interpretations for his sonic and visual mixes and juxtapositions, in his use of diegetic and non-diegetic film music, in the dialogues, in very specific casting choices, and so forth. These mixed and diverse filmic tools in Akın’s films ultimately compose, as I call it, an aesthetic of heterogeneity, defined as the filmic sampling and mixing of culturally diverse sights and sounds.

In this article, I will showcase another effect of Akın’s aesthetic of heterogeneity by focusing on Akın’s creation of a transnational film history and his contribution to a reevaluation of national film histories. Akın has been discussed as a transnational filmmaker in scholarship (e.g. Gemünden; Halle; Mennel «Bruce Lee»), but the question of how his transnational aesthetics contribute to the development of a transnational film history has not yet received much attention. I argue that Akın’s exchanges with national film histories, such as Turkish cinema, are a part of his transnational filmmaking practices and aesthetics; at the same time, his cinema is also interrelated to and affects other cinemas. Akın’s cinema helps to undermine a strictly national categorization of film and film history by, for example, synthesizing intertextual references to Yeşilçam, Young Turkish, and New Turkish Cinema as well as New German and Turkish-German Cinema. Using Auf der anderen Seite (The Edge of Heaven, 2007) as a case study and examining in particular sound, casting, and mise-en-scène, I will discuss how Akın’s filmic product is a synthesis of elements that are known from, for example, Turkish (and German) filmic traditions. By no means are Akın’s filmic references and intertextualities limited to Turkish cinema, but within the scope of this paper, the fo-
cus will be on Turkish film, which ranges in this case from the artistically and politically ambitious Young Turkish Cinema to the commercial, star-driven Yeşilçam films, as well as to contemporary Turkish television and film such as New Turkish Cinema. Finally, I argue, that Akin’s synthesis creates a new, transnational film history by drawing on specific national filmic archives.

Although recent film studies have suggested that the film industry is a transnational undertaking (e.g. Randall Halle’s book *German Film After Germany*), film histories traditionally have been (and in large part, continue to be) read and understood in a national context, even though the transnational has risen as a category in film studies, the national as a category persists. Nationally organized film histories dominate college course syllabi and book titles in publishing houses such as *New Turkish Cinema* (2013), *German National Cinema* (2010), *A New History of German Cinema* (2012), *French Cinema: From Its Beginnings to the Present* (2004), etc. Traditionally, these types of film histories provide chronological overviews of national cinemas. Even if the technological development of film is the structuring element of the publication (e.g. from silent to sound to digital film, etc.), these parts tend to have national subcategories (Gomery and Pafort-Overduin). In his article «Where is National Cinema Today (and Do We Still Need It?)», Ian Christie states that, «[t]he theoretical contradictions and limitations of national cinema are well known, but the phenomenon persists» (20). Even though national cinema is questioned as a category, it is still flourishing as seen in advertising and at film festivals, for example, where films are marketed as national products (19). Christie provides a wide range of scholarship that is highly critical of the national as a category, citing, for example, Thomas Elsaesser, who sees national cinema, similar to national literature, as a bourgeois construct (24). Christie ultimately finishes by reinstating the importance of the national for film scholarship (28).

Nevertheless, despite the persistence of the national as a category, the last two decades have given rise to the transnational as a category for film studies (see also: Hake, «German Cinema» 110; Higbee and Lim 8). The increased numbers of book and journal publications, across disciplines, on transnational film of the last years such as *In Focus: Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (2006), *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (2013), *German Film After Germany: A Transnational Aesthetic* (2008), *World Cinemas: Transnational Perspectives* (2009), *Transnational Cinemas* (2010 to present), and so forth, are a proof of this. This transnational shift highlights «cross-border cinematic connections» on cultural, economic, and geographical levels (Higbee and Lim 8). Additionally, there is film scholarship within Australian, Scandinavian, and Southeastern cinemas that shows...
the wide ranging intersections within transnational film/history (Limbrick; Miyao; Transnational Film Studies). This scholarship begins to challenge the writing of national film histories with its transnational context. The website of the transnational film history symposium, Transnational Film Studies on lnu.se states, for example:

Transnational studies both challenge and complement the writing of national film histories by seeking to explore how film culture has always and everywhere connected with developments that have transcended national limits. This can be seen in the fields of technology, economy, distribution, production as well as aesthetics and contents – ideologically and as pure entertainment.

At the same time, there are scholarly works that react to the contemporary trend which views the transnational as a «new» category in (German) film studies (Hake, «German Cinema» 110ff.). Sabine Hake points out that the relationships of terms such as national and inter- and transnational are more complicated than their common use in recent scholarship implies, and that transnationalism in film has existed for a long time (111). She suggests examining film history to see the complex relations between these terms, beginning even with early cinema. Ultimately, there are also scholars who are critical of history itself as a category. These scholars argue that the actual past remains a construct, written by people who have not actually experienced the particular history they are writing about, the actual past remains a construct (Gaines 72, 73).

I see Akin as part of a transnational filmmaking industry, in terms of production and aesthetics (as conceptualized in Halle). In that way, Akin’s films are similar to the films of Michael Hanke, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Krzysztof Kieslowski, as Goktürk and Ezli have discussed in their work on globalization and Akin’s cinema (Göktürk 35; Ezli «Von Lücken»). I add, ultimately, that Akin’s films also produce a transnational film history. Akin’s films urge us to analyze new, intertextual constellations within (his) cinema. For the purposes of this article, the transnational history of film refers mainly to the films made in Germany and Turkey during the last century, the scholarship about these films, and to their intertextual allusions, citations, and references in Akin’s work.

Before I begin discussing The Edge of Heaven, I will briefly illustrate what I mean by Akin’s aesthetic of heterogeneity and how it helps to create a transnational film history. By displaying distinctive musical and linguistic mixes as well as a variety of diverse characters and settings, Akin’s films offer an experience of heterogeneity for their viewers. His cinematic use of diverse settings, cast, sound, and so forth ultimately constitutes his aesthetic of heterogeneity. Taking the film’s soundtrack as an example, we see how it helps to provide a sonic diversity with the work of German-Romanian DJ Shantel,
Akin’s musical collaborator and the composer of the original score for *The Edge of Heaven*. *The Edge of Heaven* makes the sounds of a variety of European regions audible. Thereby, the soundtrack invites the film’s audience to «aesthetically experience a heterogeneous European polyphony» (Gueneli 337). That is, the film’s sound provides a sonic imagination of a multiethnic, multilingual, and diverse Europe. Shantel’s music is a mix from northern, southern and eastern European regions and the various languages spoken in the film feature different dialects and accents of the filmic characters, which are, in this case, cast from Turkey and Germany. Together these heterogeneous sounds testify to a filmic normalization of diversity and multilingualism. However, the acoustic representation of a diverse European sound is only one effect of Akin’s aesthetic of heterogeneity. In several instances in the film, it also changes our perception of a (national) film history. The aesthetic (aural) experiences of diversity are partially a result of the interrelated (film) histories. We can explore this further by examining casting, sound, and mise-en-scène. Through these, Akin ultimately helps to create a truly transnational film history, as I will show in the next section.

*The Edge of Heaven* is Akin’s second part of the trilogy *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* (Love, Death, and the Devil), which tells the story of three estranged parent-child relationships. The individual stories take the audience through a transnational journey depicting Hamburg, Bremen, Istanbul, and Turkish Black Sea cities and villages. In my discussion, I will showcase two scenes from *The Edge of Heaven* – the «Helenenstrasse» scene in Bremen and the «Meze» scene in Istanbul – that help us to better understand Akin’s creation of a transnational film history.10 Beginning with the Helenenstrasse scene, the film’s audience encounters a simultaneity of interrelated national film histories such as Yeşilçam, Young Turkish and New Turkish Cinema. Let me begin by briefly describing the Bremen sequence: Very much in contrast to the film’s opening sequence in the Black Sea region (long shots, slow camera movements, and quiet musical soundtrack), the succeeding Bremen sequence, set during a May Day demonstration, begins with fast-cut images. The first scene depicts street demonstrators and a German marching band that accompanies them (*Spielmannzug*). A medium-long shot shows Ali Aksu (Tuncel Kurtiz), a smiling man in his sixties. The cheerful elderly man walks in the opposite direction of the May Day participants. The next scene shows the Helenenstrasse – Bremen’s long-standing red light district – which Ali has entered. The scene is quiet. The focus is now on the man walking by the sex workers’ colorful 19th century houses until he stops in front of one of the windows. After a quick conversation, the sex worker Yeter/Jessy (Nursel Köse), a woman in her forties, dressed in a latex outfit,11 lets Ali into her house. The static
camera shows two crowded, adjacent rooms, which are rendered in red and yellow, creating an erotic ambiance. Shortly after Ali comes in, Yeter turns on the cassette recorder. The music is a song by Neşe Karaböcek, a Turkish pop star who frequently sung in the Yeşilçam films of the 1970s.

Karaböcek’s song is a tango written by Fehmi Ege (1902–78), a composer of Turkish tango, operetta, and classic Turkish music. The soundtrack in this scene alone highlights transnational intertextualities and motives of travel and migration: Having roots in the colonial experience in the Americas and the Caribbean, the Argentinian tango was created by European immigrants in Argentina/Uruguay in the 19th century. The Turkish tango, as featured in The Edge of Heaven, is the composition of a Turkish musician, and calls to mind the Yeşilçam films of the 1970s. The song’s introduction in the Helenenstrasse scene functions as an intertextual reference to this hybrid musical text and its transatlantic, multidirectional travels and, within the scene, emphasizes the melancholy prevailing in the sex worker’s house. On the one hand, the Turkish tango connects the two Turkish-German characters, Yeter and Ali, and, on the other hand, on a plot level, it reveals Jessy/Yeter to be of Turkish origin in the first place. For it is after Yeter plays the song that Ali inquires about her nationality. Karaböcek’s interpretation of the song helps to create a nostalgic space for the two émigrés. It also helps them to get increasingly familiar with each other. This is underscored through the names that Ali uses to address Yeter. He begins by calling her Jessy (her English name), moves to Yeter (her Turkish name), and ends with Gülüm (a name of affection in Turkish, meaning my rose).

The song played from the cassette recorder is Karaböcek’s 1972 interpretation of «Son Hatıra» (Last Memory). The medium of the antiquated cassette recorder, with its characteristic noise, as much as the melancholy song itself, creates a specific aural setting, an intermedial experience of exile and nostalgia for Turkey of the past decades that generates a connecting element between the two protagonists. However, in addition to a cultural connection between Yeter and Ali, Karaböcek’s song helps to establish a filmic connection to Yeşilçam, and therefore to Turkish cinema history.

This sequence not only recalls Yeşilçam cinema, it intertwines Yeşilçam, Young Turkish, New Turkish, and New German Cinema through intertextual references. Yeşilçam itself is named after a street in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, and refers to a commercially oriented, star-driven, popular Turkish cinema that emerged in the 1950s, with its heydays from 1965 to 1975 (Kaya Mutlu 417; Suner 3, 7). Yeşilçam «produced cheap, low-quality films with large profit margins, [that were] solely aimed at the star system […]» (Ellinger and Kayi 582). While there were various popular genres such as comedies and
gangster films, a large majority of Yeşilçam productions were melodramas. Among these, Dilek Kaya Mutlu differentiates between the Yeşilçam films of the 1950s, the village melodramas (which have a rural setting in Anatolia, in which the conflicts are played out within the same class) and the films from the 1960s and 70s, the urban melodramas (which predominantly feature a rural migrant in the big city, who has to struggle with the «westernized, urban» upper class. In these there is often a class conflict that needs to be overcome) (419).

While extremely popular and beloved by a large mainstream audience, Yeşilçam was heavily criticized by intellectuals. According to Kaya Mutlu, critics disapproved of Yeşilçam films early on:

[The critics] not only viewed Yeşilçam films as undesirable and unacceptable but also condemned their viewers as «passive», «irresponsible», and «mindless» masses. Gaining a more political tone, such criticisms sharpened in the 1960s. Overall, to the critical intellectual eye, Yeşilçam cinema was not only artless but uninterested in the «real problems of Turkish society»; it was «commercial», «exploitative», and «fake» […]. (418)

Furthermore, critics saw these films with their conservative content to be a «reproduction of patriarchal ideology» (418). Until the 1970s Yeşilçam was a film industry that prominently produced films for a mainstream audience with a family-oriented and ultimately patriarchal filmic content. In the 1980s, when it had lost its family audience due partially to the arrival and spread of television programs, it turned to soft porn. This was a strategy developed to cope with the declining numbers of Yeşilçam audiences. The cinema industry saw a market with new migrant workers in the city (Dönmez 99).

Even though critics disregarded the classic star-driven Yeşilçam films, the films still have an impact in Turkey today, two to three generations later. Kaya Mutlu points out that the presence and recognition of stars and films from that era and the clichéd topics of Yeşilçam films are a common aspect of today’s popular culture:

Yeşilçam cinema has […] gained a significant place in Turkish social memory and cultural imagery. Besides their frequent appearance on Turkish TV, one often finds references to Yeşilçam films in Turkey’s popular culture today, from commercials to talk shows, to music videos. Moreover, according to 2006 research conducted by the market research company TNS PIAR, the Turkish public, even the younger generation, lists Yeşilçam stars first when they are asked to name three film actors/actresses that come to mind. (417–18)

According to Kaya Mutlu, Yeşilçam cinema becomes important for «Turkish social memory and cultural imagery» as produced in contemporary Turkish media. But Yeşilçam references are also reiterated in Akın’s film, and thus gain
a place in German cinema as well. That is, similar to the Turkish media quoted above, Akin also partakes in revisiting and connecting to a transnational aspect of this cultural memory and imagery of Yeşilçam cinema. It is important to note that many migrants and immigrants in Germany and elsewhere in Europe watched Yeşilçam films on VHS. These were rented, for example, through greengrocers in the 1980s and 90s (Goldberg 420; Eren 176, 177) and constituted a large section of the viewers across Germany. Some films could also be seen on early regional Turkish-German TV channels such as TD1 Berlin. That is, Yeşilçam films belong to the cultural memory of many Turkish-German families living in Germany and by extension are part of the Turkish-German filmic memory of the first and second generation of migrants. Moreover, on a different level, there are thematic and generic connections between Akin’s cinema and Yeşilçam. The popular Yeşilçam subject of rural/urban migration and the topic of the migrant worker in Germany, for example, offers parallels. In terms of genre, many Yeşilçam films were melodramas. This is a genre that Akin’s films play with, for example, in Head-On. In fact, Akin’s genre-mixes, particularly those involving melodrama, put him in line with filmmakers such as Douglas Sirk and Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Berghahn 251, 252). Thus, I suggest, Akin’s cinema encounters Yeşilçam, as well as German/American melodramatic filmic traditions as referenced above, on a variety of levels, making it a part of a transnational film history.

Another link to Yeşilçam as well as to Young Turkish and New Turkish Cinema is made through casting. An example is the casting of the recently deceased, popular Turkish television actor Tuncel Kurtiz (1936–2013), who plays the role of Ali in The Edge of Heaven. Kurtiz’s life and work became important additions to Akin’s cinema. In his early career, which began in the 1960s, Kurtiz wrote and directed political satire, acted in and directed theater. These theater productions included plays by Bertolt Brecht, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O’Neill. Kurtiz also acted in Turkish political movies that were critical of the government. In fact, he became famous for a role he played in an early film by acclaimed Turkish director Yılmaz Güney, the creator of the Young Turkish Cinema of the 1970s. In the 1970s and 80s, Kurtiz lived in «semi-exile» because of his pieces that were critical of the government. During this time, he worked in international/transnational film and theater productions, including those for the Schaubühne in Berlin (Baydar). While in Sweden, Kurtiz even directed a film about «immigrants in the West,» the award-winning Swedish-Turkish low-budget co-production Gül Hasan (Hasan The Rose, Tr/S, 1979) (Baydar). Much later in his career, he was cast in Tabutta Rövaşata (Somersault in the Coffin, Dir. Derviş Zaim, 1996), which was one of the first films to mark the beginning of New Turkish Cin-
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This casting of Kurtiz created a connection to his earlier socially critical films from the 1970s. Finally, with his role in *The Edge of Heaven*, Kurtiz lived an international renaissance that brought him to Cannes in 2007.

Through the actor Kurtiz, we get a wide-ranging connection to Turkish and international theater and cinema history, including to Turkish cinema legend Güney. These subtle Güney references in *The Edge of Heaven* are important for their political implications, when we consider Güney's filmography as well as his biography. Güney began with commercial films and was associated with Yeşilçam in the early years of his career. He started his own production company in 1968, Güney Filimcilik, and moved toward a less commercially-driven filmmaking. Kurtiz starred in his 1970 film *Umut* (*Hope*), a political film about a man with economic and social problems in Turkey. *Hope* set the stage for a new Turkish cinema, which initiated the artistically and politically motivated Young Turkish Cinema (Ellinger and Kayi 598–99). In 1972, Güney was sentenced to several years in prison, due to his alleged criminal activities, such as «sheltering anarchist refugees» (Suner 5) and «killing a judge» (Kenny). He wrote several scripts in prison, including *Yol* (*The Way*, 1982), which had to be filmed by his associates while he remained in prison. *Yol* was prohibited in Turkey, but was smuggled out of the country and won the Palme d’Or at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival. It is said to be «the most internationally acclaimed Turkish film ever made to date» (Suner 5). Güney managed to escape from prison in 1981 and lived his remaining years until 1984 in French exile. In France, he directed his last film *The Wall* (*Duvar*, 1983) (Suner 5–6).

These Güney references in Akin’s film open new historic archives and foreground thematic continuities. They relate to and commemorate a Cannes Film Festival winner, social-justice seeker, refugee, and socially critical filmmaker in exile. Güney’s criticism and quest for social justice from the 1970s and 80s seem to be continued in the stories of Yeter and Ayten in *The Edge of Heaven*. The filmic narrative in *The Edge of Heaven* informs the audience that Yeter’s husband was killed in the seventies in Maraş. He was possibly a Kurdish political activist. Yeter talks about this incident during her first evening at Ali Aksu’s house. The viewer can infer that Yeter left the country for political and economic reasons after the death of her husband. Film scholar Daniela Berghahn perceives Akin (and Fassbinder) not as political filmmakers as such, but states that «both try to marry the popular with the political» in their films (255). While I agree with Berghahn that Akin manages to bring together the popular with the political, I nevertheless believe that Akin is more political than this statement implies. Akin references the above men-
tioned politically active time in an interview, and hopes that through his films he might provoke political consciousness in his audiences:

There is also a political thrust. In the 80s, a lot of left wing people came to Germany, but the problem we have in Germany is that young people today are less interested in changing anything. Young people are really not interested in society, nor do they feel responsible for their society. My film is to provoke people to feel responsible for other humans. (Badt)

Additionally, Yeter’s daughter Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay) informs Susanne (Hannah Schygullah) in the beginning of the film’s narrative about her quest for «100% human rights.» This goal seems to be a direct continuation of Güney’s inquiries a few decades earlier.18

Ultimately, by casting Kurtiz, Turkey’s late flagship actor, Akın connects his own film to an actor associated with recent television shows, with artistic and political cinema that had a «leftist social realist perspective» (Suner 8) in the 1970s, and with contemporary New Turkish Cinema. The intertextual references to these cinemas are not merely superficial allusions, but also work in different layers within *The Edge of Heaven*. The political messages and criticism of Young Turkish Cinema of the 1970s are subtly revisited thematically and linked to the socio-political complications in Turkey’s present, one such example is the position of the Kurdish minority today and also in Turkey’s recent history, in the 1970s/80s. This can be seen in the case of Yeter’s husband and her daughter fighting for the rights of minorities in Turkey today. Other instances in the film, depicting experiences of exile, deportation, forced migration, political injustices, and so forth, also create intertextual references to Kurtiz and Güney: Ayten enters Germany with false documentation as an illegal migrant. While in Germany, the police discover Ayten’s false identity and she undergoes the processes of applying for asylum. Ayten’s asylum is eventually denied and leads to her deportation. At the same time, Ali, who was in prison for murder, is deported to Turkey. These two deportations bring yet another layer of intertextuality: Kurtiz lived and filmed about experiences of exile in Sweden and Güney spend several years in prison before he fled to France.

It is not only Turkish film history that informs Akın’s transnational filmmaking and production of a transnational film history. It is, in fact, the synthesis of multiple (national) film histories. The Bremen sequence, for example, simultaneously provides intertextual references to New German Cinema (NGC), an equally politically and aesthetically motivated filmmaking that influenced Akın’s cinema. The character’s name, Ali, recalls the protagonist Ali (El Hedi ben Salem), a Moroccan guest worker and love interest of two women, in Fassbinder’s socially critical *Angst essen Seele auf* (Ali: Fear Eats
the Soul, 1974). Furthermore, the character of Yeter represents a connection to both Turkish Cinema and to New German Cinema. It is through the figure of the Turkish sex worker that a link between these film histories can be established. In feminist NGC, for example, Helma Sanders-Brahms comes to mind. The figure of Yeter suggests a similarity to Sanders-Brahms’s Shirin in the 1976 film Shirins Hochzeit (Shirin’s Wedding). In Shirin’s Wedding, the female protagonist (Ayten Erten) plays a Turkish guest worker, who secretly follows her fiancé to Germany. Initially she works as a factory worker living in a hostel with other female guest workers, later she starts a cleaning job and moves out of the hostel. In the course of the film, Shirin undergoes traumatic experiences: she is raped, forced into prostitution, and eventually killed. Although the pitiful figure of Shirin does not have the same self-confidence as her more independent filmic sister Yeter and is in many other ways different from Yeter, the figure of the sex worker connects the two characters. This figure has a history in Turkish cinema.19 Akın states

The aging prostitute is a popular figure in Turkish cinema. However, she is always romanticized […] in that regard, the figure of Yeter can also be seen as my personal view on Turkish cinema. I like the figure [of the aging prostitute], but not the realization of it. It needs some more realism, some more dirt. A little less mainstream. For me, Nursel plays that perfectly. (Monique Akın)

Though the Helenenstrasse scene appears to be nostalgic through Karaböcek’s music, we also encounter the very matter-of-fact workplace of a Turkish sex worker in northern Germany. This quasi-nostalgic setting, with a particular staging of Turkish-German migrants, not only suggests connections to different stages of Turkish cinema history, but also helps to create new images for Turkish-German characters. On the one hand, it connects different film histories; it connects to the mainstream Yeşilçam cinema through the music of Karaböcek and simultaneously to more political and intellectual cinema through the actor Kurtiz. The sequence refers to the figure of the aging sex worker, a well-known figure of Turkish cinema, whom Akın transforms into a contemporary, rougher figure.20 On the other hand, the sequence counters the stereotypical portrayals of Turkish-German guest workers as miserable characters. Such depictions, as known from early films about migrants in West Germany in the 1970s and 80s, are opposed by Akın’s confident and bilingual characters Ali and Yeter. They themselves, as well as their cinematic heritage, become a part of Akín’s audible and visible heterogeneous cinematic Europe. At the same time, they help the viewer rethink questions of and categories around film history.

«Meze in Istanbul» is the second scene I would like to briefly describe. It is a prime example of an intertextual use of the particular Turkish cinematic
iconography of grief. In this scene, Nejat and Susanne are dining together for the first time. Their mood is melancholic. Susanne mourns the death of her daughter and Nejat his distancing from his father. The urban restaurant in Istanbul and the specific musical background in this dinner setting once more recall classic Turkish Yeşilçam films. A bird’s eye camera angle opens the scene and shows the individual Turkish meze dishes as they are being carefully positioned on the dinner table. The diegetic music is Sezen Aksu’s interpretation of the song «Ölürsem yazıktır» (If I Die It Would Be in Vain) from her first pop double album Serçe from 1978. Nejat and Susanne drink raki. Shots of rakı tables scored with a melancholic song like Aksu’s are common in Yeşilçam cinema and are used to depict grief. Toasting with her rakı glass, Susanne states that she wants to drink tonight. The Turkish lyrics, the music, and the characteristic table settings are thus fused with Susanne’s and Nejat’s mourning. The scene combines, peacefully and unproblematically, the local music and food with the two melancholic characters from Germany. The scene thus becomes an audiovisual, aestheticized celebration of grief, adapting sights and sounds of Yeşilçam cinema.

This Yeşilçam aesthetic is portrayed by two actors, who are both intrinsically linked to German film history. Hannah Schygulla reminds of New German Cinema through her roles as a Fassbinder muse and actor in many films of the NGC, most notably in The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (1972), The Marriage of Maria Braun (1979), and Lili Marleen (1981). Baki Davrak is an actor in contemporary Turkish-German cinema and German theater. He played, for example, in Kutluğ Ataman’s Lola & Bilidikid (1997) and in Thomas Arslan’s Dealer (1999). Thus, this scene intertwines film histories through casting, setting, soundtrack as well as mise-en-scène.

The Meze scene, like the Helenenstrasse scene described above, is an example of how film histories relate to each other, how their synthesis in a director’s work creates something new. The historical references do not simply stay on a surface level, but also have consequences for the film’s content. Not only does this intertextuality invite rethinking regarding the validity of a national film history, it also incorporates the socio-political transformation these Turkish actors, directors, and various film industries stand and stood for into the film’s story. Richard Dyer states in his famous book Stars that a star image is a «complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs. […] It is manifest not only in films but in all kinds of media texts» (34). Dyer also notes that a film «may bring out certain features of a star’s image and ignore others» (127). Using Marlene Dietrich as an example, Dyer says, «[h]er face, her name even, carries the «mystique,» no matter what films she makes or what she says» (126). Thus Güney and Kurtiz, as stars who were vividly discussed
in the 1970s, bring their complicated star-images with all their political implications into Akın’s contemporary films as well.\(^\text{21}\) As much as Güney and Kurtiz bring their socio-political features into Akın’s films, it is important not to forget that the process is multidirectional and that Akın’s films also enrich the actors and cinema of Turkey.

What consequence do these references have for Akın’s films and, vice versa, what consequence do the references in Akın’s film have for the actors and films of Turkey? Considering, for example, that these references occur in Akın’s contemporary European films which have received international awards and recognition, one might ask: What do the connections to Güney’s cinema and his controversial status in Turkey of the 1970s imply for Akın’s film? How do these connections affect The Edge of Heaven’s or Güney’s films’ reception in the current, politically charged times? For example, socially conservative Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has received much criticism from Europe for his handling of the Gezi Park protests in the summers of 2013 and 14, and for his short-lived ban of YouTube and Twitter in 2014. Akın, too, has voiced his criticism of Erdoğan and solidarity with the protesters of the Gezi park through a YouTube clip and an open letter early in the summer of 2013 (Akın, «Fatih Akın appelliert»). A new avant-garde cinema and new actors of contemporary Turkish cinema are brought to the foreground against the backdrop of the political cinema of the 1970s. Through his casting choices, Akın influences international recognition for Turkish actors such as Yeşilçay and Kurtiz, who with The Edge of Heaven appear at prominent film festivals such as Cannes and receive global attention. The reverse is true, too. In her discussion of New Turkish Cinema, Suner has a chapter on the Istanbul films that show new sides and perspectives of the city. In this chapter, she includes Akın’s films such as Head-On and Crossing the Bridge which are partially set in Istanbul. Although Suner insists that Akın does not belong to the category of New Turkish Cinema directors such as prominent and award-winning Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz (Suner 77–140), she still mentions him as a contributor to these Istanbul films from a transnational perspective. She calls Akın’s films «transnational Istanbul films» (153).

Whether scholars pigeonhole Akın’s cinema as «belonging» to a certain category of Turkish films or not, the fact that he is discussed in a Turkish cinema book and that his films have a variety of complicated references to Turkish film history challenges mono-nationally categorized films and film history. This challenge underscores the multidirectionality of transnational filmmaking and the transformation of film histories and archives in the process. It becomes important to read these transnational films as indicating a transna-
tional film history. Furthermore, by understanding Yeşilçam, Young Turkish, and New Turkish Cinema, the layers of *The Edge of Heaven* are extended and the film reveals a much more complicated structure.

Taken as a case study, *The Edge of Heaven* demonstrates how our perception of not only «German cinema» but also German film history might be changing. The films and filmic examples urge us to rethink national frameworks when considering film history. Akin, a director who has gone through the institutions of film production (and studied film), combines his academic knowledge with his cultural, filmic heritage and creates an artistic product that demands reconsideration of institutionalized concepts, such as film histories, but also film museums and archives. By including intertextual/-medial references to Turkish classic, popular, political, and contemporary filmmaking through music, casting, and setting, we are subtly invited to recognize and analyze new elements about Turkish film in Akin’s filmmaking. Vice versa, Akin’s cinema expands and intervenes with Turkish and transnational filmmaking. That is, *The Edge of Heaven* becomes a new commemoration of film history. Seen as such, Akin’s film forces us to rethink film history as a category. It challenges national conceptions of histories and, certainly, decentralizes film history made in Germany.

*Notes*

1 See for example, Ezli, «Von der Identität,» 293–301; Gallagher; Knopp 59–77; Pratt Ewing 265–94; Schäffler.

2 Recent Akin scholarship has started to discuss individual aspects of these sights and sounds: Göktürk, «Mobilität und Stillstand,» 15–45; Gramling 353–72; Gueneli, «Challenging European Borders»; Gueneli, «The Sound of Fatih Akin’s Cinema»; Hillman and Silvey 186–97; Kosta 343–60; Mennel, «Überkreuzungen,» 95–118.

3 Discussing Akin’s *The Edge of Heaven* and *Head-On*, Daniela Berghahn uses the term «aesthetics of hybridity,» see Berghahn 239–56.

4 Akin compares his way of filming with a DJ by referring to himself as a «cinema DJ»: «I try to find the right information for the image. I try to find the right images. The music in my film is also important. I am still doing my DJing in Hamburg. I am a cinema DJ. I can mix Fassbinder with Fellini. Cinema reminds of sampling. Costa Gavras’ movie *Missing* influenced me. I tried to shoot the runaway scene like Polanski would do it. I try to watch a movie a day. I watched a lot of silent movies before this. I really tried to tell the story in the form of a silent movie, without language. This is DJing.» (Badt)

5 For a discussion how transnational production influences transnational aesthetics see Halle.

6 Daniela Berghahn briefly also mentions homages and references to Turkish and German film history in Akin’s film, see Berghahn 246, 252, 253.

7 Göktürk, for example, refers to Antonioni [as well as to Coppola] when discussing *The Edge of Heaven* and Akin’s filmmaking. Akin himself states that the opening sequence
in *The Edge of Heaven* is «Antonioni-mäßig.» See Göktürk, «Mobilität und Stillstand» 35; Monique Akin.

Although, Göktürk as well as Berghahn also make brief references to Turkish film or film history (see endnotes 6 and 7 above), the intertextual references to Turkish cinema have not been analyzed in-depth as of today.

While Akin’s cinema has often been analyzed within the framework of transnational cinema, his contribution to a transnational film history has not been discussed so far.

The analyses of these two sequences are based on a previous discussion of them in the context of Akin’s soundtrack. For details please see Gueneli, «The Sound of Fatih Akin’s Cinema.»

Akin said that Nursel Köse has the faith of many Turkish actresses over forty in Germany; they are left to play the «Kopftuch-Mutti» (headscarf mom). Yet, she is «too sexy» to do that. He states about Köse: «I think she is a great actress, whose presence reminds me of the divas of Italian cinema of the 1950s and 1960s.» See Monique Akin.

For further details see: Béhague’s entry on «Tango» in *Groove Music Online*.

Even though Yeter and Ali belong to different age groups (Ali is in his 60s and Yeter in her 40s), they represent the first (non-German-born) generation who left Turkey several decades ago either as guest workers or as political migrants. Ali came in the context of the guest worker recruitment program (possibly in the 1960s/70s) and Yeter seems to have come at a later stage, possibly as a political refugee (maybe in the 1980s), however it is not clear under which circumstances.

«In Yeşilçam melodramas the tension between tradition and modernity is reflected also as a tension between different social and economic classes, while modernization is associated with the westernized upper class urbanites and upward class mobility» (Kaya Mutlu 419).

«During the turbulent 1970s, at the height of political oppression and censorship, Yeşilçam resorted to soft porn to attract the migrant male audience and compensate for its loss of women and family audiences to television» (Dönmez-Collin 99).

See also Berghahn’s reference to melodrama in Akin and Fassbinder (and Sirk) (251–52). For a discussion of Akin’s genre mixes and film style, see Volk 151–58.

Hasan *The Rose* is a film with a multilayered narrative about the exploitation of guest workers and also about the ambitions/dreams of some foreign workers to become film stars.

However, toward the end of the film’s narrative, after Lotte’s death and her release from prison, Ayten seems to become more moderate as is indicated through her behavior toward Susanne and her actual early release from prison.

For a discussion of women in Turkish cinema, see Dönmez-Collin 91–105.

This transformation is also verbally hinted at in the introductory sequence between Nejat and Yeter. Yeter explains to Nejat that she is a prostitute. She uses the word «Hayat kadın» (lit. woman of life), which is a Turkish euphemism for sex worker, also commonly used in Turkish films. Since Nejat does not understand the meaning of the word, she has to be more precise: «Bildiğin orospu işte» (A whore as you know it).

Other actors, on a less political level, who create a connection to contemporary Turkish TV and film are Erkan Can and Nurgül Yeşilçay. In the second half of the film, we see Ali’s nephew in Istanbul played by Can. Turkish audiences know Can mainly as Temel, a character from the Black Sea he played in the popular TV show *Maballenin Muhtarlar* (Headmen of the Parish, 1992–2002). In this show, which takes place in Istanbul, Temel represents the large community of migrants, who came from the Black Sea to Istanbul in
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the course of the 20th century. Yeşilçay, who plays Ayten Öztürk in The Edge of Heaven, is a popular and renowned Turkish stage and film actress. She is known from cinema, theater, and popular TV shows such as Sultan (2012), Ask ve Ceza (2010), to mention just a few. Her acclaimed theater acting includes major roles such as Ophelia in «Hamlet» and Blanche in «A Street Car Named Desire.» These references to and commemoration of contemporary Turkish film and TV becomes a part of The Edge of Heaven and therefore, have an effect on the film’s production, distribution, and audiences.

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