

Turkish delight – German fright
Migrant identities in transnational cinema

This paper investigates the positions which are assigned to and occupied by diaspora and minority cultures, or “Ausländerkultur” in the German context, in a world of increasing transnational migration and hybridization. After some general framing, I shall consider representations of Turks in Germany and question the cultural politics of integration. My focus being on transnational traffic in cinema, I shall raise the question of whether, in relation to Turkish-German film production, we can begin to talk about a development from a “cinema of duty” to “the pleasures of hybridity” – a shift which has recently been suggested in relation to Black British cinema. Within this context, Sinan Çetin’s film *Berlin in Berlin* (1993) will be commented on in some detail.

Rethinking Minor Cinemas

In a world increasingly determined by traffic across national boundaries, by migration, exile, displacement, by mobility and rootlessness, by the clash or amalgamation of cultures – where “the pure products go crazy”, as cultural anthropologist James Clifford has put it – authenticity has become a highly problematic category.¹ Incidentally, James Clifford opens his new book on travelling cultures by quoting the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh who contemplates the resemblance between an Egyptian village and an airline transit lounge, implying that remote and supposedly authentic cultures are subject to global flows and change as much as the post-modern Western world.² In fact, it is important to remember that people in Middle Eastern countries and other post-colonial locations are often torn between religion and secularism, between tradition and modernization, mostly envisaged as “Westernization”, before they even travel to the West.

It seems to me, however, that current discourses about migrants or exiles and their diasporic cultures are often informed by a social worker’s perspective and haunted by residual notions of cultural purity, community and authenticity. Between

¹ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard UP 1988), “Introduction: The Pure Products Go Crazy”, pp. 1-17.

national entrenchment and transnational dispersal, ethnic minorities are often “imagined” as outsiders on a subnational level. “Third cinemas” or “sub-state cinemas” are “defined ethnically in terms of suppressed, indigenous, diasporic, or other populations asserting their civil rights and giving expression to a distinctive religion, language, or regional culture.”³ Crofts gives Catalan, Québécois, Aboriginal, Chicano, and Welsh cinemas as examples. This othering of so-called “third” or “sub-state” cinemas by cultural producers, critics and policy makers seems to me highly problematic. I would therefore propose to reframe the discussion about such “minor” cinemas within a broader consideration of travelling cultures and global flows, of mobility between margin and centre, between independent and mainstream productions, as well as cross-overs between different genres and reception across national boundaries.

This would also mean shifting the discussion of ethnicity, identity and hybridity from margin to centre, from the fringes to the core of national self-fashioning. A recent volume on British cinema entitled *Dissolving Views*, for example, features a still from the popular Black British (or British Asian) film *Bhaji on the Beach* on the cover. The image depicts a diasporic Indian woman with aspirations derived from Bollywood melodrama and an aging English actor with colonial desires engaged in a dialogue about movies on the beach at Blackpool.⁴ *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), the first feature film to be directed by an Asian woman in Britain, tells the story of a group of Indian women who go on a day trip from Birmingham to Blackpool, appropriating the public space of this very English seaside resort and having various encounters and adventures. Gurinder Chadha’s film, funded by the British TV station Channel 4, presents the women as a diverse group which is by no means unified by common bonds to one tradition. The elderly bitch about the immorality of the young, while the visitor from Bombay is dressed in fashionable Western clothes and tells her old compatriots that home is no longer what they imagine it to be. Migrants develop new tastes and pleasures, such as having their fish and chips flavoured with hot chilli powder. In relation to some Black British films of the 1990s, it has recently been argued that a shift has been taking place from the

² James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Harvard UP 1997).

³ Stephen Crofts, "Concepts of national cinema", in: *Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford UP 1998), pp. 385-394.

⁴ Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (Cassell 1996).

social realism of a “cinema of duty” towards “the pleasures of hybridity”.⁵ Films like *Bhaji on the Beach*, despite maintaining some elements of the social work scenario, succeed in displaying humorous enactments of ethnicity, repudiating an essential racial identity by offering fluctuating points of identification, playing on modes of performance and incorporating elements of comedy, irony, pastiche and self-conscious masquerade. These films speak about the transformations of British popular culture as much as they speak about the complex lives of immigrants. We can see traffic in both directions here. This will be important to keep in mind as a point of comparison when we discuss the location of Turkish culture in Germany.

Since my move to Britain, I have been looking back at the Turkish-German scene comparatively, hoping for a little more hybridity and pleasure, rather than victimization and closure and looking for evidence of “speaking back” from margin to centre. Of course, political problems of exclusion and xenophobia will not be resolved by discussing cultural representation. On the other hand, it would be naive to believe that once citizenship and political participation are established, all resentment will easily dissolve. I believe that by drawing attention to processes of cultural mix and transition, we can disrupt notions of cultural purity which are prevalent, not only in the hegemonic discourse of nation states, but also in the discourse of marginal diasporic communities. By addressing hybridity as a source of strength and pleasure, rather than lack and trouble we might eventually move beyond dutiful performances of multi-culturalism and community bonding grounded in restrictive notions of cultural purity and rootedness.

Over the past years, there has been a growing worldwide interest in films which visualise the experiences of people crossing boundaries, of migration, displacement and exile. These films have been described as a new genre of “postcolonial hybrid films”⁶ or as an “independent transnational cinema”⁷. Following Homi Bhabha and other post-colonial critics in describing immigrant communities as “the other within” which contests the notion of a pure national identity, and suggests

⁵ Cf. Sarita Malik, "Beyond 'The Cinema of Duty'? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s", in: *Dissolving Views*, pp. 202-215.

⁶ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Routledge 1994), p. 42.

⁷ Hamid Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre", in: Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), *Global/Local: Cultural Productions and the Transnational Imaginary* (Duke University Press 1996), pp. 119-144.

to narrate the nation from the margins⁸, “migrant” cinemas could be interpreted as posing a similar challenge to established concepts of “national cinema”. The experience of migration serves as a productive provocation and creates a transnational “third space” of travel and translation where our traditional patterns of classifying culture are put into question, and we are made aware of the shortcomings of defining culture on grounds of nationality or ethnicity. While celebrating this “third space”, however, we ought to be cautious not to forget about 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”.

The generic grouping as “transnational” raises some general questions about the positions which are assigned to and occupied by exiles and their so-called “communities”, by diaspora and minority cultures in a world of increasing transnational migration and hybridization. How does cinema re-work popular phantasies of unsettling infiltrations into the “imagined community”? How do transnational cinemas create imaginary homelands? Which discourses of identity construction are echoed in these films? Are mental ghettos reflected in spatial imagery (scenarios of imprisonment)? How do we define diaspora cultures without falling into the trap of reinforcing fictions of cultural purity? How are diasporic positions determined by the marketing politics of ethnicity and “otherness”? How “independent” are these films? Does the ethnic origin or even the gender of the director matter? Where does a business trip end and exile begin? My aim with these questions is to unsettle some prevalent notions of exile and diaspora which are often determined by a great deal of fake feeling, nostalgia and romanticism cultivated by cultural critics and policy makers as well as migrant artists who conveniently settle in the niche.

Making the Turk speak

In relation to Turkish-German cultural exchange it seems especially important to address these questions within a broader horizon and a comparative perspective, because there is still a great deal of indifference, othering and exclusion to be observed. After several decades of co-existence and well-meaning multiculturalist endeavors there still appears to be a considerable lack of communication and of humour on both sides. Even Homi Bhabha, the great propagator of hybridity, following John Berger’s *The Seventh Man*, imagines the Turkish migrant worker in

⁸ Homi Bhabha (ed.), *N a t i o n a n d N a r r a t i o n* (Routledge 1990).

Germany as an incommensurable, alienated, speechless victim without any voice.⁹ In the following, I would like to pursue the question whether this mute figure has meanwhile learnt to talk and whether there have been any attempts in Turkish-German cultural production to speak back and to address hybridity as a source of strength and pleasure, rather than lack and trouble.

“Turkish delight – German fright” plays upon a reversal of current perceptions concerning German-Turkish relations where Turks generally tended to feature as victims. Since the reunification in 1989, the international media have been watching Germany cautiously, reporting on the rising level of xenophobia, on numerous violent, at times lethal, attacks against foreigners, on Neonazis burning down Turkish and refugee families in their homes. You would expect the Turks to be the ones who are paralyzed by fright whereas Germans take a delight in chasing them. However, there are also some indications of German fright caused by the presence of two million immigrants from Turkey who have not only introduced Döner Kebap (which has meanwhile become a staple German fast food), but who now wish to erect minarets in German cities. Instead of peacefully integrating into German society they seem to be reinforcing their Turkishness. Evidently, they have brought about fundamental changes in German cityscapes. Must we assume then that European civilization is in danger of being turkicized?

Today, Istanbul is the largest metropolis in Europe, having exploded from 2.5 to about 16 million inhabitants over the past 30 years. But is it really in Europe? At the heart of Europe, the scope of demographic, economic, political and cultural upheavals in Turkey has gone largely unnoticed. People interested in Turkish culture usually still want their exotic expectations of an archaic, rural society to be confirmed. The Turkish immigrants in the popular German imaginary have somehow emerged from this remote land, bringing along their archaic customs and threatening to unsettle the house of Europe from within. In any case, there is no doubt anymore

⁹ The Turkish guestworker in Germany makes a passing appearance in "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation", in: Homi Bhabha (ed.), *N a t i o n a n d N a r r a t i o n*, pp. 315-317. The Seventh Man is, however, not just a product of migration to Germany, but can also be found back in Turkey where there is a high rate of migration from rural areas to the cities. Özümkal considers the continuity between these migration processes and their representation in cinema: Özümkal, *S i n e m a d a Y e d i n c i A d a m . T ü r k s i n e m a s • n d a i ç v e d i • g ö ç o l a y •* (The Seventh Man in Cinema. Migration within and abroad in Turkish cinema (Ege Yayınları 1994)).

that the immigrants have come to stay. The number of people applying for German citizenship is increasing, and so is the number of people carrying two passports.

Over the past years, there has in fact been a growing concern with multiculturalism in Germany. The city of Frankfurt has an office for multicultural affairs, Berlin's radio station "MultiKulti", which for the past three years has specialised in minority issues and world music, has now become permanent. Television, too, especially on public broadcasting channels, is increasingly concerned with discovering ethnic identities in talk shows and soap operas. Despite a rising awareness of diversity, however, there are certain prevailing patterns in the perception of "foreign" cultures. An underlying thread in these discourses is the rather problematic assumption of coexisting pure and homogenous cultural identities. Well-meaning multiculturalist projects often result in the construction of binary oppositions between "Turkish culture" and "German culture". The focus on cultural difference which claims to be liberating, in practice, often covers up existing crosscultural traffic and makes dialogue and interaction more difficult. Furthermore, the question of minority discourse in Germany is tightly connected to issues of the national past and identity, a connection which reinforces performances of duty rather than pleasure. With regard to cultural policy in Germany, I would therefore like to argue for moving beyond the whining rhetoric of being lost "between two cultures", commonly indulged in by politically engaged Germans as well as self-pitying Turks, and for exploring the "pleasures of hybridity" by envisaging broader, less provincial horizons and embarking on mutual border traffic.

Performing acts of duty

If we consider some of these issues of positioning in relation to cinema, we find that schemes of film financing and subsidy ("Filmförderung") on a federal or regional level as well as through co-productions with television, mainly with the public broadcasting channel ZDF, have sometimes proved to be counterproductive and limiting, in the sense of reinforcing a patronizing and marginalizing attitude towards "Ausländerkultur", the culture of foreigners. Filmmakers from an immigrant or minority background have often been reduced to producers of "a cinema of duty". They have been expected to make films about the problems of their people. In order to receive funding, filmmakers have been almost driven to represent the "other" culture in terms of common assumptions and popular misconceptions. In consequence, a kind of ghetto culture emerged which was at great pains to promote politics of integration, but rarely achieved much popularity.

Initially, in the 1970s, directors of New German Cinema showed some interest in immigrants. Fassbinder who staged himself in *Katzelmacher* (1969) as “ein Griech aus Griechenland”, shot *Angst Essen Seele Auf / Fear Eats Soul* (1973) under the working title of “Alle Türken heißen Ali” (All Turks are called Ali) – all North Africans as well, one might add, because the film does not feature any Turks. This was an exceptional film because it featured a black man (Ben Hedi El-Saalem) as an object of desire and erotic projection. Generally, however, women tended to be the victims of the cinematic imagination. Many films centred around the problems of Turkish women who were oppressed by their patriarchal fathers, brothers or husbands, excluded from the public sphere and confined in enclosed spaces. Helma Sanders' *Shirins Hochzeit / Shirin's Wedding* (1975), for example, less well known than her *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter / Germany, Pale Mother* (1979), is a black and white film about Shirin (Ayten Erten) who leaves her Anatolian village, to search for her fiancé Mahmut in Köln. The fiancé was played by Aras Ören, who was around the same time becoming known as a writer of Berlin-poems such as *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße* (1973). Shirin ends up on the street as a prostitute and is killed by her pimp in the end, her fate being commented on elegiacally by Helma Sander's voice-over, somewhat universalizing the suffering of womanhood.¹⁰

In the 1980s, pictures of victimization continued to circulate, and were replicated in the work of Turkish directors living in Germany. Tefvik Ba'er's *40 qm Deutschland* (1986), is literally a *kammerspiel* about a young Turkish woman who is brought to Hamburg by her husband and locked up in a flat. The young woman with the telling name Turna (crane), played by the jazz singer Özay Fecht, is reduced to “40 square metres of Germany” for months, without any contact with the outside world. She is cast in framed-in shots in front of the mirror cutting off her braids or standing at the window, looking out into a grey courtyard. This film received the Bundesfilmpreis in 1987, an award given by the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs – dutiful national acknowledgement, which paradoxically seemed to cement the sub-national status of “Ausländerkultur”.

There are certainly no pleasures of hybridity to be found in films like *40 qm Deutschland*. Humour is not a strength of these productions. Immigrants are depicted as victims, totally incapable of communicating and interacting with Germans. In his second film *Abschied vom falschen Paradies / Goodbye to a false paradise* (1988)

¹⁰ Cf. Annette Brauerhoch, "Die Heimat des Geschlechts – oder mit der fremden Geschichte die eigene erzählen: Zu *Shirins Hochzeit* von Helma Sanders-Brahms", in: "*Getürkte Bilder*": Zur Inszenierung von Fremden im Film (Marburg: Schüren, 1995), pp. 109-115.

Tevfik Ba°er, the Hamburg based Turkish director of the film, followed a similar pattern of staging women’s confinement in enclosed spaces. Elif, a young Turkish woman in a German prison, tries to commit suicide in her cell just before her release. Her story is presented in flashback. Being sentenced to six years in prison for killing her husband, paradoxically, her experience of imprisonment becomes an experience of liberation. Her integration into German society is achieved in prison where she learns fluent German from a dictionary and finds a safe haven in the supportive community of women, reminiscent of the women’s community in her village in Turkey. In this film, the Turkish woman interacts with German society, but only within the confined space of the prison.

The prison which filmmakers in exile have tended to use as a key symbolic space is thus reevaluated in a dubiously positive sense by Ba°er.¹¹ Ba°er's heroines can only escape this enclosure and confinement by retreating into their subjectivity, into flashback memories and dreams. When Elif is feverish in her cell and longingly looks out through the iron bars of the window, rain brings back memories of the clean and clear waters back home. Home is associated with women bathing and doing the washing, with water, purity, nature. The scene offers a somewhat purified version of the Turkish village film genre, made consumable for Western audiences not only through the use of Western music. The community of women back in the village is idealized in bright colours and contrasted with the harsh reality of German prison life, although in the course of the film the community of women in prison gradually grows stronger and develops into a second home. In the end, it remains unclear whether the “false paradise” is the pure and authentic homeland back in Turkey or the claustrophobic space of the German prison which Elif is reluctant to leave behind. But beyond the indeterminacy of the title there is little critical reflection of the fake warmth of closed communities to be found in this film. I would like to argue that *Goodbye to a False Paradise* is a good illustration of cinematic imprisonment of immigrants within the parameters of well-meaning multiculturalism feeding on binary oppositions and integrationist desires.

However, Ba°er’s treatment of female subjectivity was taken as authentic and even acclaimed by feminist critics for “measuring the cultural no man's land which Turkish women in exile have to live in – equally exploited and misused by German

¹¹ Hamid Naficy has decribed the configuration of claustrophobic spaces as an iconography which is characteristic to exilic cinema. Cf. Hamid Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics".

men and their own compatriots”.¹² The stories of total incompatibility, non-communication and silent suffering which these films tell are perceived as the experiences of Turkish women in general. But how authentic is it? I feel the liberation and Westernization/Germanification of the Turkish village woman is reached all too smoothly in this “fake paradise” of the prison. The actress who plays Elif, Zuhâl Olcay, does not appear quite convincing in this role of rapid transformation and Germanification. Zuhâl Olcay (born 1957 in Istanbul) is not a migrant Turk, but a “real” Turk based in Istanbul, an actress familiar from sophisticated theatre and film productions in Turkey, usually playing modern and urban women characters. In *Ýki Kadın / Two Women* (1992), for example, she enacts a liberated, but warm-hearted high-class prostitute who sues a minister for rape and ends up in the arms of his wife – a considerably different role to Elif of *Abschied vom falschen Paradies*.

It seems important to remember the aspect of dressing-up, acting and performing, rather than simply equalizing the screen persona with reality. In relation to third cinema and minority discourse, however, the fabricated nature of images often tends to be forgotten. While generally we have come to perceive identity as unstable, fluid and transient, essentialist fixations seem to linger in concepts of ethnic identity, especially in diasporic discourses. Distancing strategies such as the use of phantasy, pastiche or irony remain the property of Western mainstream or art cinema. Critics and audiences expect directors of third cinema to tell true stories about social problems of their people. The director Tevfik Ba°er, however, is not exactly speaking from harsh experience in his films. He came to Germany through a link between the film and television department at the University of Eski°ehir in Turkey and Hamburg. Often we find quite simple stories of career moves or personal choices behind the grand rhetoric of exile, displacement and cultural incompatibility.

Among the German productions of the 1980s dealing with experiences of immigrants, *Yasemin* (1988) has proved the most popular. It features on almost every German-Turkish film programme and is circulated by the Goethe-Institutes even in Thailand and India. *Yasemin* was released in 1988 and directed by Hark Bohm, a German director also living in Hamburg. His films emerged from a political engagement common to a lot of New German Cinema, and he is known and slightly mocked as social consciousness personified. In *Yasemin* he took up current debates about the problems of Turks in Germany. The film has been referred to as “Romeo and Juliet in Hamburg”. The love-story of Yasemin (played by charming Ay°e Romey), a

¹² Heike Kühn, “Mein Türke ist Gemüsehändler: Zur Einverleibung des Fremden in deutschsprachigen Filmen”, in: “*Getürkte Bilder*”: *Zur Inszenierung von Fremden im Film*, pp. 41-62.

seventeen-year-old Turkish girl, and German student Jan (played by Uwe Bohm, the director's own son) falls into the pattern of being lost "between the cultures". Yasemin embodies the total split between German and Turkish culture which was summed up in an exhibition title of those years: "Morgens Deutschland – Abends Türkei / Germany in the morning – Turkey at night". The double identity is also rendered in the linguistic mix of family conversations, featuring Emine Sevgi Özdamar as the mother, an actress who has also made a career as a writer of hybrid German. Yasemin is active in a Judo club where she fights with great ability. In fact, she is just like her German classmates at high school, where her teacher tells her to carry on with school and prepare for university. But when she returns from school to the family's green grocery shop she is the dutiful Turkish daughter who helps with the business and always has to be chaperoned by her cousin when she goes out. Initially, her transitions from one sphere to the other are staged with some pleasure and sense for costume. She lowers her skirt and covers herself up on the way home from school to mark the shift from one sphere to the other, or switches gracefully from Western to "Oriental" style when she dances with her father at her sister's wedding. But eventually, the culture clash explodes. The kindly father, being concerned about his honour, switches into a brutal patriarch who rejects his elder daughter and sets out to ship Yasemin back to Turkey. Whereas the promoters of this film claimed to foster cross-cultural understanding, it really reproduced and generated common stereotypes and confirmed the view that German society in general is more civilised and enlightened than archaic Turkish community. Integration in this binary model could only be achieved by a split between first and second generation immigrants. The popularity of the film draws on the common phantasy of victimised Turkish women who, especially when young and beautiful, need to be rescued from their patriarchal community. Within the parameters of this discourse, Yasemin does the right thing, when in the end she leaves the Turkish men behind and is carried off by Jan on the backseat of his motorbike ...

In general, narratives about Turks in German society, have tended to centre around gender relations. The liberation of poor Turkish women from enclosure, oppression, subordination or even prostitution has been a popular phantasy. Although ethnic cinema, third cinema, and minority discourse in general, are usually presented and perceived as some kind of authentic expression of the real-life experiences of a group to which the director belongs, I wonder whether there is really a fundamental difference between a German director's and a Turkish director's depiction of German-Turkish encounters. Perhaps, there is rather a set of popular images and stories which feed into the films of both. I would argue that the films of Tevfik Ba'er and Hark Bohm (and even Helma Sanders) form part of the common discourse about

the victimization of Turkish women and confirm the subnational positioning of the immigrant. I would also like to argue that the imagery and discourse of imprisonment and exclusion which we frequently encounter in exile cinema is often grounded in fake compassion, rather than authentic experiences. Separatist practices are often promoted by cultural institutions, funding schemes, and also readily taken up by some migrant artist, writers and film-makers. The construction of a diasporic identity can at times offer a rather comfortable retreat for cultural producers as well as audiences.

Reinventing Berlin in Berlin

Have there been any new departures in the 1990s? Are the exiles still in prison, or have they managed to break out? Is the cultural production of migrants still confined to niches, or has it meanwhile become mainstream? Are there any celebrations of hybridity in recent Turkish-German productions? *Berlin in Berlin* (1993) might be considered a step in this direction. This rather trashy movie offers a bizarre and entertaining view of intercultural encounters, and ironically subverts some of the established stereotypes and models. It was produced in Turkey, although with a Turkish-German team and partly shot on location in Berlin. Its fast pace and cinematic style appear to be influenced by director Sinan Çetin's work in advertising. The film is a genre mix, incorporating elements of thriller, melodrama, and comedy. The camera playfully engages in an investigation of voyeurism and dissects the power of the ethnographic gaze. In Turkey, the film was a box office hit in 1993, predominantly because it features Hülya Avşar, an actress and singer popular on Turkish television, as Dilber in a masturbation scene.

The “multicultural melodrama”¹³ is set in Berlin. The establishing shots, initially aerial, then followed by scenes from the Alexanderplatz in the Eastern part of the city, point to a setting in the new reunified Berlin. The city in these days is a huge building site, and thus the story begins on a building site which is rendered as a potentially dangerous space. Thomas (Armin Block), an engineer and amateur photographer, follows the wife of a Turkish colleague with his camera and takes pictures without her noticing. The camera adopts the voyeuristic gaze of the photographer on the Turkish woman. Despite her headscarf, she becomes an object of erotic attraction and is objectified by the camera. When finally she looks back into the telephoto lens her gaze, too, appears to be somewhat threatening. The loud clicking of the camera underlines the thriller atmosphere. Later, the photographer hangs up the

¹³ Cf. Harald Martenstein, "Das multikulturelle Melodram", in: *Der T a g e s s p i e g e l*, 13.5.1994.

enlarged photographs in the office. When the husband sees them he is infuriated by this liberty taken with his wife. He assumes that she has deliberately posed for the camera and exposed herself to the gaze of a stranger – an offence against his honour. He rushes out to confront his wife. The photographer comes in on the row and tries to pacify the couple. In the resulting fight the husband is pushed against an iron bar and thus killed by accident. Fake blood dribbles from the corner of his mouth.

Three months later we see the photographer doing push-ups facing the photographs of the woman while memorising Turkish sentences from a dictionary: “Bu bir kaza. Ben katil deđilim.” (It was an accident. I am no murderer.) He travels by the underground in search of the woman and sits opposite her house in Berlin-Kreuzberg in a café which is run by her brothers-in-law. When he finally gets hold of her and attempts to explain that he did not intend to kill her husband, he finds himself chased by the dead man's brothers. Ironically, his flight leads him into the flat of the very same family where he hides on top of the wardrobe in Dilber's bedroom.

Along with the intruder the spectator is introduced into the diegetic space of “Berlin in Berlin” – a city within the city, namely the home of an extended Turkish family in Kreuzberg. The matriarch of the family wakes up to the muezzin's call for prayers. A tapestry image of Mecca is hanging on the wall behind her bed. German voices mingle into the prayer call. The camera then moves to a portable mosque-shaped clock, the source of the muezzin's voice which is competing with a German commercial for a nail cure. This originates from the television set in front of which the father is just waking up. The use of diegetic sound and the delayed revelation of its sources gradually introduces the spectator into the hybrid space of “Berlin in Berlin” – a place where the day begins with competing voices and languages.

Meanwhile, the intruder is discovered on top of the wardrobe. The camera shows facial expressions of fright on both sides. Mürtüz, the angry young man (played by popular talk show star Cem Özer), claims that the stranger has murdered his brother and threatens to kill him with his pistol. The chase is stopped, just in time, by the father and the grandmother (Aliye Rona) who pronounce that this German is a guest, “sent to them by God” as a “trial”, and therefore cannot be harmed while inside their home. The young avenger has to bow to the authority of the elders. The German is thus given asylum in the Turkish family – a reversal of the situation of foreigners seeking asylum on German territory. A close-up of his face displays an emblematic image of German fright.

Thus, the Turkish family home becomes a safe haven for the displaced German. He settles on the floor for a life in “Berlin in Berlin” or “4 m² of

Germany”¹⁴. It is this reversal of the situation of the imprisoned guest/asylum seeker which makes this film potentially interesting, and which transgresses performances of duty which have determined most German attempts to produce “Ausländerkultur”. In one scene, Thomas lingers on the doorstep, staring at Dilber, not daring to come in or to go out. His performance points to the borders running right through Berlin, while at the same time his lack of resolve subverts these boundaries and makes them appear ridiculous. What follows is a bizarre symbiosis between the German “foreigner” and the extended Turkish family. Four generations are living together in this flat (grandmother, father and mother, three sons and the daughter-in-law – the dead man's wife – with her son) and they all display different modes of interaction with their surroundings and with the intruder. The eldest brother Mürtüz (Cem Özer) is a caricature of the Turkish macho, playing around with his gun and screaming for revenge. Mostly, he insists on speaking Turkish and on keeping up Turkish customs, but he likes whisky and blondes as much as he adores his beautiful sister-in-law. The younger brothers who tend to speak German are more ready to fraternize with their guest. Thomas is gradually incorporated into family life. He is given a plate of food, handed a guitar, appreciated for fixing the television set during an important football match of Germany vs Turkey, he befriends the grandmother and learns Turkish songs from her, familiarises himself with the customs such as the passing around of eau de cologne and Turkish delight, and even kisses everybody’s hand on Kurban Bayramé, a religious festival. In this enforced symbiosis, the voyeurist ethnographic gaze is gradually reversed. It is now the Turks who are watching the German, almost like a circus animal and who stare at him in claustrophobic close-ups. When all the relatives come to visit, Thomas is the chief attraction. The uncle who does a great belly dance to a German popsong, keeps bending down towards this odd stranger, asking why on earth he is sitting on the floor. While Thomas mingles with the brothers, Dilber finds herself interrogated about the circumstances of her husband's death. The discovery of the photographs makes her position within the family increasingly problematic. The film ends by pairing Thomas with Dilber. They leave the flat and walk hand in hand into an unknown future. Once again a Turkish woman liberated by a German man? The ending seems slightly forced. On the whole, however, *Berlin in Berlin* shows more potential in exploring the pleasures of hybridity than previous attempts to portray German-Turkish encounters. The reversal of the asylum situation and the resulting symbiosis open up possibilities of mutual humor and reflection, of traffic in

¹⁴ Cf. Stefan Reinecke, "Vier Quadratmeter Türkei: *Berlin in Berlin* – ein Kinomelodram von Sinan Çetin", in: *F r a n k f u r t e r R u n d s c h a u*, 20.5.1994.

both directions – aspects which seemed to be absent from earlier examples of a “cinema of duty”.

Abschied vom falschen Paradies on the one hand and *Berlin in Berlin* on the other, seem to suggest two alternative routes for exile or diaspora cinemas. In one, we get scenarios of imprisonment, claustrophobia, binary oppositions between cultures, nostalgia for authentic homelands, longing for purity. In the other, we find first attempts to break out from imprisonment in a marginal niche and speak back to the centre, to occupy shifting points of identification, to switch between different modes of performance and thus undermine restrictive identity politics by employing humour and irony. I would like to suggest that we need more of this ironic and irreverent spirit not only in the films to come, but also in the discourse about exile and diaspora cultures. The reversal of the exile/asylum situation and the resulting symbiosis in *Berlin in Berlin* might open up possibilities of traffic in both directions, of shifts and transitions between Turkishness and Germanness, of mutual mimicry, performance, masquerade and humor. I have tried to argue for opening up the ethnic pigeonhole of dutiful “Ausländerkultur” and for broadening our perspective beyond national boundaries for traffic in both directions. The figure of the mute and passive Turkish worker in Germany, whom even Homi Bhabha evokes, has been haunting us for too long. Writers and filmmakers have begun to tackle migration and cultural clashes with a sense of humour and irony. It is up to cultural policy makers and critics not to limit them to performances of duty, otherwise, they would be promoting a scenario of new tribalism and fetishization of cultural difference. We need to abandon the phantasies of victimization which have been cultivated on both sides. We need voices which disrupt the common assumptions about cultural purity, which explore the potentials of hybridity, which occupy shifting positions, speaking from within and without, claiming a place in the house of Europe. We need to develop more global, comparative, transnational, translational perspectives on travelling cultures. More pleasure and less closure should be the agenda of our explorations rather than constructing and reinforcing “German” or “Turkish” identities. Perhaps there is even potential in fighting fright by delight!