# 7. Precarious Masculinities in the New Turkish Cinema

"New Turkish Cinema" is a disputed label. It is grounded on "one of the biggest crises" in the history of cinema in Turkey, since after 1990 spectators "no longer (a) went to the cinema in general, and (b) when they did, they especially avoided Turkish films" (Atam 202). The label therefore, as Zahit Atam asserts, "is used as part of a simple and pragmatic discourse, rather than as an appropriate term to characterise the new cinema in Turkey" (202). Asuman Suner (12) sees two separate forms emerging from this crisis: 1) a new popular cinema with considerable box-office success that is trying to emulate the style of Hollywood productions (e.g. *Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak*, see discussion below) and 2) an art cinema based on European auteurism and receiving critical acclaim and prestigious awards in national and international festivals, but attracting no Turkish audience, or only a very limited and elitist one (e.g. *Güneşe Yolculuk*).

Popular Turkish cinema up to the 1980s is called "Yeşilçam cinema," literally meaning "pine-tree cinema." The name stems from a street in Istanbul that housed the film production companies. During its golden years in the 1960s and early 1970s, an annual average of 200 films was produced (Suner 3). Before director Yılmaz Güney entered the scene, Yeşilçam cinema was a highly commercialized cinema of stars with little power granted to directors. Relying mostly on melodrama and comedy, but also historical action adventure and gangster films, this changed in the 1970s with the advent of social and political turmoil and the ensuing politicization of cinema.

Güney first starred in this cinema as an actor playing a rough lower-class anti-hero type at odds with the former polished image of middle-class heroes, which made him the most popular star in Turkey and earned him the nickname "Ugly King" (Suner 5). He then turned to directing and became known for his politicized social-realist films such as *Umut* (*Hope*, 1970) and especially

*Yol* (*The Way*, 1982), which won the Golden Palm at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival. Arguably the most internationally acclaimed Turkish film to date, *Yol* had an astounding production history with Güney being imprisoned for his political views and actions—charged initially for sheltering anarchist refugees, but also for smuggling forbidden films like his *Umut* out of the country, he later was accused of murder—and writing film scripts that were executed by assistants (Şerif Gören in the case of *Yol*). With the film industry still being highly controlled by state censorship that lasted until 1986 and beyond, it is a miracle that this film was realized at all. *Yol* was not shown in Turkey until 1999, and yet the film marked a decisive shift in politics as well as aesthetics in the development of Turkish cinema. It deals with Kurdish protagonists—who had to speak Turkish, because the use of the Kurdish language was still prohibited in Turkey at the time—in conflict with law; it is about women's rights, family honor and ethnic differences filmed in a multifocal, poetic visual style. The main plot revolves around a group of prisoners on furlough, who are travelling as far as Kurdish East Anatolia. The film eventually turns into an allegory with the disillusioned prisoners having to realize that they are physically and mentally freer in their prison microcosm than in a seemingly modern democratic republic that does not allow any kind of nonconformist dissidence and is controlled by military force. For the first time, Turkey appeared on the international film scene with formally challenging aesthetics combined with social criticism paving the way for a New Turkish Cinema.

*Yol* is famous not least for some of the most gruesome depictions of female suffering in cinema history, but noteworthy is also the depiction of masculinity. On the one hand, traditional Turkish gender relations seem to be affirmed; most conspicuously female sexual digression causes a rift in the family honor system and is consequently punished by male family members. On the other hand, the film also portrays a hitherto unacknowledged male vulnerability. Eylem Kaftan explains this vulnerability as an outcome of a traumatized society subjected to both a feudal patriarchy and military rule. While there is no space for women to act at all, men are shown to have a limited agency, yet fail to overcome the power systems at work. At first repressed by older male relatives, they then take on the role of oppressor in handling their own female relatives. Kaftan speaks of a precarious subjectivity with the failure of men in their families and homes as allegory of a national power system in crisis that, at least in southeastern Turkey, still seems to be valid (cf. 160-161).

## From Yeşilçam to New Turkish Cinema: Black Turks and Nationalist Masculinity

*Güneşe Yolculuk* (*Journey to the Sun*), a milestone of the New Turkish Cinema, has a lot in common with Güney's *Yol*, and yet it sets a new standard in the depiction of ethnic conflicts, of the urban/rural divide, and especially in its focus on masculinity. But it also marks a new development in Turkish cinema which increasingly becomes European in terms of production and reception as well as narrative. *Güneşe Yolculuk* is a Turkish-German-Dutch coproduction from 1999 and it earned Turkish female director Yeşim Ustaoğlu the "Blue Angel" at the Berlin Film Festival as best European film. The film's socio-geographical location is the working-class milieu of Istanbul and it depicts the friendship between Mehmet, a migrant from Turkey's west coast, and Berzan who stems from the Eastern Kurdish village Zorduç. Without ever using the word "Kurdish" in the film, Mehmet due to his dark skin and friendship with Berzan is repeatedly taken as Kurdish himself. After Berzan is killed in street riots, Mehmet starts his journey east with Berzan's coffin. This journey entails bidding a final good-bye to his German-Turkish girlfriend Arzu, who, despite having grown up in a liberal German milieu, cannot free herself from the restraints of her traditional Turkish family. Again, like in *Yol*, the journey east points towards repressed political and ethnic conflicts in modern Turkey, but here, in contrast, the voyage serves as initiation for the male protagonist who evolves from a naive malleable young man to a hardened defiant hero. His corporeal experience of being treated as "black" (a pejorative term for Kurdish) Turk and thus as second-class citizen leads him to acknowledging a pluralistic society that is at odds with Turkish founding father Atatürk's enforced secular Kemalist ideal of a homogenized nation modeled after European pattern.[1] Metropolitan centers, and especially Istanbul, prove to be a far cry from this

1 On the lasting impact of foreign films and especially American films on urban Turkish youth—above all those living in Istanbul—in the early years of the Turkish Republic see Boisseau, who claims: "By the end of the 1920s American films outpaced all other foreign imports, cementing not only the cultural connection between cinema and Western expressions of 'modernity' but also Hollywood (and by extension the United States itself) as the apotheosis of what it meant to be 'modern.' Hollywood provided a model of modern relationships between men and women and a sounding board for the emerging youth of Turkey to negotiate their new-found national identity and generationally specific self image" (170). For years to come, foreign cinema was the most powerful and widely available form of media from abroad in Turkey, and it would

ideal and turn out to be hybrid, Arabesk spaces of migration, transformation and negotiation, and accordingly the narrative center of much of New Turkish Cinema.[2]

*fig. 7.1 Güneşe Yolculuk. Mehmet carries Berzan's coffin*

*fig. 7.2 Güneşe Yolculuk. Mehmet's tortured body*
*fig. 7.3 Güneşe Yolculuk. Mehmet's tortured body*

remain associated with 'the West' in general and 'America' more specifically until the heyday of Yeşilçam cinema during the 1960s and 1970s.

2 On the concept of "Arabesk" see Stokes. I will expand on "Arabesk" in the following chapter.

From the very first image, we see a world that is topsy-turvy. As prolepsis, it shows Mehmet carrying the coffin on his long odyssey to Zorduç. His image, however, is reflected in water and thus upside-down (see fig. 7.1). The film was released during a period of escalating conflict between the Turkish military and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and its narrative reflects this conflict through Mehmet's body. The director inserts Mehmet's involuntary involvement in street riots, hunger strikes, and police harassment into documentary footage. Mehmet's body progressively becomes the site of the ethnic-nationalist confrontation: being taken as a "black Turk," i.e. as a Kurd, he is tortured by the police and shunned by his colleagues. Setting, camera, and lighting drastically emphasize the visible traces of abuse on Mehmet's body (see fig. 7.2 and 7.3). At the same time, he physically gets closer to Berzan, with whom he starts to share his life in an increasingly intimate haven of privacy secluded from the outside turmoil until Berzan is killed. At this point Mehmet claims to be Berzan's closest relative, thus tightening the homosocial bond with seeming blood ties. The physical and emotional intimacy between the two men is striking, also in its visual presentation, giving credence to queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's claim of a "potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1-2). Thus, when speaking of homosocial male bonding as is the case with Berzan and Mehmet, this marks non-sexual social interactions between two men that in general often feature a strong homophobic undercurrent, which, however, is totally absent here. Even given habitualized male-male interaction, which in Mediterranean cultures does not necessarily prohibit the display of physical affection between men, I would argue that the intensity of such displays between Berzan and Mehmet exceeds the culturally sanctioned degree of homosociality. Instead, the two men's bonding must be seen as deliberately embracing the notion of being 'othered' by society, and they accordingly cross the divide of heteronormative prescriptions that society forces onto men's interactions with one another. When Mehmet decides to act as a close relative and to take Berzan's coffin home to Eastern Turkey, Mehmet further intensifies their 'Othering' bond even beyond death by symbolically choosing a new identity and homeland for himself. His 'journey to the sun' therefore reverses the migrant Western direction towards the metropolis Istanbul. Mehmet's final refusal to be part of a falsely homogenized nation comes with a strengthened sense of self. The

assertion of manhood has eventually taken a somewhat utopian turn in being based on an abject ethnic minority (cf. Atam 218).[3]

Quite the contrary can be said of *Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak* (*Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*), one of the most remarkable and controversial films emerging from Turkey in recent years. This 2006 film by Serdar Akar "is an action movie set in contemporary northern Iraq that has become a box office hit in Turkey and ended up as the highest-grossing Turkish film […] since reliable box office returns began to be compiled in this country" (Özkaracalar 165). The film is a mix of many things: evidently, it is a spin-off from the popular television series *Kurtlar Vadisi* featuring a super-violent undercover officer, Polat Alemdar, who has been idolized by far-right wing young Turkish nationalists especially prone to terrorizing the Kurds. But more importantly, the film starts off with several factual events, most significant amongst which is the incarceration of a group of Turkish undercover military personnel in northern Iraq by the American forces in 2003. This event caused a public outcry in Turkey because the Turkish detainees were marched off hooded, their heads in sacks, by the American captors, which was perceived as an open demonstration of shaming (see fig. 7.4). The film then tells the fictional story of Alemdar going after the American officers who humiliated his compatriots. "At a basic level," as Özkaracalar claims, "it is a crude revenge fantasy to heal hurt national pride" (166).

*Fig. 7.4 Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak. Hooded Turkish prisoners*
*Fig. 7.5 Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak. Human pyramid*

The film includes "almost every single atrocity known to have been committed by the occupation forces in Iraq, including the notorious 'human pyramid' torture at Abu Gharib [sic] prison" (Özkaracalar 166, see fig. 7.5). It is

3 For an extended discussion see Poole, "Unsichtbarer Kurde."

therefore "saturated with anti-American imagery," and yet, as Özkaracalar rightly points out, it "fails to qualify as a progressive anti-imperialist text" (166), mainly because the protagonists are driven by extremely nationalist and chauvinistic motivations glorifying their own imperial past of the Ottoman Empire and because of its anti-Kurdish and anti-Semitic representations. In contrast to the films by Güney and Ustaoğlu, this economically most successful film of the New Turkish Cinema remains within the patriarchal order of the republican regime if not blatantly propagating Prime Minister (now President) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's increasing Islamist political shift in recent years. Thus, this masculine action-adventure melodrama depicts, as Savaş Aslan concedes, "male bonding among the tough heroes and their sidekicks, codes of patriarchal honor, and the domestic role of women" as parts of the dominant nationalist discourse. The "power play among secret agents, military, and terrorists" leaves no room "for the utterances of alternative male subjectivities" (261).

On yet another level, i.e. that of the film's international and especially American reception, it can be said that "Turkey is still the land of *Midnight Express* for many. For human rights groups, journalists, intellectuals and others still come to Turkey with preconceived images branded in their minds by this film. And perhaps so do the officials of the European Union who refuse to admit Turkey" (Şahin). *Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak* has therefore been understood as revenge against the humiliation of Alan Parker's *Midnight Express* (1978).[4] Gardels and Medavoy even assert that the

> Turkish backlash has manifested itself precisely in cultural reassertion, using America as a foil. […] Capturing the sentiments of ordinary Muslims throughout the region, it [i.e. *Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak*] portrayed a Muslim Rambo who sets out on a mission of revenge against Americans in Iraq, who are shown as looting and raping sadists. (67)

Asuman Suner includes this film in the corpus of New Turkish Cinema because it reflects the rising internationality of Turkish Cinema while also proclaiming a trend to restorative nostalgia based on a conspiratorial worldview. While blatantly anti-American, the film also employs American cinematic models, above all the American-style action hero, who is inserted into this contemporary culture-clash setting as "all-powerful, undefeatable and

4 For a further discussion of the link between Serdar Akar's and Alan Parker's films see Poole, "Foltern."

devotedly patriotic," and who yet functions "as reincarnation of the Ottoman/Turkish legacy" (47-48) at the same time.

## Precarious Masculinities in the New Turkish-German Cinema: The Melodramatic Penis and Trans-Masculinity

Like Serdar Akar, Fatih Akın and Kutluğ Ataman both arguably belong to the cadre of New Turkish Cinema directors, but unlike Akar both present male subjectivity in a much more volatile and vulnerable manner. Aslan has called their films "alternative fictions"—in contrast to Yeşilçam's "dominant fictions"—relating them to art house or auteur cinema, especially in depicting the loss of belief in "Oedipal normalization" and offering "overt instances of the portrayal of gendered and sexual identities which runs counter to the dominant fiction and its masculinist logic" (261). More and more, contemporary urban life becomes entrenched with transnational and diasporic experiences, and the cinema accordingly turns to international co-operations and multinational narratives.

Whereas Suner contradictorily claims that the films of Fatih Akın are not part of the New Turkish Cinema and yet includes him in her discussion of this cinema due to Akın's representation of Istanbul, other critics such as Deniz Bayrakdar list Akın in their corpus of New Turkish Cinema. Akın's films are variously said to be part of New European Cinema (Bayrakdar), Cinema of New Arrivals (Sualp), Kino der Normalität (Nicodemus), Accented Cinema (Naficy), Cinema du métissage (Seeßlen), Transnational Cinema (Göktürk), Post-Migrant Cinema in Transit (Lornsen), New German Transnational Cinema (Esen), Deutsch-Türkisches Kino der Gegenwart (El Hissy), 'New' New German Cinema (Fachinger), etc. With regard to German-Turkish film productions, it is safe to say that Fatih Akın has been the most important and most prominent director to date. Akın calls himself a "child of European Cinema" (qtd. in Bayrakdar, "Introduction" xviii) and indeed his fourth film, *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-On*) from 2004 was a major European success receiving amongst other prizes the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival and the "Best Film" and the "Audience Award" at the 2004 European Film Awards.[5] Part of why Akın is considered to be the essential force in shaping a *new*

5 In 2007, Akın's second part of his trilogy "Liebe, Tod und Teufel," *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*), won the prize for best screenplay at the 60th Cannes Film Fes-

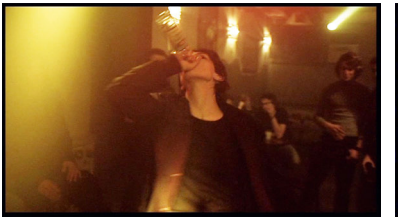
German-Turkish cinema is what Levent Soysal calls his "visual theory of migration" (109). By shifting the focus from a stereotypical victim-focused, Orientalized representation of the male migrant 'Gastarbeiter' and the veiled, submissive woman of former times, a cinema that therefore has been labeled "Suleikarism" (Lornsen 14), Akın's films are corrective to such conventions of visualizing immigrants (cf. Soysal 117) and instead promote an Otherness that has turned from showing German 'multikulti'-society to a transnational, globalized outlook (cf. Bayrakdar, "Turkish Cinema" 121). Besides featuring very resilient and self-assertive women, far from any "Suleika"-stereotype, Akın's male protagonists are equally very different from the standard Turkish male macho. They are often at a loss, struggling with their diasporic existence, showing a rather fluid subjectivity at odds with traditional gender norms, are unsure of their male prowess (such as the 'hero,' Nejat, of *Auf der anderen Seite*), and are often depressive if not outright suicidal, as is the case with the protagonist Cahit in *Gegen die Wand*.

Already the title signifies the protagonist's crisis of masculinity. The film's opening scene shows Cahit in his menial job, a drunkard being repeatedly and unrightfully cursed as "bum and fag," epithets that he later also uses, adding Kanake, to ironically belittle himself. Only a few minutes into the film, Cahit drives full-force into a wall, thus providing the literal meaning of the film's title, *Gegen die Wand*. However, he survives and while in psychiatric treatment, Cahit meets equally suicidal Sibel who asks him to marry her as a means of escaping her traditional Turkish family. He agrees, and although their marriage is a contract allowing the pursuit of one's own pleasures, which includes sleeping with whomever one wants, Cahit starts his metamorphosis from an un-stable existence that lacks a center into a caring partner. This growing into the role of husband, and thus into a heteronormative masculinization, however, entails an increasing violent streak and possessive jealousy, which leads to an attack on one of Sibel's one-night stands who then dies. Cahit's ensuing imprisonment ends the first part, located in Hamburg. The film then focuses on Sibel's move to Istanbul. This is an interesting element in terms of sex and gender performance, since I see Sibel's immediate reaction to Cahit's imprisonment as a transitory moment of female masculinity. She discards all elements of overt femininity such as long hair and short skirts, and dresses similarly to Cahit's street style. She starts to roam the city and bars like Cahit

tival and was awarded the first edition of the LUX prize for European cinema by the European Parliament. The trilogy's final part, *The Cut*, was released in 2014.

did, drinks, takes drugs, picks fights, and dances until she falls unconscious (see fig. 7.6 and 7.7). These scenes have been heavily criticized for their misogyny and depiction of Turkish machismo, but I think that her male masquerade rather serves to act out mourning and anger. Cahit, on the other hand, towards the end of the film after his release, tracks her down and asks her to go with him to Mersin, his birthplace on the Mediterranean coast of southern Turkey. Sibel, who by now has a new partner and a daughter, at first agrees to join him, but then does not show up at the appointed time of departure. So Cahit, much like Mehmet in *Güneşe Yolculuk*, travels alone towards his new/old home, which is the film's final image.

*fig. 7.6 Gegen die Wand. Sibel drinking*
*fig. 7.7 Gegen die Wand. Sibel fighting*




*Gegen die Wand* has been called a melodrama (cf. Lornsen 15, Eren 181, Göktürk 216), and even though it has comic moments, I would agree. The humorous scenes probably stem from Akın's original plan to write a romantic comedy in the style of Peter Weir's *Green Card*. However, the first draft of the script coincided with the terrorist suicide attacks of 9/11, and Akın had too many "angry thoughts," as he claims, that entered the plot to sustain the plan of a comedy (cf. Lornsen 26). The surviving scenes of comedy are mostly rooted in transcultural moments of linguistic and heteronormative failure, due to Cahit's rusty Turkish, but also his deadpan sense of humor, for example when he counters Sibel's effort in cutting off his long, unruly hair and thus 'beautifying' but also taming him with the rhetorical question: "Willste aus'm Bauer 'n Modell machen?" ("D'you wanna turn a farmer into a model?").

The film features two interesting mirror moments concerning precarious masculinities. The first was mentioned already: Sibel's male masquerade that almost gets her killed. The second relates to Cahit's performing maleness as an ethnicized variant of what Peter Lehman has called the spectacle of the

melodramatic penis. Mainly focusing on American films, Lehman considers "one of the most significant developments in the representation of the penis" in recent years the melodramatic penis as a third category besides "the phallic spectacle" and "its pitiable and/or comic collapse" (235). One of the problems that Lehman mentions is that the "privileged signifier of the phallus" (236) retains its awe and mystique best when the penis remains hidden: "The melodrama surrounding the representation of the penis paradoxically cries out to reaffirm the spectacular importance of the penis even as the very assault on the taboo seeks to dislodge that importance" (252). This melodramatic paradox basically continues "to assert that showing the penis must be of some special, if bizarre, significance. The one thing a penis cannot be is simply a penis" (255). Cahit's physical representation shares many traits of such a paradoxical melodramatic penis. On the one hand, his marriage to and ensuing love for Sibel triggers a process of masculinization leading to jealousy and manslaughter, his formerly deviant masculinity as loser turns into a dominant hegemonic masculinity, and a very stereotypical Turkish masculinity above all. And yet, the continued depiction of his vulnerable body, repeated shots of his bare behind and, indeed, his penis, mark him as a feminized object to be gazed at and pitied (see fig. 7.8). His hopeless love, of course, adds to this structurally feminized position, marking the precariousness of his masculinity.

*fig. 7.8 Gegen die Wand. Cahit naked*

While the film in general paints a stereotypically negative portrait of Turkish masculinity—especially through Sibel's father and brothers—, Cahit's volatile masculinity stands out in stark contrast. Leal and Rossade,

however, take this to be a limited existence that Cahit in the end leaves behind with his return to Turkey, which releases him "from the negatively charged conception of masculinity" (72). Viewed this way, Cahit's troubled hyphenated Turkish-German masculinity gives way to a notion "that Turkey might in fact offer an alternative and potentially less fraught context in which to define new masculine identities" (72). I agree that *Gegen die Wand* is "resolutely heterosexual," at times even manifestly homophobic, thus relegating alternative sexualities to the margins and revealing "how threatening these can be to those constructions of heterosexual masculinity potentially destabilized by the experience of social exclusion" (81). But I also believe Cahit's portrayal as described above undercuts this heteronormative logic in a way that differs from Leal and Rossade's reading. Moreover, the casting of Cahit with actor Birol Ünel adds to a subversion of Turkish(-German) masculinist cliches. Ünel's star *persona* has been described as eccentric and has also been compared to that of Klaus Kinski, which in turn highlights Ünel's own ethnic masculinity: "The comparison to the sexualized, eccentric, ill-tempered star [Kinski] certainly gave Ünel an edge, connecting him to an actor who represents New German Cinema and German Culture with an ethnically ambivalent body, since Kinski had a Polish father" (Gueneli 145). As Gueneli points out, Ünel's repeated filmic appearances that link him to "high alcohol consumption, a lower-class milieu [and] a complex sexuality tied to ethnic masculinity" (146) is further complicated in *Gegen die Wand* through explicit nudity, which at first lacks eroticism but becomes increasingly sexualized, albeit in an ethnically romanticized way. This romanticization in turn highlights Akın's move from a narrower Turkish-German to a broader transnational filmic agenda. As Deniz Göktürk asserts, the multilocal affiliations and frequent travels across borders as well as the interchangeable use of German, Turkish and English puts *Gegen die Wand* within "a new trend in European cinema, namely a shift of some transnational directors out of the niche of 'exilic' or 'diasporic' cinema, aptly described by Hamid Naficy as an 'accented cinema,' into mainstream popular cinema or the international festival circuit" (216).[6] Several critics especially stress Akın's mix of Turkish,

6 For an application of Naficy's "accented cinema" in *Gegen die Wand* see Esen, who claims that "the film utilizes both closed and open forms, the epistolary form, multilinguality, and the notion of 'journey' that transforms lost and drifting characters who are looking to kill themselves in the beginning of the film to open and responsible characters in the end: [...] on a journey of being and becoming" (153).

German, and American cinematic traditions and genres that characterize his transnational move, above all his reliance on American melodrama (Douglas Sirk), the New Turkish Cinema, the New German Cinema (Rainer Werner Fassbinder), the new German comedy of the 1990s, and MTV's video-clip style, as well as his fascination with the Italo-American gangster film (Martin Scorsese, John Cassavetes) and the postmodern film noir, with Cahit as a European version of John Travolta's character in *Pulp Fiction* (cf. Eren 181, Fachinger 254, Göktürk 221, Lornsen 20).

Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* (1999) is yet another prominent film that strives towards a transnational perspective, partly by mixing cinematic genres such as the female-identified melodrama and the 'male' action thriller. It is also a film which focuses on the penis in a very literal manner, namely as the "little problem" that needs to be taken care of, i.e. by having a male-to-female sex reassignment surgery, thus "queerly challenging the audience's expectations of genre conformity" (Clark 563). In contrast to Akın's oeuvre, Ataman's film indicates another crucial moment in the development of a New Turkish Cinema relocated in Germany but with numerous international links. Whereas Rob Burns claims that the recent Turkish-German cinema, although aiming to be transnational, is a "new male-oriented cinema" which marginalizes women (142, qtd. in Fincham 60), both Sibel in *Gegen die Wand* as well as Lola and the other transgender characters in Ataman's film transcend this limited perspective. Other critics, like Christopher Treiblmayr, while acknowledging the U.S.-American commercial and generic influence, nevertheless stress the 'Germanness' of *Lola* and include the film in the corpus of the post-Fassbinder "Junger Deutscher Film" alongside Sönke Wortmann or Tom Tykwer (cf. 192). Certainly, when viewed from this angle, Ataman's film gestures toward "the difficulty of articulating what German national cinema has come to mean in the new millennium" (Gemünden 181, qtd. in Frackman).

In contrast to Akın, Turkish-born Ataman is not German-Turkish, in that he has no binational background. His academic training at the University of California, Los Angeles, and his Berlin film, however, transport him into a transnational field of production and reception. Already his film's title suggests its intertextuality, by mixing the allusion to the legendary American Western hero Billy the Kid with references to German female heroines such as Marlene Dietrich as Lola in Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (1930) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Lola* (1981). What is most impressive, however, is the fact that all this is played out against the backdrop of what has been called "transness" as a "moment of in-betweenness," simultaneously representing

the emergence of a new category of sexual and cultural liminality, and revealing "the instability of all categories" (Clark 556). This playing out of gender and ethnicity via "transed" sexualities and, thus, national "transness," links *Lola* to yet another American filmic genre: the New Queer Cinema. Ataman, although claiming to be the only gay Turkish director who is out of the closet (cf. Treiblmayr),[7] is actually part of a small but growing number of directors, who tackle Turkish gay sexuality, either from an exiled point of view, such as Ferzan Özpetek, most famously in his Italian-Turkish-Spanish coproduction *Hamam: Turkish Bath* (1997),[8] or from a foreigner's perspective, such as Guy Lee Thys in his Belgian film *Mixed Kebab* (2012). What these "queer diasporic" films (Williams 197, 213) all have in common are depictions of parallel societies, i.e. gay Turkish lives as being marginal within an already marginalized minority of Turkish immigrants.

Ataman's film came out at the same time as the much more famous Tom Tykwer Berlin film *Lola rennt* (1998), as yet another cinematic link in the ever-growing "Lola culture" (Kılıçbay 113). In it, the redhead Lola also 'runs' through Berlin's streets, but here she is a performer on stage, part of a transvestite group called "Die Gastarbeiterinnen" (see fig. 7.9). Off-stage and like her co-performers forced to wear male clothes in Turkish Kreuzberg, she 'runs' from her Turkish-German cultural heritage as much as from her macho lover who wants to turn Lola into a 'good' Turkish wife and *Hausfrau*, which is, of course, where the penis comes into play (see fig. 7.10). In order to have this wish fulfilled, i.e. to live with Bili as 'normal' husband and wife in Turkey, Lola would have to get rid of the "little problem," as her lover calls the allegedly superfluous mark of manhood: "Wir werden verheiratet sein. So wie diese deutschen Schwuchteln können wir nicht zusammenleben. […] Aber da gibt es noch ein kleines Problem. […] Wenns sein muss, schneid ich dir den Schwanz ab." ("We will be married. We can't be together like those German fags. […] But there still is a little problem. […] I'll cut off your dick if I have to.")

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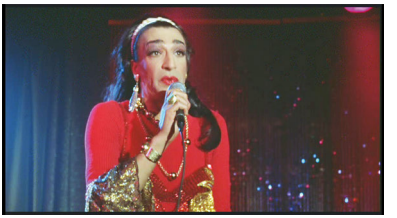
7 As Karin Hamm-Ehsani points out, homosexuality is still largely a social taboo in Turkey, and even within the German-Turkish community, openly queer people are mostly rejected. While the film was successful internationally, the reaction in Turkey was so fiercely negative that Ataman faced death threats when the film premiered, which partly led to the director's decision to flee Turkey for London (cf. Hamm-Ehsani 371, 378; Smith 54).

8 For a discussion of Özpetek's *Hamam* see chapter 2.

*fig. 7.9 Lola + Bilidikid. "Die Gastarbeiterinnen"*
*fig. 7.10 Lola + Bilidikid. Bili und Lola*




While Cahit in Akın's film metamorphoses into an ambivalent specimen of Turkish heteronormative manhood, Bili in Ataman's film is equally ambivalent in his Turkish machismo, which is based on a structurally internalized homophobia, claiming: "Ein Mann ist ein Mann and ein Loch ist ein Loch. Sei niemals ein Loch." ("A man is a man, and a hole is a hole. Never be a hole.") Bili's masculinity, however, is precarious in various ways. He works as a hustler, and yet his troubled homosexual desire is at odds with his acculturated heterosexism, and his heroic, yet diminutive and juvenile name "Bilidikid" points towards a performed, 'fake' hypermasculine identity, a "Macho-Drag" (El Hissy 249-250). Lola resents and resists relinquishing her penis to become Bili's "w/hole woman" (Kılıçbay 107), a decision that she comments on in a dystopic tale which not only paints a bleak picture of Bili and an imagined penis-less Lola in Turkey, but foreshadows her own violent death shortly after: "Warum glaubst du hat Bili Lola verlassen? Weil die Frau, die er geheiratet hat, nicht mehr der Mann war, in den er sich verliebt hatte." ("Why do you think, Bili left Lola? Because the woman he married was not the man he fell in love with anymore.") Towards the conclusion, in a spectacular showdown, Bili, before getting killed himself, castrates, not Lola (who is dead by then), but Lola's presumed murderer, a Neo-Nazi. As it turns out, Lola was not a victim of hate crime but of family honor instead, since it was Lola's older brother who sexually abused and later killed her. Lola's younger brother, who masquerades as his dead brother, and thus acts as yet another Lola running through Berlin's streets, eventually solves the crime and exposes his abusive older brother as a homophobic killer acting in the name of family honor. The film's title heroes are ultimately both dead, perhaps because they represent failed attempts in dealing with a multifarious "transness." Nevertheless, there

are other survivors claiming a queer utopic space of precarious masculinity, above all Kalipso, one of the "Gastarbeiterinnen," who is the only character in the film to decide to make the transition from performing transgender on stage to also being transgender off stage. Kalypso's chosen name refers to a sea nymph in Greek mythology that literally means "I will conceal," which is very appropriate since "she is portrayed as a drag queen who finally breaks free after years of concealing her orientation in her daily life" (Kılıçbay 108). In a humorously campy epilogue, the film's last moments and words are given to Kalypso, who, while triumphantly riding in a taxi towards "the glorious queered Berlin 'Siegessäule'" (Hamm-Ehsani 379), calls out in Turkish: "I am a woman with balls." In the end, she has surpassed the melodrama of the penis, celebrating a precarious trans identity that has moved beyond dichotomous national and sexual borders.

It is with such films that European cinema both stays true to its own diverse national traditions and moves into a transnational sphere of a supranational cinema. While many films of the New Turkish Cinema such as *Güneşe Yolculuk* and *Kurtlar Vadisi—Irak* incorporate multiethnic perspectives, migratory narratives, and transnational, especially American generic modes, they still highlight primarily national issues. In contrast, films like those of Akın and Ataman radically break open such national framings. Especially through depictions of fractured, destabilized, and liminal masculine identities, these films engage in a transnational agenda of negotiating multiple ethnic and gendered cinematic representations across national borders.

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