FROM ESSENTIALISM TO HYBRIDITY: FATIH AKIN'S GEGEN DIE WAND AS PORTRAYAL OF SECOND-GENERATION TURKS IN GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

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Who are the Turks living on German soil? This question is central to many contemporary discussions being waged in the German media. In a country with approximately 2 million residents of Turkish descent, the time has come for this question to finally be addressed and answered. While journalists and politicians grapple with this topic, one director has made significant contributions to the discussion through one film: *Gegen die Wand*.

This thesis explores the struggles that second generation Turks in Germany face when it comes to identity. It will look into the history of the minority Turkish population in Germany, and the struggles that the current generation must face. By incorporating the hybridity theory of Homi K. Bhabha the discussion will be widened to include new ways of approaching the question of identity. The thesis will then focus on *Gegen die Wand* and show the ways in which this film opens up new opportunities for discussing this very topical issue of second-generation minorities in Germany.
“The migrations of modern times...have transplanted themselves according to some social, religious, economic or political determination, or some peculiar mixture of those. There has therefore been something in the removements analogous in nature to religious schism. The people have taken with them only a part of the total culture...The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture: it will be complicated sometimes by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration from other than the original source. In this way, peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash appear.” –T.S. Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture
I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Stephen and Mary Ann Johnson. Their unwillingness to accept anything less than my best, and their constant faith in me have made it possible for me to attempt and complete all that I have accomplished in life.
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INTRODUCTION

There was nothing exceptional about the February 7, 2005 murder of Hatun Sürekü. Only twenty-three at the time of her death, Sürekü became the forty-ninth documented case of an “honor crime” in Germany during the past nine years (Schneider). An honor killing is carried out, usually by male members of the victim’s family, as a way to preserve the family’s honor against supposed offenses committed by a female family member. Such offenses may include premarital sex, promiscuity (which may not necessarily involve sexual activity, but merely hand-holding or casual dating), or general disobedience of family mandates.

Hatun Sürekü was raised in Berlin by parents who had emigrated to Germany from Turkey. At sixteen years of age she was sent to Turkey to be married to a cousin. A year later she returned to Germany after separating from her husband, and was expecting a child. She enrolled in school and began dating. She raised her son as a single mother. As she built a new life for herself, she began to live a more westernized lifestyle, which included living alone as a single mother, dating other men, and educating herself. At the same time she still observed many Muslim practices. The former was unacceptable in the eyes of her family. After one of her brothers threatened her, she reported the incident to the German police. The next time police were called regarding Sürekü, she had been shot three times and lay dead on a Berlin street. Her executioners were three of her brothers.

Though all three brothers were tried, the court on April 13, 2006 found only the youngest brother, Ayhan Sürekü, guilty. Because he was only eighteen years old at the time of the murder, he was tried as a juvenile and sentenced to just nine years and three months in jail. This is a typical tactic used by families who carry out honor killings.
Though many in the family take part in ordering and planning the killing, the youngest male member of the family actually carries out the murder. This is to ensure that if he is caught he will be tried as a juvenile, and his sentence will be lighter than that of an adult. In the case of Hatun Sürückü’s family this plan worked out exactly. The reaction to the verdict in the German Press was overwhelmingly negative. European Parliament Member for the Green Party, Cem Özdemir, spoke out immediately following the announcement that only the youngest brother would be incarcerated, declaring it “shocking.”

Being just one of forty-nine such cases, Sürückü’s case came to the spotlight only after Berlin school director, Volker Steffens, overheard many students agreeing with her murder, and even commenting, “Die hat doch selbst Schuld. Die Hure lief rum wie eine Deutsche.” Steffens was outraged over these remarks and sent a letter out to the parents of all his students condemning such an attitude. The media eventually got hold of the story, and Germans throughout the country read about the case. (Schneider) It became the latest spark in a long line of events that have brought the debate over immigration and integration in Germany to the forefront of public and political debate. Two events, both headed by Islamic Fundamentalists, have fueled the need for debate on these issues: the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 (two of the hijackers had studied in Hamburg), and the stabbing death of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by an Islamic Fundamentalist in Amsterdam. Further, the decision to start Turkey on a path for entry into the European Union has also played a major role in sparking debate about Muslims in Europe.

How is it possible that honor killings have become somewhat unremarkable in a modern country like Germany? Peter Schneider argues that following the horrors of
World War II, Germans made an effort to be tolerant of other cultures and religions. When the *Gastarbeiter* arrived, many of whom were practicing Muslims, Germans failed to establish practical integration policies, and instead allowed incoming foreigners to settle in their own communities and live according to their own customs and beliefs. At first this was due to the fact that these workers were only supposed to remain in Germany for a limited amount of time, and then return to their home countries. However as the situation changed Germans preferred to hold cultural relativism sacred and not interfere in cultural practices, such as forced marriages for young girls. In doing so liberal-minded Germans avoided accusations of being racist. Instead of confronting the problems that an emerging fundamentalist Islamic population within Germany was creating, they let matters alone and allowed minority populations to establish their own “parallel communities” in which beliefs and practices dominated, even when they clashed with German democratic law and international human rights. Peter Schneider declares in his article “The New Berlin Wall,” that citizens who abhor cases like Sürücü’s “are fighting on two fronts – against Islamic oppression of women and its proponents, and against the guilt-ridden tolerance of liberal multiculturalists.” Schneider argues later on in his article:

> Merely citing ‘lessons from the German past,’ as Germans tend to do, does not guarantee that these lessons are correct. It is a perversion when, out of respect for the ‘otherness’ of a different culture, Germans stand aside and accept the fact that Muslim women in Germany are being subjugated to an archaic code of honor that flouts the fundamental human rights to dignity and individual freedom. This has nothing to do with Germany or the ‘guiding German culture’ that German
conservatives want to put through; it has simply to do with humanity, with the protection of basic human and civil rights for all citizens of all ethnic backgrounds. (66)

Schneider appears to be calling for a forced assimilation of the Turkish Muslim population into mainstream, western, German culture. While his condemnation of the archaic practice of honor killings against women is certainly valid, his attention to only the Turkish Muslim population is short-sighted. Throughout the world, the western world included, women are killed by men everyday. Though some cases get more media attention than others, which may give the impression that such murders happen only quite seldom, the truth is that there are no patriarchal cultures in which women are not often subjugated to the anger and violence of men. By making his argument against only the Turkish community, Schneider forgets that though it may not be referred to as an honor killing when a German woman is gunned down by her ex-boyfriend or husband, it is still unnecessary and unacceptable violence against women. By publishing such articles as Schneider’s, authors and journalists in Germany give a very one-sided view of the Turkish community. Germans read these accounts of the weak, beaten-down Turkish woman, and suddenly the gap between Germans and Turks widens even more. What good does it do, if after reading such articles, Germans sit back and conclude, “if the lives of these people are so different from ours, how can we possibly co-exist together?” This thesis will attempt to make a contribution towards understanding the unique situation of Turkish women living in Germany rather than constructing them as a radical “other,” to be avoided or protected.
What is it like to grow up Turkish in Germany? Thousands of second and even third-generation Turks live in Germany, and each would have their own way of answering this question. While Hatun Sürüçü’s life story may appear to many Germans as a typical fate for Turkish women in Germany, nothing could be farther from the truth. Though it is certainly true that her case raises many important questions, and forces Germans to confront the problems that have been allowed to develop over decades, Sürüçü’s fate is far from typical when compared to others who have grown up in Turkish families. Many have written books about their experiences, which run the gamut between positive and negative. Hatice Akyün writes in her autobiographical novel *Einmal Hans mit scharfer Soße* that she is „Türkin mit deutschem Pass, für Politiker ein Paradebeispiel einer gelungenen Integration...“ In *Scheherazades Tochter*, written by an unknown author under the pseudonym Ayşe, the narrator describes a much more turbulent experience. To escape an arranged marriage she methodically plans to run away from her family, only to be caught and violently beaten by her brothers and father. Cem Özdemir, the first German of Turkish descent to be elected to the Bundestag, writes in his autobiography, *Ich bin ein Inländer*, about how he is seen by different communities within Germany and Turkey. “I had to explain to those of the Turkish migrant community…that I was of Turkish descent. Not more and not less.” (8)

As varying as each individual experience, so too are the ways in which this community is referred to in the press and in the academic world. A random sampling from various sources consulted during research includes/d: *ein türkischstämmiger Hamburger, die Deutschtürken, Immigranten, Deutsch-Türkin, Türkin, die in Deutschland lebenden Türken, Deutsch-türkisch, Deutsche, eine türkischstämmige*
Deutsche, die Ruhrgebietstürken, Sohn/Tochter türkischer Eltern, die in Deutschland aufgewachsene Türken, Gastarbeiter, Sohn türkischer Einwanderer, second-generation migrants, and a German citizen with a migratory background. Each of these terms attempts to capture in the fewest words possible the identity of this diverse group of people. In doing so, mostly these terms fail to achieve complete accuracy. The terminology is further complicated by the fact that until recently, second and even third generation Turks were unable to attain German citizenship, making them officially German residents but Turkish citizens. What name then is appropriate for a child born in Germany, to parents who have lived for decades in the Federal Republic; a child who speaks flawless German, attends German schools and holds German residency status if not citizenship?

In the past Germans have attempted to deal with this population by essentializing them, pigeonholing them into either a Turkish or a German category. When the decision is to categorize them as Turkish, which is generally the case, they are seen as being inherently different from their German counterparts. This sets up an all-or-nothing belief that expects children of Turkish immigrants to behave in an entirely “Turkish” manner which is in reality an impossibility. To expect such a phenomenon, one must first be able to define what it means to be Turkish, and then what it means to be a German. If those first two objectives are achieved, one must then prove that the people they see as Turkish fit only those characteristics essential to a Turk. In an ever more globalized world, with intermingling of cultures and modernization of traditions becoming the norm, it is ludicrous to assume that any Turk could fulfill such a definition, much less a Turk who has spent his or her entire life living in Germany.
In order to avoid these essentialized notions of culture and identity one must find another level of discourse upon which to base discussions of the second and third generation Turks in Germany. Post-colonial theory offers some appealing alternatives, beginning with the work of Homi Bhabha. Two of his concepts are of particular interest here: *hybridity* and *the third space*. According to Bhabha in an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, “hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them” (Rutherford, 216). “The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford, 211). Hybridity therefore, offers an alternative to essentialized notions of culture. As Bhabha notes, “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (Rutherford, 211). It does not place emphasis on the two cultures, such as German and Turkish, but rather explores the possibility of a new space, in which there is a completely new ground upon which to construct identity. This third space is an important place, where new positions are allowed to take hold and flourish. These ideas will guide this work, giving new perspectives from which to view an old discussion.

Chapter One will explore the history of the Turkish presence in Germany. Special attention will be given to the experiences of Turkish women, and their immigration process. The chapter will also outline the emergence of the so-called *Parallelgesellschaft*, or parallel community. Chapter Two will analyze *Gegen die Wand*, a film which captures the ideas of a “third space.” Both formally as well as through the story it tells, this
Migrantenfilme generates new levels of discourse, which are far less limiting than those which came before. Through the exploration of Gegen die Wand I will show that Fatih Akin has found a new way to portray the lives of Turkish Germans without reducing them to a social problem.
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY

According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany as of December 31, 2004 the Turkish population in Germany was 1,764,318. This includes all residents of Germany, who were either born in Turkey or born in Germany to Turkish parents. It includes German citizens of Turkish descent, as well as Turkish passport holders currently residing in the Federal Republic. This number does not include Turks applying for asylum in Germany, or undocumented Turks living within Germany. Turks make up roughly twenty-four percent of the 7,288,000 total foreign residents in Germany (Federal Statistical Office). This is a sizable minority in a country that has publicly claimed that it is not a country of immigrants. Why are the Turks in Germany?

The answers to this question dates back over sixty years, to the end of the Second World War. At the close of hostilities, Germany was in ruins. Its major cities had been bombed, and the majority of her infrastructure was severely damaged or even destroyed. In addition to these losses, Germany had lost a great deal of manpower. In order to rebuild the country, Germany would need money, materials and labor.

The money and materials were supplied in large part by the Marshall Plan, introduced by the United States in 1947. However there was little that could be accomplished without the manpower Germany desperately needed. After losing over 6.5 million mainly male Germans during the war, the country was in critical need of outside help (Legge Jr. 18). This came in the form of *Gastarbeiter*, or “guest workers.” Eastern Europe, the traditional supplier of foreign workers to Germany, was unavailable after 1949; the Soviets needed their own workers to supply labor power to remain in-country.
Instead Germany turned south, towards the Mediterranean, which housed many countries with high birthrates and unemployment.

The first agreement was reached with Italy in 1955, with agreements with Spain and Greece to follow in 1960 (Legge Jr. 26-27). During this time, the German economy was beginning to rebuild itself, and workers were desperately needed to fill menial, blue-collar jobs. The German government entered into these agreements with a “rotational” model in mind (Legge Jr. 26). The idea was that *Gastarbeiter*, overwhelmingly male, would be granted temporary work permits, which would allow them to live in and work in Germany for one year (Chapin, 11). After the year ended, those workers would return to their home countries and be replaced with another round of workers. The idea was never to integrate these people into German society, they were purely *guest* workers. When their year was over, they would return home. To recruit these workers the *Bundesanstalt für Arbeit* was created (Panayi 217). This organization was funded by German firms, who, in need of labor, applied with and paid a fee to the BfA. The BfA would then place recruitment offices in the supplying countries, where they would interview and do background checks on potential *Gastarbeiter*.

This plan sufficed until 1961, when the Soviets erected the Berlin Wall, closing the last escape hatch from East to West Germany. The West German labor force was immediately affected by this border closing, as its East German labor supply could no longer enter the west. Once again, Germany had to look outside of her borders for new labor. In the same year as the building of the Berlin Wall, a bilateral labor agreement was reached with Turkey for the “export of surplus workforce” (Uçarer 242). The same rules applied to the Turks: Turkish men were recruited to come to Germany as temporary
Gastarbeiter. After a year their work-permit would expire and they would return to Turkey. The Gastarbeiter were highly desired. Not only would they take the unskilled jobs that German workers preferred not to do, but they were also willing to relocate to regions facing dire labor shortages, something their German counterparts were largely unwilling to do (Legge Jr. 27).

Turkey was a model supplier of foreign labor, with an inflated birthrate that was one of the world’s highest. This fact, coupled with high unemployment rates, led the Turkish government to encourage its male citizens of working age to apply to work abroad. This would not only help to alleviate the unemployment issue, but it would also bring foreign currency into Turkey, in the form of remittances (Panayi 216-217). The money sent back by these workers to their families in Turkey was considered by the state to be an “indirect aid program” (Chapin 14). Turkey would end up being the leading supplier of Gastarbeiter to Germany. Between the years 1968-73 the yearly average number of Turkish workers entering Germany was 97,053 (Panayi 218).

The first Turkish Gastarbeiter had actually come to Germany four years before, in 1957, when twelve Turkish men were invited to Hamburg to be trained as craftsmen. Three years later in 1960 there were 2,700 Turkish workers in Germany. In 1963, two years after the bilateral agreement with Turkey was enacted, the number had increased tenfold to 27,500 (Uçar 242). The majority of Turks who came to work in Germany were of working age, hailed from very rural areas of Turkey, and had little or no formal education. They came alone, without wives or children. They were placed in the manufacturing and construction sectors, freeing German workers to take less physically-demanding jobs in the service sector.
In the years 1966-67 a recession in the Germany economy caused many foreign workers to “voluntarily” return to their home countries. This was largely in response to pressure and incentives from the German government. Amidst public debates on the “foreigner problem” and worry over losing German jobs, the government was anxious to appease voters (Klopp 39). By 1968 however the recession had ended, and German firms were once again desperate for more foreign workers.

As the 1970s began, firms had grown tired of constantly having to retrain their foreign workers each year (Legge Jr. 27). After applying pressure to the German government the law was changed with the 1971 Ordinance on Work Permits to allow foreign workers who had already spent five or more years in Germany to apply to stay and work for another five years (Legge Jr. 15). This was made possible by the granting of a five-year work/residence visa. A major result of this decision was that many Gastarbeiter sent back to Turkey for their wives and children to join them in Germany. Many new workers left Turkey as well and arrived in Germany. By December 1973 there were nearly 600,000 Turkish Gastarbeiter in Germany (Panayi 218).

In this same year, ostensibly as a preventative measure to offset the anticipated oil embargo, Germany passed a new law, the Anwerbestopp, limiting new foreign labor from entering the country (Klopp 39). Hit hardest by this new law were laborers in non-EEC states, as the law was more lenient towards allowing labor from EEC-countries to still enter Germany. When the oil embargo indeed hit the next year, Germany’s economy was hit hard. The Wirtschaftswunder slowed, and unemployment rates rose sharply. First and most severely affected by this were Gastarbeiter, as unskilled jobs were the first to be lost. Without union membership to help protect these workers, many lost their jobs.
However, due to the global impact of the economic downturn, Turkish *Gastarbeiter* recognized that the economic situation in Germany remained stronger than that of the Turkish economy, and they chose to take their chances and remain in Germany.

After the oil embargo Germany implemented family-reunification programs. By providing financial incentives to workers, to reunite them with wives and children back in Turkey, the German government made reunification a lucrative choice. One aspect of the program involved Germany’s Children Allowance. In the past this money was paid to all parents in Germany regardless of the location of their children. In 1973 however, this was amended to stipulate that money would only be paid to parents of children living in the Federal Republic (Chapin 17). This was a further benefit to moving wives and children into Germany. Reunification of families naturally caused a rise in the foreign birthrate in Germany, especially in the Turkish population. Therefore, though new migration into Germany was halted, the Turkish population continued to rise. Germany’s reaction to this was to offer incentives for *Gastarbeiter* and their families to return to Turkey in the early 1980s. By improving information to *Gastarbeiter*, and offering financial benefits to workers willing to return to Turkey, the German government hoped to entice a number of *Gastarbeiter* to return to Turkey. In a 1984 program the government went as far as to offer a $5000 bonus to workers willing to give up their work and residence permits (Chapin 17-18). Though some did take advantage of these various offers, most did not, preferring to remain in Germany. Increasingly families were reunited, and in 1981 there were 658 Turkish women for every 1000 Turkish men (Panayi 219).

Citizenship restrictions help to ease or hinder eventual integration into a new country. The easier access one has to citizenship, the easier it can be to truly join a new
society. Until the 1990 major revisions to the Foreigners Act of 1965 were passed, Germany held the third most restrictive naturalization laws in Western Europe, behind Austria and parts of Switzerland (Klopp 44). As Germany’s policy on citizenship from 1913-2000 was based on *ius sanguinis*, or blood descent, and not *ius soli*, citizenship based on where a child is born, this prevented children and even grandchildren born and raised in Germany from obtaining automatic citizenship (Klopp 44). If a child was born to a German parent and a foreign parent, it was automatically granted German citizenship. However if a child is “of more than half non-German descent,” citizenship was not granted (Klopp 44).

In 1990 however, progress was made with laws allowing for easier access to naturalization for children of *Gastarbeiter*. Naturalization requirements remain very strict: foreigners must have strong German writing and speaking skills; must have been legal residents for ten or more years; must be able to work, and have a steady income; must have assimilated to the German way of life; and must have a clean police record (Klopp 43). The 1990 changes extended rights of residence for foreign workers holding unlimited residence permits, and took away the power of individual Länderr to use their own judgment on a case-by-case basis to determine the granting of residence permits (Chapin 18). Begun in 2000 the “option model” law allows children born in Germany to non-German parents, who have lived in Germany for eight or more years and who have held a residence permit for three or more years, to hold both a German passport and the passport of their parents’ home country until they are 23 years of age (Legge Jr. 163). At age 18 a five-year decision period begins, in which the individual must decide which nationality to keep (Klopp 50). This law was originally intended by the SPD to allow
children of foreigners to permanently hold dual citizenship. However the CDU opposed this plan, and the law was changed to appease them (Legge Jr. 163). Many German political parties are against policies which would simply allow immigrants to hold both a German passport and the passport of their native country. This has historically kept naturalization rates low, especially in the case of the Turks, as immigrants are reluctant for various reasons to relinquish their native passports.\(^1\) In response to the new laws of 1990 however, more than 300,000 immigrants naturalize annually in Germany (Klopp 44).

**Specific History of Turkish Women in Germany**

In addition to the general history of Turkish immigration into Germany, it is helpful here to take a closer look at the specific history of Turkish women’s journey into German society. In her dissertation entitled *Separate Spaces, Separate Outcomes* Anita Drever specifically addresses the differences Turkish women face when immigrating into Germany. Their experiences are quite different from those of their male counterparts, especially given the fact that their experiences in Germany have traditionally taken place less in the public sphere and more in the private sphere, or the home (53). Though the great majority of *Gastarbeiter* that arrived in Germany were male, in the last year of recruitment, 1973, thirty percent of foreign workers were female. Many of these women were recruited specifically for jobs left empty by German women returning to the home. These jobs were in industries such as textiles, food, health care and hospitality, and generally paid between thirty and forty percent less than jobs offered to male

\(^1\) For instance, without a Turkish passport, individuals were unable, until 1996, to inherit property in Turkey. Additionally, due to the belief that immigrants would one day return home to Turkey, many saw no need to relinquish their native passport for a German one. (Klopp 43).
Gastarbeiter (60-61). Turkish women and men faced the same assumptions that both were only to remain in Germany for a year, before being rotated out of the German labor market and back to Turkey. For Turkish women this had implications for their social acceptance and treatment. Little effort was made to empower these women, instead they were held to their same Turkish social position so that they would have no trouble returning back to their families in Turkey after their year in Germany (61).

The majority of Turkish women arrived in Germany not as Gastarbeiter themselves, but rather when the family reunification programs became active. Drever uses the term “the following woman” to refer to this new wave of female Turkish immigrants (61). These women arrived in Germany and moved with their husbands and children shortly thereafter out of dormitory style housing and into homes. In this setting most of these women became stay-at-home mothers, overseeing the household and the children. Because of the language barrier, the unfamiliarity with the German culture, and the desire of many husbands to shield their wives from the relatively liberal German society, many Turkish women were confined to their homes and local neighborhoods. This led to an isolation which insured that integration into German society would not progress. Those women who did enter the workforce did so in the lower end of the service sector, employed as domestic workers in restaurants and hotels, or in jobs caring for the elderly (62).

Development of a Parallelgesellschaft

Male and female Turkish immigrants alike must face German attitudes towards immigration. The famous phrase “Germany is not a country of immigration”

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2 Unfortunately this position was felt by many Turkish women to be of lower standing in Germany than it had been in Turkey. As German women were choosing more often than not to work outside of the home, unpaid work was seen as less valuable than employment (Drever 63).
(“Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland”) dates back to 1977, in a report prepared by the Federal Minister for Labor and Social Order. This report goes on to state: “West Germany is a country in which foreigners reside for varying lengths of time before they decide on their own accord to return to their home country. Over the long-term this basic orientation serves the economic and social interests of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as those of the home countries” (Klopp 7). That these words were uttered four years after the halt in recruitment of new foreign workers, and amidst the family reunifications taking place all over Germany, makes them ludicrous and outdated. This would be the government’s attitude in the years to come.

This tendency to ignore the issue of properly integrating these now permanent workers continued through the following decades. Germany allowed the Turkish community to distance themselves further from German society. The unwillingness on the part of Germany to confront this phenomenon until quite recently, contributed largely to the development of an essentially parallel community. Along with this governmental indifference, the German society began displaying xenophobia towards the foreign population and towards the Turks in particular. Primarily these attitudes revolved around the economic situation; in times of downturn, Germans felt that their jobs were being lost to Turkish workers. In reality, as in many countries with significant immigrant populations, the jobs occupied by foreign workers were jobs most Germans felt to be beneath them. Nevertheless negative attitudes against foreigners flourished, and in 1982 a poll showed that eighty percent of Germans surveyed felt that there were too many foreigners in the Federal Republic (Ardagh 284). Acts of violence against Turks have
also been carried out, one example being the arson attacks in Solingen in 1993, in which 5 Turkish women were murdered (Whitlock).

In response to the unfamiliar and often unwelcoming German society many Turks turned to fundamentalist religious leaders for guidance. These Islamic organizations preached resistance towards integration and a general mistrust of the German “infidels” (Ardagh 286). This phenomenon is not unique to Germany, but tends to occur in any European country in which a large Muslim minority exists. The Turks who follow these strict interpretations of the Islamic faith, generally become more devout and fundamentalist than their counterparts back in Turkey. These families tend to be very patriarchal; the brothers and fathers hold complete authority over the women of the family. Young daughters especially are often strictly controlled and punished for their indiscretions with violence. Many times these young girls are forced into arranged marriages at relatively young ages, with cousins or family friends back in Turkey, who use this opportunity to come to Germany. The patriarchal system then continues under the control of this new husband, who holds complete power over his young bride. Naturally not all Turkish immigrants follow this path. There exists, in fact, a dichotomy within the Turkish Muslim population in Germany. While some families follow a fundamentalist path, others hold onto or adopt more liberal lifestyles. These more liberal families abhor the reputation the more fundamentalist populations give to Islam (Ardagh 286).

Over the last decade Germany has made some strides towards encouraging and easing integration of Turks. In particular, efforts have been made to protect Turkish women from the patriarchal constraints of certain fundamentalist households. In October
2004 the German government passed a law making it illegal for parents to force their children to marry\(^3\) (Biehl 2005). This law will attempt to prevent the forced and/or arranged marriages of many very young Turkish daughters. Many marriages are arranged between daughters in Germany and men back in Turkey. This is known among experts as Heiratsmigration, which facilitates further entry into Germany for many Turkish individuals (“Integrations-Krise”). Statistics gathered by the German Ministry for Family Affairs and published in 2004 indicate that half of the Turkish women surveyed were pressured into marrying a man selected by their relatives. Forty-nine percent reported experiences with physical or sexual violence within their marriages. It is in order to prevent a rise in such statistics that this law was created. However such a law can be circumvented, as it only applies to legal marriages and not religious ones (Biehl 2005). Many Turkish families simply skip the civil ceremony and instead marry their children in a strictly religious setting, where no questions are asked.

\(^3\) Secular Turkey has had such a law for many years (Biehl 2005).
CHAPTER TWO: QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

The question of identity is central to people of all backgrounds and cultures. The second and third generation Turks in Germany are no exception. Certainly their situation can be seen as similar to that of other minority populations living in countries all around the world, yet their specific history and societal factors make questions of identity especially central to studies of this population.

In her book *Einmal Hans mit scharfer Soße: Leben in zwei Welten* Hatice Akyün writes about her experiences growing up as a second generation Turk in Germany. Through anecdotes and vignettes Akyün recounts stories from her life, which together, give her readers an idea of what her experience growing up involved. The back of the book gives a concise outline of her self-described identity:

Mein Name ist Hatice. Ich bin Türkin, aber auch Deutsche, Ausländerin, Muslime, Deutsch-Türkin, Journalistin oder rein Miststück, je nachdem, wer mich gerade betrachtet. Und ich empfinde es als Reichtum, diese Widersprüche in mir zu vereinen. Ich trage kein Kopftuch und bin mit fünfunddreißig noch nicht verheiratet. Ich bin zu deutsch, um eine Türkin zu sein, und zu türkisch, mich eine Deutsch zu nennen.

This description lack any mention of forced marriage, limited rights, or violent patriarchal upbringing. Her story bears little resemblance to the lives of the victims of honor killings, such as Hatun Sürückü, yet many elements reveal themselves to be similar nonetheless. Both women must deal with the tension that arises when these two worlds collide. Both must make choices about who they want to become, how they want to live their lives. In the case of Sürückü the consequences of these actions are obviously much
more serious, whereas Akyün seemingly has much more freedom to decide the terms of her life herself.

This question of identity is naturally a central theme in many writings and films portraying Turks in Germany. To claim that in order to find one’s identity, one must make a decision to either be German or Turkish, is no longer an acceptable practice for dealing with this issue. It is not logical to view this supposed struggle as a conflict that can be easily solved by deciding “either-or.” The question of identity goes farther than this binary option would allow. Identity must be constructed between these two nationalities, between these two cultures. The position of Turks living alongside Germans, in what has developed into parallel societies, gives them a unique opportunity to create an identity that reflects not simply a combination of German and Turkish, but also the experience of living in a society that sees them as others.

Through the migration process into Germany new frontiers have been formed. Geographically Turkey remains quite a distance from the German border. However in practice today Turkey is no longer separated from Germany by several states; rather the two countries share an ever changing border. Turkish communities within major German cities, such as Berlin or Hamburg, bring the Turkish-German border much closer. It now falls between these Turkish communities and the German communities that surround them. While discussing such modern, globalized borders, Saskia Sassen refers to them as: “a frontier zone in the territory of the nation” where “proximity is deterritorialized.” (273). Through their migration into Germany over the past four decades Turks have brought a new border into Germany. These two cultures, German and Turkish, now reside, in this sense, side-by-side.
Once this new in-between space is constructed how are relations between Germans and their new Turkish neighbors established and changed? Many Germans tend to group all Turks (and indeed, often, all foreigners) together, making no distinction between first and third generations, Turkish or Kurdish, educated or uneducated, German citizens or Turkish passport holders. They are often simply viewed with the generic term Ausländer or the outdated Gastarbeiter. As German interaction with the Turks, and above all with Turkish women, remains minimal these labels persist, accompanied by dozens of stereotypes. Often such misconceptions are used as an excuse for anti-foreigner sentiment or even violence. Most often however, they serve as a basis for the continuation of the division between German and Turkish societies. Many Turks remain socially confined to their predominantly Turkish neighborhoods, while Germans remain in their own neighborhoods, never establishing relationships with Turkish families.

These separate spaces may have suited first generation migrants to some extent, in the sense that many were not fluent in the German language and often preferred the safety and familiarity of such Turkish enclaves. Turks were easily able to maintain their traditions and live within a community that obviated the need for true integration. For many, identities and social standing remained relatively similar to what they had been back in Turkey. This was especially true in the case of Turkish women, who as stated above, spent much more time at home in these isolated neighborhoods than their husbands. This generation faced many hardships, beginning in the mid-1970s with the rising anti-foreigner sentiment and growing talk of “the foreigner problem.” The second generation however, their children, was left with an additional hurdle: the struggle to find its own identity as children of Gastarbeiter.
Post colonial Theorist Homi K. Bhabha has written about the collision of multiple cultures in colonized societies. His ideas have transformed some of the ways in which scholars read and interpret writings from the colonial world. These ideas have also crossed disciplines proving to be relevant to subjects as diverse as Art, English, and Culture Studies. I will argue to show how his ideas can be very insightful and helpful in a discussion involving identity of second generation Turks in Germany.

Two of Bhabha’s major contributions are the concepts *hybridity* and *the third space*. These ideas are closely linked together, and attempt to open up a new field for identity construction in situations where many influences exist. In this thesis I will focus on identity constructions for second and third generation Turks in Germany. Many second Generation Turks grow up in homes with parents who speak only Turkish, at the same time attending German schools and making German friends. How do this combination of cultures affect the identities of these individuals?

In his own words, Bhabha describes a new possibility for addressing this issue:

> It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (55)

This third space that he describes is a liminal area where multiple cultures collide. Instead of forming clear and firm borders between two cultures, the third space allows for a fluid in-between area where identity can be negotiated and constructed. In doing this, hybrid identities form and emerge. To reiterate Bhabha’s quote out of the introduction of this thesis:
The importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (Rutherford, 211)

What does it mean then, to establish a hybrid identity? Bhabha points out in the quotation above that the new hybrid identity is made up of already existing parts, none of which take precedence over the others. Negotiating in this third space does not require participants to renounce their cultures, but only to work at finding new ways to combine and interpret them. “[In the] hybrid moment…the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One…nor the Other…but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both.” (Bhabha, 41) This “something else besides” is something new, and something which may not exist for more than a moment. The is constantly in motion, constantly being redefined and reformed. “Hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them.” (Rutherford, 216)

This dynamic idea of identity allows for constant rearranging and reconfiguration, which is similar in nature to what Zeynep Kiliç refers to with his theory of “fluid adaptation.” In his own words, fluid adaptation “represents the contextual and shifting meaning of adaptation, presented by immigrants as they talk about who they are, where
they belong, and the meaning they attribute to belonging in a nation-state” (164). This builds on the ideas of Bhabha, and claims that Turks’ own identity constructions are flexible and often change, or adapt, depending on the circumstances.

The character Mustafa from Akyün’s *Einmal Hans mit scharfer Soße: Leben in zwei Welten* offers a clear image of a second generation Turk attempting to establish his own identity in German society. He has lived in entire life in Germany, along with his siblings. Although the siblings all speak perfect German, Mustafa goes out of his way to speak improperly and with a Turkish accent.

Er weigert sich, Deutsch ordentlich zu sprechen. Wenn ich ihn frage, warum er so ein Kanakendeutsch spricht, antwortet er: >>Schiwesta, bin ich Türke, hab ich türkisch Bulut, ist Schiprache von türkisch Kollege und mir<< (129).

Although, like his sisters, Mustafa is perfectly capable of speaking fluent unaccented German, he makes a point of creating his identity by altering his language. He chooses to present the Turkish influences on his identity everyday through a medium that will reach everyone he meets. Later in the chapter, Akyün describes her brother further:

Mustafa hat das geschafft, was assimilierten Türken nicht gelungen ist: Er fühlt sich wohl in seiner Welt, weil er nicht zwanghaft versucht, alles Türkische aus seinem Leben zu verbannen. AssimilierteTürken tun das oft, weil sie sich für die Landsleute, die bei den Deutschen ein Negativbild hinterlassen, schämen (132-33).

Mustafa creates his identity, not by choosing to be either German or Turkish, but instead by using all of the elements around him. Though Akyün describes him to be a cliché, the stereotypical male Turk in the eyes of many Germans, his identity is a making of his own
wish. He chooses to present himself as so, in order to avoid appearing to be a
gedeutscher Turk (133), who just as intentionally disregards any Turkish influences in
his life. His identity is hybrid, because it is created in a third space that consists of living
in Germany and yet not being German. He finds a space in between the two worlds,
extracts elements from both, and creates himself.

Though this example comes out of contemporary literature, there are many other
to be found in other media. Film is another arena where
examples of Turks in Germany to be found in other media. Film is another arena where
this theme has been addressed. Until recently most films involving Turks living in
Germany focused on the first generation, those who migrated directly from Turkey. In
many of her essays Deniz Göktürk addresses this topic and looks at the history of
German films involving Turkish characters living in Germany. In her writing she often
cites Bhabha and his theories of hybridity and the third space.

In Deniz Göktürk’s essay “Beyond Paternalism: Turkish German Traffic in
Cinema” she addresses one problem that many filmmakers have faced when trying to
make movies depicting the lives of Turks in Germany. Many “have produced well-
meaning projects encouraging multi-culturalism that, however, often result in the
construction of binary opposition between ‘Turkish culture’ and ‘German culture’”
(Göktürk 249). In other words, in trying to open the public’s minds to the experiences of
others, these films instead created a deeper rift between the two communities, by
focusing on the differences between them. That seems to be the case in Shirins Hochzeit
from 1976. The film is narrated by two women, one of whom is Shirin herself, looking
back on her life after leaving Turkey for Germany. Throughout the film her situation
becomes more and more hopeless until eventually she becomes a prostitute and is
murdered by her pimp. During her time in Germany she naturally comes into contact with many Germans. Besides her pimp, none of these contacts lasts for longer than a conversation. Shirin’s world is depicted as completely unconnected with German society. When she asks a restaurant owner for a job, the woman tells her they can’t hire her. When she is searching for a room to rent, she is told outright by one German woman that there is no longer any room, and definitely not a room for a foreigner. Shirin’s world, and the message being the world of Turkish women in Germany, is separate and unimaginable to the stable world in which most Germans live. Even when the director of the home in which many of the female Gastarbeiter live joins a group of Turkish women for coffee, the moment they share is short-lived. In the next scene she bids them all a kind but stiff farewell, which acts to end the brief relationship between the two worlds. The director returns to her world of power, evidenced by her immediate shouts at other residents to finish their chores, and then Turkish women remain in their world of powerless submission.

A decade after Shirins Hochzeit, 40 Qm Deutschland appeared in Germany. This film did little more for closing the gap between Germans and Turks. It portrays a woman who is brought from Turkey to marry a Turkish man already living in Germany. He locks her in the house everyday when he leaves for work, therefore controlling her ability to integrate or to flourish in her new surroundings. This film reinforces the division between the two societies very concretely: Turna is segregated from the German community, and indeed the entire outside world, by the very physical walls of her apartment. The German society cannot reach her and she cannot reach the German society.
Both of these films, made fifteen and twenty-five years after the beginning of official immigration from Turkey began, portray the lives of first-generation Turkish immigrant women in Germany, making them very different from more recent films which focus on the lives of second-generation Turks who have spent their entire lives in Germany. Gegen die Wand is one of these films. Released in 2004, Gegen die Wand portrays the life of a young German citizen, whose parents emigrated to Germany from Turkey before her birth. The film places individual identity in the forefront of the narrative, along with a very unconventional love story. The emphasis is not on solving the problem of integration, nor does it problematize the situation of second-generation Turks in Germany as a whole. Rather the film brings a German character of Turkish descent to the spotlight and allows her to live out her turbulent life in front of the camera. Gegen die Wand offers insight into how one can construct his or her own identity, in a world that expects them to belong to one culture or another.
CHAPTER THREE: GEGEN DIE WAND

By the time Gegen die Wand was first released throughout Germany in March 2004 it had already won the prestigious goldener Bär at the Berlinale, or Berlin International Film Festival. This was the first German film to earn the distinction since Reinhard Hauff’s 1986 film Stammheim eighteen years prior. The very fact that dozens of newspapers around Germany announced this feat as a victory for German cinema brings up some interesting points of discussion. While Gegen die Wand is indeed a German film, the second half is shot in Istanbul, the main characters all speak Turkish, and the director himself is of Turkish descent. In its portrayal of two main characters who are both likewise of Turkish descent, the film manages to combines the two worlds (German and Turkish) that many journalists and politicians currently describe as existing “parallel” with one another. Akin himself describes the film as “ein deutscher Film mit einer türkischen Seele” (Akin 244).

Though only thirty years old at the time of the film’s release, Akin was hardly new to the world of film. He had already directed three full length films: Kurz und Schmerzlos, Im Juli, and Solino in addition to two short films and a documentary. The son of Turkish immigrants who came to Germany in the 1960s, Akin was born in and grew up in the Altona neighborhood in Hamburg, Germany. This neighborhood is home to many original Gastarbeiter families, who came to Germany around the same time as Akin’s father. Akin grew up in a “traditionsbewusst” family, with a father who adhered strictly to the tenets of Islam (Hensel). His motivation to write Gegen die Wand is based

4 Sensin-Du bist es! (1995) and Getürkt (1996) were Akin’s two short-films. Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren (2000) was his documentary.

5 Akin’s father, Mustafa Enver Akin, came to Germany in 1965 as a guest worker. Akin’s mother, Hadiye Akin, followed in 1968.
in a kernel of truth: it came from a girl with whom Akin was once in love. Though they remained only ever friends, years later she approached him to ask if he’d marry her in order to help her escape living in her parents’ home. Though he declined her offer, the memory remained with him and eventually he processed through the idea and wrote the screenplay for the film (Akin 244). In addition to both writing and directing Gegen die Wand, Akin also founded his own production firm, Corazon International, prior to shooting and became a co-producer.

The premiere date for the film was moved up from mid-April to the beginning of March following the Berlinale victory. When the film was released on March 11, 2004 it premiered simultaneously in Germany and Turkey, making it the first film to ever do so (Jaklin). Distributors in many other countries, such as the United States, Japan, Israel and Paraguay, purchased rights to the film. Though it cost only roughly 2.5 million Euros to produce, the film was highly successful in Germany and abroad (Mies).

Gegen die Wand explores the question of identity through Sibel, a Hamburg-born daughter of Turkish parents. The film strives to portray Sibel’s life without the usual binary categorization; the question for Sibel does not appear to be simply whether she is Turkish or German, but rather who she is as an individual. Identity is shown as being constantly in motion, affected by the details of every new day. Being raised in a Turkish home while growing up in Germany has influenced her identity, but does not automatically prescribe an either/or decision for Sibel. Akin portrays her search to establish herself and embrace her own unique identity as brutal and often violent, but without treating her as a helpless victim. The entire film strives to portray this idea of a hybrid identity, which is not made up of one whole, but rather of many different pieces.
Through its non-traditional love story and formal elements, *Gegen die Wand* shows that identity is far more than either/or and is rarely set in stone.

Sibel is introduced to the audience in a psychiatric clinic where she is a patient. Her self-inflicted wounds, which her family and doctors see as an attempted suicide, bring her to the clinic where she meets Cahit. Cahit is also a patient, admitted for ramming his car into a wall (the origin of the film’s title, “against the wall”). After realizing that Cahit is of Turkish descent, Sibel begs him to enter into a Scheinehe, or marriage of convenience with her so that she may escape her oppressive, controlling home life. His Turkish roots make him an acceptable choice for a husband in the eyes of her parents, although he is a self-styled Penner, or bum, with a drinking problem and addiction to cocaine.

After they are married they begin their lives as little more than roommates, living together and occasionally conversing with one another. Sibel and Cahit are both free to do as they please sexually, and Sibel seizes this long-awaited opportunity to explore relationships with various men. The major source of conflict occurs when love develops between the two. Cahit kills one of Sibel’s former lovers out of jealousy, and is sent to jail. After his incarceration Sibel is forced to flee from her family, upon whom she has brought shame. She moves in with her cousin in Istanbul, and falls into a life of drugs and dependencies in the Istanbul underground. In the emotional climax of the film Sibel is nearly beaten to death by three men on the streets of Istanbul. After this scene the film moves forward many years: Cahit is released from jail and begins his search to find Sibel; Sibel has remained in Turkey and built a new life for herself and her young daughter. It is in Istanbul where the two lovers eventually find each other, and spend a mere two days
together before parting ways for good: Cahit boards a bus bound for his birthplace, Mersin; Sibel remains with her daughter and boyfriend in Istanbul.

**Escaping Patriarchy**

The narrative of *Gegen die Wand* is notable in many ways. The first is how Sibel is portrayed. She does not follow the pattern of previous depictions of Turkish women in German films, in that she is not portrayed as powerless or hopeless. She speaks fluent German and has attended German schools. Sibel comes from a strict Muslim household, where the patriarchal power structure is enforced. This becomes obvious in the scene in which she appears for the first time. She is sitting with her mother, father and brother, Yilmaz, in a room in the clinic, where her father is lecturing her about her suicide attempt. She keeps her head down while he speaks, less out of shame and more out of the respect and submission he demands of her. The entire time he is speaking she is breathing heavily in and out in anger and frustration, as if it is very hard for her to remain silent without protesting or objecting to what her father is saying. Yet she says nothing, choosing to remain silent. After her father makes his exit, her brother threatens to hurt her if she should cause her father any more pain. As soon as Yilmaz leaves the room, Sibel suddenly sits back, lets her hair down and she and her mother light up cigarettes. She clearly relaxes in the all-female situation, something she was impossible with her father and brother present. Another indication that Sibel’s family gives full power to the men of the house is when Sibel is explaining to Cahit about how her nose was broken. “Die hat mir mein Bruder gebrochen, weil er mich beim Händchenhalten erwischt hat!” Through these two scenes it becomes obvious that not only does Sibel come from a patriarchal home, but also one that inflicts violence upon her for any disobedience.
Despite this background Sibel appears strong during the first half of the film. She is not helpless or incapable, and far from being resigned to living under such controlling circumstances looks instead for ways to better her situation. In many previous films involving Turks, one example being *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*, the women are portrayed as being completely dominated and distraught, helpless and hopeless for a better future or even a way out of the current one. Sibel does not follow this pattern. Even as she is recovering in the clinic, she is pursuing Cahit in hopes that he will marry her. Her reasons for this are stated very clearly in her conversation with Cahit in the *Hefner* club. “Ich will Leben, Cahit. Ich will leben, ich will tanzen, ich will ficken! Und nicht nur mit einem Typen.” She sees a marriage with Cahit as a way of removing herself from the controlling influences of her father and brother, without losing the connection to her family altogether. Unable to simply abandon her family due to the fear of being harmed in retaliation, she must find a way to both free herself and please her family: she does this by proposing the idea of a marriage with Cahit. She creates this plan in order to gain freedom and live life on her own terms. Another instance of Sibel taking charge of her future is revealed while talking to Cahit at his apartment. He asks her how she will pay for the wedding, and she tells him she has the money. When he asks how, she answers, “Ich dachte immer, dass ich eines Tages von zu Hause abhauen werde. Also hab ich gespart.” This indicates that Sibel has planned for many years to free herself from her situation, and make her own way. She is not helpless; she can take care of herself.

Another notable narrative difference in *Gegen die Wand* is the way the film deals with the identity of Sibel. Whereas in other films or media portrayals involving Turkish women tend to approach the question of identity from an either-or perspective (one is
either Turkish or German), *Gegen die Wand* shows another possibility. Sibel’s identity is shaped by her own experiences, connections and feelings. She is not portrayed as an essentialized Turkish or German character, but rather as an individual, as Sibel. Akin does not try to categorize her in order to explain her. Instead he shows her as the complicated woman that she is, just like any other character in the film. Her identity is constantly being molded and changed, never becoming fixed. She is not a stereotype. The ending of the film presents a good example of how her identity is portrayed. Unlike in previous films centering on Turkish female characters, there is no “resolution-ending.” She does not run off with a German boyfriend, as does the main character in the 1988 film, *Yasemin*. Her life does not end as it does in *Shirins Hochzeit*. Instead she makes her own way, choosing not to run off with Cahit. Though she remains in Turkey at the end of the film, it is hardly the same conservative Turkish culture in which she was brought up in her Turkish home in Hamburg. She appears instead to live rather freely and independently, not submitting herself to the control of any male figure. Quite the opposite; it is her female child with whom she chooses to remain. Her identity is what she has made it to be, and not the identity that one culture or the other has placed upon her.

A third way in which the narrative of *Gegen die Wand* differs from previous films, is in the way it portrays the marriage between Sibel and Cahit and their roles within it. Much of the marriage is seen as being dominated by Sibel. Though far from being a traditional union, there are definite roles within the partnership. Sibel appears to be the more dominant partner, controlling most of the interactions between herself and Cahit. It is Sibel who arranges the marriage and controls the details. She buys the rings, plans the wedding, and redecorates the apartment. Additionally she works a job outside
of their home, and is able to support herself. In the scene in which Cahit and Sibel nearly consummate their marriage, it is Sibel who decides that they will not proceed. In a role-reversal the husband, Cahit, takes on the more passive role, and it is Sibel, the wife, who is strong and dominant.

The theme of role-reversal comes into play in another important way in the film. Sibel is the character interested in exploring her sexuality and amassing as many sexual encounters as possible. Cahit is the character who prefers relationships with one partner at a time. He was married once before, and according to Maren, very much in love with his wife. As the film unfolds the viewer sees that following the death of his wife he has been in a long-term yet casual relationship with Maren. After Sibel moves into his apartment he falls in love, and attempts to begin a relationship with her. He is less motivated by sex and much more by love. In the relationship with Sibel it is the male figure, Cahit, who falls in love first. The female character, Sibel, proactively avoids love, fearing the commitment to which it will lead.

In the narrative we encounter not only Sibel, but three other main female figures, who differ dramatically from one another: Birsen, Sibel’s mother; Selma, Sibel’s cousin; and Maren, Sibel’s boss. The inclusion of several female characters, all of whom Sibel looks up to in some way, gives strength to the argument that identity is created individually, not according to an essentialized version of culture.

Sibel’s immigrant mother, Birsen, is clearly dominated by her husband, Yunus. When he lectures Sibel at the clinic, she sits quietly and listens as submissively as her daughter. When Sibel wishes to marry Cahit, it is Yunus who must decide to allow or prevent the marriage. When Cahit goes to jail, Yunus decides to disown their daughter.
Birsen has little say in the major family decisions. In the film she never speaks a word of German, and the viewer is left to assume that this is because she knows little or none of the language. She is never seen outside of her apartment without the company of her husband and son. Birsen and Sibel have a more equal relationship. When the men of the family are away, the two are much more casual and open with one another. In the first scene at the clinic, it is only after the father and brother depart that the women relax and smoke cigarettes together. Her words with her daughter are much kinder than those of her husband: “Was hast du davon, wenn du dich umbringst? Das einzige, was du erreicht, ist uns und dich unglücklich zu machen. Vergiß das nicht.” Later in the film Sibel cites her mother as her only reason for not simply running away from home, showing again this loving bond between mother and daughter. After Cahit’s incarceration Birsen is the only member of the family to whom Sibel can go. She sits outside of the apartment and waits for her father and brother to leave, before knocking on the door to her former home and embracing her mother.

Selma is the other main female Turkish figure in the film. She lives in Istanbul, is divorced from her husband, and works in a well-respected and upward-moving job. The first time Sibel mentions her is when she is explaining to Cahit that Selma will be her Trauzeuge. “Meine Cousine, Selma, aus Istanbul. Die ist geil, weisst du.” Through the figure of Selma the viewer sees a very different Turkish character from that of Birsen. She is independent, motivated and successful. She lives on her own, in urban Istanbul, without a husband or father to oversee her every move. She makes her own decisions and is responsible for her own life.
Maren is the only significant non-Turkish female figure in the film. She is a German woman, around Cahit’s age. She lives a lifestyle similar to his, in that she consumes drugs and spends nights at the bar. A major difference between her and Cahit is the fact that she owns her own business in Hamburg and is therefore able to support herself. She is unmarried and not dependent on any one man, though she maintains a long-term, albeit informal, relationship with Cahit. Sibel appears to look up to Maren after she begins working for her in her hair salon. When talking to Cahit one evening she mentions Maren: “Maren ist voll die coole Frau.” At the end of the film, when Sibel is standing naked in Cahit’s hotel room, a tattoo very similar to Maren’s can be seen across her lower back, revealing her desire to imitate Maren.

**Sibel’s Transformation**

The details of the mise-en-scène in *Gegen die Wand* are used by Akin to enforce formally the idea that identity is complex and ever-changing. One technique Akin uses to show this is the appearance of Sibel throughout the film. The very first shot of Sibel shows her sitting demurely in the waiting room of the clinic with her hands folded in her lap. Her wrists are both bound with gauze, as a result of her attempted suicide. She wears black pants, with a flowered, somewhat low scooping, brightly-colored blouse. Her dark hair is shoulder-length and curly and she wears subtle make-up: black eye-liner, pink lip gloss. Her appearance is young and feminine. Throughout the scenes leading up to her wedding, Sibel wears similar outfits. Her tops are form-fitting yet modest, making her appear feminine and innocent. She often wears white, mostly in the form of her white jacket. Though her clothing is fairly modest, there is a tendency for the necklines on her shirts to be cut rather low. This reveals her current situation: she lives with her family
still and must behave according to their standards, but the whole time she is plotting how to escape from this life and live a much more extreme lifestyle. On her wedding day she wears a traditional white wedding dress, as is the custom in both German and Turkish weddings. Significantly this is the same dress she wears the morning after her wedding, and she rounds the corner on her way back to Cahit’s apartment. This slow-motion shot of Sibel walking through the streets, bathed in sunshine and smiling radiantly shows the viewer that she has achieved what she planned for herself. Ironically it is only through marriage, of which the dress is a symbol, that she can be free.

A change in her appearance takes place shortly after her wedding. She begins to dress for going out to dance clubs, wearing more revealing outfits, which usually expose her midriff and her new belly-button piercing. Her make-up becomes more visible, and she often wears black. In the first club scene of the film, she is wearing very short shorts and a see-through white shirt, which is bare across the stomach. It is here that she truly begins to live the life she had planned, meeting men at clubs, dancing and going home with them. As she and Cahit become closer, her outfits become tamer. She wears skirts that are no longer extremely revealing and tops that cover more of her mid-section. She dresses tastefully yet youthfully, as one would expect from a twenty-something. As she develops feelings for Cahit she calms down and her clothing reflects this change. After Cahit kills Niko she wears the same outfit for many days, reflecting her desperate and devastated condition.

The most drastic change in her appearance however occurs when she moves to Istanbul. As the camera follows her exit from the plane through the terminal the viewer notices that she has cut her hair very short. Her clothing is different as well, with her
outfits made of darker, more subdued colors. Her pants are no longer feminine, but formless and loose. She wears no make-up and her face is stony. This new style continues throughout her time in Istanbul, the only exception being her cleaning uniform, which although it appears more feminine, is also very grey and drab, reflecting Sibel’s feelings while in the city. Even her trademark white coat that she wore all over Hamburg is replaced by a very similar style jacket in black. She rarely smiles. Instead she appears hollow and numb to everything around her.

Another small detail that Akin adds in to the scene occurs right before Cahit sneaks out of the clinic to meet Sibel for a beer. The time they agreed to meet each other is midnight. This time may have been chosen out of practicality: it is easier to sneak out of the clinic without being seen at such a late hour. However, the time is also significant in that it signals a new day for both characters, both literally and figuratively. Sibel has taken the initiative to propose an arrangement to Cahit that will give her the freedom she has long desired. For Cahit the new day signifies a chance for him to start a new life through this stranger. He has a chance to change his surroundings, his company and his outlook on life. Not all of these things are apparent right as the clock strikes midnight and the two meet to talk seriously for the first time, but the use of such a significant time suggests to the viewer that this is what will come.

The wearing of wedding rings by both Cahit and Sibel, both of whom have grown up in Germany, on the left ring finger is another small, yet significant detail that Akin includes. In German culture it is tradition to wear the wedding ring on the right ring finger, and most Germans follow this practice. One might expect the same from a couple who had grown up in Germany, but Cahit and Sibel do not do this. This decision reminds
the viewer of the other cultural influences on Sibel’s upbringing. Her parents raised her in a Turkish household, and her wedding itself followed Turkish tradition. The wearing of the rings on the left hands is another extension of this influence. It is a concrete sign of Sibel’s Turkish past, and the continuing influence of her parents. The viewer can assume, just as the wedding is put on for her parents’ benefit, so too is the ring worn on the left hand. In this way the ring becomes a symbol for the identity Sibel presents to her parents, not the identity she lives on a daily basis. Though both identities are constructed by Sibel, one is guided not solely by her wishes but by those of her parents, whose control she is attempting to escape. By following such rules in order to appease her mother and father, Sibel shows us that at this point in the film, she has not truly attained the freedom she had hoped.

After Sibel has moved to Istanbul and is living with her cousin, she is watching a sporting event on television. The event is a women’s weight-lifting competition and is being broadcast in English. On the screen Sibel sees a weight-lifter from Turkey whose name, coincidentally, is also Sibel. As Sibel is watching the weight-lifter she begins to root for her, saying “Los, Sibel.” This scene is very obvious in its symbolic nature: Sibel wants to be strong like the woman on the television. It is a following scene however, that will be discussed here. After Sibel returns home one evening she finds her cousin, Selma, in the living room, working out on an exercise machine. It is Selma who is lifting weights and strengthening herself, not Sibel. Here we are clued into the relationship between the two cousins and how that affects Sibel’s construction of her identity. Obviously she hoped to be strong like the weight-lifter on the television. However in real life it is Selma who is strong, who makes her own way, who is able to lift the weights. Sibel longs to be
like the weight-lifter, and in doing so she also longs to be like her cousin. She wants to be strong, independent, and able to care for herself. However in the scene where Selma is on the machine, Sibel is not yet to this point. This leads to her resentment of Selma, which she iterates in a letter to Cahit at another point in the film.

**Boundaries, Borders and Liminality**

Two elements that play important roles in the question of identity are music and language. Both diegetic and non-diegetic music are present in the majority of scenes. The style of music is constantly changing, often abruptly. In addition to the music, language is also used to reflect the various identities that exist in the film. The characters speak in mixtures of German, Turkish and even English. Some characters always speak one language with one another, while others change back and forth between various languages. Just as Akin invokes certain elements of mise-en-scène to reflect the dynamic identities of his figures, so too does his choice of sound in *Gegen die Wand* underscore these same points.

The very first scene of the film shows a seven piece band standing along the Bosporus River in Istanbul. A standing woman dressed in red is positioned in the center, with three men dressed in black suits on each side of her. This scene will reappear six times in the film, each time with the band playing a different song. It acts as an additional and symbolic narrative, reflecting in music and lyrics what is happening in the story. Akin himself describes this reoccurring scene as a “Brechtian element” which he used to break the story up into five acts (Mitchell). It is interesting that Akin chooses a Turkish band and setting to fulfill this function instead of a German one, indicating that Sibel and Cahit’s roots both lie in the Turkish culture and language. The rest of their identity is
built on top of this foundation. This is further evidenced by the fact that the performers are wearing very traditional and slightly old-fashioned costumes, reflecting times past. It is upon this past that Sibel and Cahit’s identities have grown and developed.

The first time we see the band the woman is singing a Turkish song about unrequited love, and the lyrics are written from a man’s point of view. From this scene Akin cuts abruptly to a scene in Hamburg, where Cahit is drunkenly picking up glasses from a barroom floor. In this scene the only sound is the clanking of the glasses and beer bottles being collected by various employees. This stark contrast of sounds makes immediately clear the differences in the two worlds portrayed in the first 3 minutes of the film. The musical Istanbul scene evokes a very traditional and romanticized image of Turkey, which the music itself, along with the costumes, helps to enforce. The after-hours scene in Der Fabrik, where Cahit works, depicts conversely a very gritty and modern image of Germany. In this scene the music, in the form of a concert has just ended, leaving only the sounds of collected glass. Cahit fits well into this scene: his hair is unkempt, his clothes are ragged and he appears to be intoxicated. However as this scene flows into the next, Cahit is addressed in Turkish by Seref. This ties back into the scene along the Bosporus, and shows the viewer an important element of Cahit’s identity: he is a Turk living in Germany. The two worlds just shown are the two which Cahit, and other Turks in Germany, must strive to combine.

The second time the band in Istanbul appears is after Sibel has taken Cahit to a bar and asked him to marry her. The song this time is a wedding song, which serves to reinforce what is happening in the narrative. The woman in red is still standing in the center of the group and singing the lyrics, which are more upbeat this time around.
Instead of singing about unrequited love, this time she sings from the point of view of a man in love. This song is more hopeful, and urges others to actively search out a lover of their own. In the narrative at this point Sibel is hopeful for her future; she has found her “husband” and in the following scene Cahit reveals that he has agreed to marry her. She is finally able to achieve her goal of moving out from under her family’s watchful eye.

The third time the band plays is after Cahit has begun to fall in love with Sibel. The music begins before the cut to the band, as Cahit is lying on Sibel’s bed and smelling her pillow. As the band appears, a clarinet is playing and the woman in red is sitting this time. There are no lyrics being sung, only the lively music. The woman is casually conducting the music with her hand, although the band seems to be playing simply from habit. This scene abstractly portrays the developing love between Cahit and Sibel. She is unknowingly and unintentionally leading him, bringing him into her life, causing an environment where he eventually falls into love with her. No words are exchanged between them at this point, the growing love is left unsaid, just as in the band scene there are no lyrics.

The fourth time the band plays is after Sibel has gone to see Cahit at the jail. As Cahit disappears down the hallway escorted by an official, the very somber music begins. A cut takes us to Istanbul, where we see the band. The woman and five of the musicians are sitting very still, while the lone-standing clarinet player plays notes that sound wobbly and uncontrollable. He stands by himself, just as Cahit must spend his time in jail alone. The music continues as the scene cuts to Sibel walking through the Istanbul airport, towards her new life in Turkey. The music is not hopeful as it was before her wedding: this time it sounds foreboding.
The fifth appearance of the band comes after Sibel has been stabbed and left for dead on an Istanbul street. As the taxi driver approaches her to help, the music begins. The band is then shown, with the clarinet player standing once again, while this time an additional band member is standing, although not playing his instrument. The music is once again quite sad, though it is more dynamic than the last song. As the song continues, Akin cuts to a shot of Cahit exiting the jail. He is a free man.

The band makes its last appearance in the very last scene of the film. Cahit’s bus to Mersin drives off into the sunset as the music begins. Just as before, there are again lyrics being sung by the woman in the red dress. The lyrics speak of a lover who is apart from his beloved, and because of this is “unendlich betrübt.” The song comes to a complete end and all of the band members bow, signifying the end of the concert, of the film, of the romance between Cahit and Sibel.

These six scenes serve as dividers between the action taking place in the love story between Cahit and Sibel. Each scene has what Akin describes as a “kitschy postcard element” (Mitchell). This serves to remind the viewer that although the characters are living and working in Germany, there is also another cultural influence at play. This foundational influence constantly resurfaces, just as the musical scenes in the film do. It is significant that these scenes are filmed against the backdrop of the Bosporus strait, which runs through Istanbul.

In addition to the shots of this band, many other types of music are used in Gegen die Wand. American music, Turkish music, and European music are all heard throughout the film, reflecting a multicultural and not merely binary identity that is based on aspects of cultures all over the globe. There are song lyrics in English, Turkish, and German,
which are played either as diegetic or non-diegetic music. Often Akin blurs the line between the two, and that which is non-diegetic becomes part of the scene itself.

When they go out to clubs in Hamburg the music is generally in English, either techno or heavy metal. The last club they visit together, Taksim, plays Turkish music. Ironically when Sibel visits the fair an English-language song “After laughter comes tears” plays. This song continues to play as the scene cuts to Cahit’s regular bar, where he will kill Niko. While in Istanbul there are a couple of scenes in which a piano plays more classical sounding music.

During the last third of the film, after Nikos death, Akin uses Turkish music more frequently. As Sibel returns home after seeing Niko dead, her face is streaming with tears. She puts a CD into the CD-player and listens to a Turkish song at full volume. Later, when she spends the night at Seref’s apartment, he sings her a Turkish lullaby.

By using music from different cultures, in various languages, Akin shows more than one or two ways in which identity is affected. Just as Sibel’s identity is not solely Turkish or German, neither is the music played during the film. The music changes from scene to scene, never staying with one song or tune for very long. Even the tune that appears in the film twice with Sibel, never again returns, indicating that her identity has moved on past where it was then.

Language is another aspect of sound that appears in varied forms in the film. German, Turkish and English are spoken at various points during the film. It is interesting to note who speaks which language with whom, and how some characters use a variety of languages with one another.
Sibel’s family itself and the languages they use are very interesting. Her parents speak only Turkish. Whether or not they speak any German at all is left a mystery, as all the viewer sees is them conversing with each other in Turkish. Sibel and her brother naturally speak only Turkish with their parents, but use a mixture of German and Turkish with each other. The scene in the psychiatric clinic, when Sibel is being chastised by both her father and brother, reveals some interesting choices of language. As her father scolds her, he does so in Turkish. After his exit Yilmaz continues to scold his sister, but does so in German. He starts off by saying, “Wieso merkst du nicht, was du dem Alten antust. Der krepiert doch.” After this however he switches quickly to Turkish in order to command Sibel to look at him. He orders her twice to look at him. When she does he returns to German, saying, “Wenn dem Alten was passiert, wisch ich dich weg.” The mixture of languages that Yilmaz speaks with his sister reflects the fact that both children have grown up in Germany, living a life quite different from that of their parents. The fact that they can speak German means that their daily lives are far less restricted than those of their parents. By using the German language with his sister, he puts the two of them on the same level of understanding. He may give her a quick command in Turkish, but he uses “real life” words to threaten her into obeying him.

The use of the English language in the film, a language not native to any of the characters that speak it, often reflects the idea of a third space. The first time English is used in the dialogue is in the scene where Cahit and the psychiatrist Dr. Schiller are in the office. After urging Cahit to change his life rather than committing suicide, the doctor quotes a song, and gives the lyrics in English. “If you can’t change the world, change your world.” At the moment he switches to the English-language song, he is having little
success communicating with Cahit. He has just suggested that he move to Africa and help people there. Upon hearing this suggestion Cahit snickers a bit. The doctor then regroups and quotes the song. Though he translates the name of the band, “Kennen Sie die Band The The? Der Der, Die Die, Das Das,” he never translates the lyrics he quotes. He assumes that Cahit has knowledge of this third language, and attempts to use it to change the seriousness and tone of the conversation. The doctor assumes Cahit to be a native Turkish speaker, which is evidenced by asking what the name Cahit means in Turkish. As Dr. Schiller himself is obviously a native German speaker, he supposes that English will enable him to meet Cahit halfway or somewhere in between, in the third space.

The second scene in which English is used to a significant extent is when Cahit shows up at Selma’s hotel in Istanbul and the two are speaking. They begin in Turkish, as Selma speaks no German. After exchanging greetings Cahit asks Selma to take him to Sibel, and she refuses, telling him that Sibel has a new life with a boyfriend and daughter. She tells him Sibel does not need him. At this point the conversation halts for nearly thirty seconds. During this time Cahit looks out the window over the city of Istanbul and the Bosporus. Many ships are in the water steadily moving away from each other, and leaving an empty space in between them. After seeing this and then taking a long drink of water, Cahit asks Selma in English, “How do you know that?” He continues in English, trying to convince Selma that his intentions are pure. In the middle of the English he switches back to Turkish to say, “Ich hatte mich vor langer Zeit verloren.” This partially reiterates what he has just said in English, as if he wants to be sure that Selma understands the meaning of those words. At the end he asks, again in Turkish, “Verstehst du?” Immediately thereafter he repeats this in English and asks, “Do you understand.”
This is a reversal of the dominant language, as he reiterates in English what he has already said in Turkish. Again he wants to be sure she has understood, and he does this by asking this time in a more neutral language and creating a third space; he speaks in English. Here there is, according to essentialized definitions of identity and culture, no difference between Selma and Cahit. They are both Turkish. However through using English to communicate, Akin shows that there are indeed vast differences between the two of them, and just as Dr. Schiller used English with Cahit, so too does Cahit use English with Selma to find a space in between. It creates a middle ground, upon which the two can better communicate and understand each other.

Akin uses sound to reinforce similarities. An example of this is when Sibel is in Istanbul, dancing in the bar owned by her drug dealer. She has just had a fight with her cousin in the last scene and has moved out of Selma’s apartment. As she enters the bar and begins dancing around a song is playing. It is the same song that was playing at the beginning of the film when Cahit was in the car. As this song played the first time, Cahit tried to kill himself, ramming his car against a wall. This time the song comes at a similar point in Sibel’s life. Her spirit has been broken; she has turned to a dangerous world to numb her pain. She has given up on her life and wants to die. Shortly after this song plays she will be raped, and then will flirt with death by enraging a group of men enough that one stabs her. As she dances in the club the camera shoots her from various angles. In the background people are standing around staring at her, and it becomes obvious to the viewer that nobody else is dancing. She is not part of a crowd; she is literally spinning out of control as she moves around the bar. This is shown quite literally as the camera points at a spot on the ceiling and begins to spin around it. Sibel appears dazed from a
combination of alcohol and drugs. The bottle she holds in the hand spills alcohol over her face, on her clothing and is eventually dropped onto the floor. She is wearing a man’s jacket, which further strengthens the comparison with Cahit at the beginning of the film. Just as with the first time this song plays, this time will also end with a character slamming “against a wall.” This time however the character is Sibel and instead of slamming a car into the wall of a building, she loses consciousness and falls heavily and face-first to the floor. Her head slams against the hardness of the floor, bounces up and then lands once again. She has reached her lowest point, just as Cahit did at the beginning of the film while the very same song was playing.

Signs of Turkey

The cinematography in the film also adds facets to Sibel’s hybridized identity. Details that appear in the film are showcased in extreme close-ups, with nothing else in the frame. This appears to restate the importance of the everyday details that make up a person’s identity. These details may go unnoticed in most situations, but by using this close-up technique the viewer is able to focus in on these details and understand to what extent they help to construct an identity.

One of the most striking uses of the extreme close-up in the film is when Sibel decides to serve a traditional Turkish meal to Cahit. As she prepares the meal, the camera shows every step of the process in great detail. We see how Sibel painstakingly chops the onion, mixes the water with the Raki, and tops the stuffed peppers with tomato wedges. These shots are relatively unimportant to the narrative, yet Akin’s portrayal of this meal being prepared takes many minutes of the film. In doing this he brings attention to the very things that often go unnoticed in life; the details that one does hundreds or even
thousands of times throughout one’s life. For Sibel cooking the Turkish meal represents one aspect of her identity, a detail from her Turkish upbringing. This point is reinforced when she replies to Cahit’s compliment by saying, “Habe ich von meiner Mutter gelernt.” To see this as her simply embracing a “Turkish identity” however would be to miss the point Akin is making. Throughout the film we see Sibel reject countless Turkish traditions and forms of behavior, yet she still happily prepares the Turkish meal. In showing this, Akin reinforces the idea that identity is constructed. Sibel’s identity is not decided by simply attaching a cultural label to her. It is a process that she controls. She creates her own identity every day, taking pieces of the world around her and incorporating them into her life. By choosing to prepare a Turkish meal, she selects one aspect from her Turkish upbringing and holds onto it. This demonstrates how the process of constructing an identity can function. In the detail that Akin chooses to showcase, he says a lot about his character and her struggle to find herself.

A second instance of Akin choosing to showcase details through the use of the extreme close-up occurs after Cahit and Sibel have gone to Yilmaz’ house to spend the evening. The women are in the living room talking, while the four men are in a side room playing a board game. In three consecutive takes the camera focuses in on the hands of the first three men rearranging their playing pieces. Each player moves his pieces around deftly and smoothly in fluid-like motions. From the skill and grace with which each of the first three men move their pieces around the viewer ascertains that they have played this game very often before. The fourth player however, Cahit, is an exception. There is no close-up shot of his hands. The fourth shot instead finds the behind Cahit sitting in his chair, allowing the viewer to see the first three men clearly but only the shaded back of
Cahit. In the dialogue the player opposite Cahit is attempting to explain to him how to play the game. He is obviously frustrated at having to explain such things to Cahit, and even remarks to Sibel’s brother in Turkish, “Wie konntet ihr dem bloß euer Mädchen geben?” All of these elements together show the viewer very clearly how removed Cahit is from these men. Although all four men are of Turkish descent and are married to women also of Turkish descent, Cahit stands out as very different from the others. He speaks broken Turkish, was once married to a German woman and lives estranged from his family. His willingness to enter into a Scheinehe with Sibel, which will certainly bring dishonor to her family, is another way in which he differs from these other three men, who would do anything to preserve the honor of their families. This scene makes clear Cahit’s differences from these three men, with whom he should supposedly have much in common.

A third scene in which Akin makes use of the extreme close-up is after Cahit has been incarcerated, and Sibel has once again slit her wrists. As she sits in the operating room the camera focuses for twelve seconds on the stitches being sewn into her arm by the doctor. In this amount of time the viewer sees this cut and the stitches in detail, and it becomes clear that Sibel has slit her wrist vertically. This is significant, as earlier in the narrative Cahit tells Sibel that if she truly wants to kill herself, she should cut vertically, not horizontally as she did before coming to the clinic. After Cahit is imprisoned Sibel’s desperation leads her to want to kill herself: she cuts vertically. The stitches are carefully sewn into her arm, by an unseen doctor, saving her from death. However her motive is apparent: she wanted to die. This signifies to the audience that Sibel has truly come to love Cahit, and is distraught at having brought about such a situation. Cahit is taken from
her, and she no longer wishes to be alive. The extreme close-up of Sibel’s wrists makes this point very clear. Her identity is now intertwined, much like the stitches in her arm, with Cahit.

Another way in which Akin makes use of cinematography to convey information about Sibel’s identity is during the wedding scene, while Sibel and Cahit are dancing together in the middle of the dance floor. The first shot is a long shot, filmed from the far corner of the room. This shot puts the couple in the center and offers the viewer the perspective that anyone sitting in the room would have of the newlyweds. Everything looks very normal; there is nothing to point to the fact that the marriage is a sham. The next take centers again on the couple, but this time the camera is much closer to them, filming at the distance of a medium shot. As the camera films Sibel’s face turns to face the camera and makes eye-contact with someone off-screen. The next take reveals the person whom Sibel had been looking at; it is her father. He is sitting opposite of her, watching her dance without expression. As he lights a cigarette the camera pulls back away from him. This tracking shot is interrupted by a cut which shows Sibel’s mother standing by herself behind Sibel in a line with both her daughter and husband. Flawlessly the cut changes from a tracking shot moving away from Sibel’s father, to a tracking shot of the camera moving towards her mother at the same rate. This scene uses cinematography to emphasize Sibel’s relationship to her parents. The shot moving away from her father suggests that Sibel’s decision to enter into a Scheinehe means she is turning her back on the values her father tried to instill in her. With such a lie between them Sibel can only move farther away from him. The following shot in which the camera moves towards Sibel’s mother shows the viewer an equally important aspect of
this mother-daughter relationship. Here with the motion towards the mother Akin shows that Sibel is attempting to gain the happiness and freedom that her mother always wished for her. Sibel’s quick smile in the next take reinforces this idea. Having lived so long in a submissive relationship with Sibel’s father, Birsen hopes for a better life for Sibel.

Another example of Akin’s use of the camera to reinforce the identities of his characters is when Sibel is awaiting Selma’s arrival at the airport. A plane landing is shot through a chain link fence surrounding the runway. The plane moves closer and closer to the camera and the viewer can eventually read the word on the side of the plane: “Turkish.” As this word becomes visible the camera continues to follow the plane on its approach, but the chain link fence no longer obstructs the shot. This shot says a lot about Sibel. Though she has set up the marriage with Cahit already, and is attempting to free herself from her familial constraints, she remain imprisoned in the world of her family and community. The plane she looks out at, the plane in which her cousin is sitting, represents freedom. Selma has the ability to come and go as she pleases, and must not answer to any man, whereas Sibel must construct a new life based entirely on lies in order to try to live life the way she desires.

A last example of Akin’s unique use of the camera takes place during the scene in which Cahit is talking with Dr. Schiller at the psychiatric clinic. As the scene ends, and the lecturing of the doctor ceases, Cahit looks at him and asks, “Darf ich Ihnen mal ‘was sagen, Herr Doktor?” As he speaks the camera is focused on his face. After he finishes his question a cut changes to include both the doctor and Cahit, shot from roughly ten feet behind Cahit’s back. Suddenly another cut changes the angle once again, this time the camera is shooting close-up on Cahit’s face once again. This time however, the 180
line has been violated, and Cahit is shot from the other side of the axis. As this new shot appears, Cahit finishes his question, “Sie haben doch voll den Knall, oder?” This violation of classical editing practices serves to jar the viewer. The setting itself is jarring; Cahit is in a mental clinic. This cut serves to reinforce this idea.

_Crisis of Colliding Worlds_

In the minutes leading up to Niko’s death in the film a sequence of events emerges which exposes the feelings of the two main characters, Sibel and Cahit. The sequence begins and ends with declarations of love: at the beginning Cahit is yelling out his love for Sibel in a crowded bar, and at the end it is Sibel that carefully lays a heart with the words _Ich liebe dich_ on Cahit’s pillow. What transpires between these two bookends is the realization, recognition and acceptance on the part of both Sibel and Cahit that they have fallen in love with each other. At this point in the film the tension between both characters has grown during their marriage to one another, and here it finally comes close to being realized. Sibel leaves the heart on the pillow and leaves to find Cahit; their love story can almost be realized. However in the meantime Cahit’s jealousy causes him to unintentionally kill Niko, and as the sequence ends it becomes apparent that any relationship between Cahit and Sibel must wait still longer. Cahit is put into jail and Sibel flees from her family to Turkey. But it is this sequence in the film that fully acknowledges the love that has developed between the two, and how important it is and will become in both of their lives.

It begins with Cahit sitting with Seref at a bar counter during a concert. The background noise is somewhat loud, but the viewer hears clearly as Cahit yells loudly in Turkish, “Ich bin verliebt. Verliebt!” He has a smile on his face. After he says his next
line, “Sie hat mich verhext!” he lifts both hands and smashes them down on the two glasses in front of him, shattering them into hundreds of pieces all over the counter. He then presses his palms into the glass and pushes them around, causing blood to stream from his hands. This scene reminds the viewer of an earlier scene, when Sibel used a glass bottle to cut into her wrist and spray blood everywhere. Just as when Sibel did this, Cahit now wants to be understood and taken seriously by his friend. He has come to terms with his feelings for Sibel, but does not yet know how to proceed. Following the death of his first wife he shied away from feelings, preferring instead to live on a diet of beer and cocaine until his pain was numbed. Sibel has somehow reached him, reached into his pain and isolation, and changed him. He has fallen in love with her, which he had no intention of ever doing. By smashing the glasses in front of him his frustration with his situation becomes apparent. He is, in one sense, ready to love her, ready to tell the entire bar and world of this love. Yet in another sense he is terrified, having lived without love in his life for so long, without the vulnerability that comes with giving his love to another. He accepts the love he feels for Sibel, yet remains at the same time quite angry at himself for having allowed such strong feelings to develop.

Immediately after smashing the glasses Seref grabs Cahit’s hands and tells him to stop. He then slaps him across the cheek in order to calm him down. He then grabs Cahit’s hands once again and begins picking glass shards out of his palms. While he does this he asks Cahit in Turkish, “Weißt du überhaupt, was Liebe ist? Liebe ist ein Karussell. Du steckst Geld rein und es dreht sich. Aber immer im Kreis, und dein Pferd ist nur aus Holz!” After this Cahit cups Seref’s face in his bleeding hands, smiles, even chuckles a bit and says, „Du verstehst mich nicht. Du verstehst gar nichts.” He then makes his way
to the crowd dancing in front of the performing band. He jumps up and down, bloody arms stretched high up towards the ceiling. This is where the film opened; this is the floor where Cahit picked up glasses and bottles in the first scene, when he was drunk, weak, and angry. In the present scene the viewer sees a vastly different Cahit. He is energetic and social and appears to be celebrating. He eventually crawls up onto the lit stage. In this take the camera films from below, accentuating his rise up out of the crowd. He has left the floor where he once collected glasses. He goes from the dark of the crowd into the light of the stage, where he continues dancing and jesting with the musicians.

At this point in the scene the viewer hears Maren begin to speak. The camera remains on a dancing Cahit at the club while her voice becomes more and more dominant. “Sie hiess Katharina. Ein total fröhlicher Mensch. Ein Kind, richtig lustig. Sie hat gerne gelacht. Alle mochten sie.“ As she says the last sentence, Cahit sits down on the edge of the stage breathing heavily. He looks out at the audience right in front of him, yet he appears to be lost in thought, with the camera circling him, showing his face from all sides. Here the scene changes abruptly, with a cut that switches the scene to a close-up of Maren’s face. She is leaning back and having her hair washed. She continues speaking and says, “Ich habe sie sehr gemocht.” The sudden change of scene here takes the viewer back to the present, away from thoughts of Cahit’s dead wife and his love for her, to a moment in the present, where Cahit has fallen in love once again. The next shot shows the face of Sibel, who is washing Maren’s hair. She is smiling as she listens to Maren talk about Katharina, and continues the conversation by asking, “Was hat sie gemacht?” Her eagerness to ask questions about Cahit’s old life and her pleasant facial expression show that she harbors no jealousy or insecurity towards Cahit’s dead wife. The second question
she asks Maren, is whether Cahit loved Katharina. Maren answers with a nasal, “Mmm hmm” before saying with words, “Ja, sehr.” While the conversation progresses, Sibel continues to gently wash Maren’s hair. Between this calming massaging motion and her continual smile, the scene is very peaceful. The two women appear to be friends with each other.

After answering Sibel’s question about whether Cahit loved his first wife, the camera shows Sibel’s pleasant reaction to her answer before a cut returns our focus to Maren’s face. She seems to be thinking, debating whether or not to ask the question in her own head. “Was für eine komische Beziehung habt ihr eigentlich?” she finally asks. In proposing this question she forces Sibel to answer truthfully about her relationship with Cahit for the first time out loud. Before this all questions about her relationship with him have been based on the lie that they had fallen in love and gotten married honestly. Maren’s character however knows the relationship between the two is far from a normal husband-wife bond, therefore Sibel has a chance to answer much more honestly. The next shot returns to Sibel’s face. She is smiling once again, and glances up briefly in thought before answering, “Er ist mein Mann und ich bin seine Frau.” This answer does not seem to surprise Maren, as the next shot, again a close-up on her face, reveals. She too appears to ponder her next question before asking, “Liebt ihr euch?” This question is so simple, requiring a yes or no answer. However for Sibel it is very complex. Never before was she asked this question. Perhaps she never asked herself this question. Her answer is ambiguous. “Das würdest du nicht verstehen,” she tells Maren. Her answer is not meant in anger, which is clarified in her next statement, „Ich verstehe es ja selber nicht.” After this statement the camera shows a completely new angle. Instead of showing a close-up
of the speaker’s face, Akin cuts in the ensuing silence to a side angle extreme close-up of Maren’s scalp. Sibel continues to expertly and gently massage Maren’s soapy hair. The only part of Maren’s face that is visible is her left eye. A cut then returns the shot to the frontal close-up of Maren’s face as she says, “Cahit und ich, wir ficken manchmal.” The comment catches Sibel off guard as evidenced by her expression when the camera returns to show her face. She screws up her face in indignation and breathes in sharply. The next shot shows Maren’s face once again, and Sibel’s hands which have been massaging her scalp for so long now throw her hair down into the sink angrily. The next shot is of neither woman’s face, but rather a long shot showing Maren lying back against the sink and Sibel drying her hands briskly. She throws the towel down carelessly on a counter, grasps her wedding ring and puts it firmly back onto her left finger and walks out of the room towards the camera. Just before she disappears from view her left hand flashes before the camera showing clearly the ring on her finger. The camera remains in the same position as Sibel’s footsteps take her to the door which she pushes open, exiting the salon. Maren raises her head up and watches Sibel leave.

Using the alternating shots of both women’s faces in this scene is important. The close-up on each woman as she is speaking reveals much more about her inner emotions that just one take would offer. Keeping the camera focused on the women speaking without many other differing shots allows the viewer to be a part of the very intimate conversation between the two. There are few distracting shots, forcing the viewer to concentrate on the character speaking. Through aural and visual inputs emphasis remains on the dialogue, indicating that what the characters are saying is very important to the film.
The next shot shows Sibel emerging from the salon onto a street. Just as she steps out a voice is heard off-camera calling her name. She swears under her breath in Turkish and turns to look at the caller. As Sibel turns the camera turns as well, never interrupting the take. We see the identity of the caller at the same time as Sibel: it is Niko. He approaches her and strokes her face with a smile. His intentions are those of a lover, while the viewer sees immediately that Sibel’s are not. Her face remains steady and unsmiling. As his face comes closer to hers she asks, “Was willst du hier?” The take changes to show a confused Niko, who appears somewhat hurt by her sharp tone. He regroups and confesses to her, “Ich wollte [dich] sehen.” The next take shows Sibel for the duration of her curt reply, “Wieso?” The camera then returns to show Niko’s face, as he struggles to give her an answer. Before he can think of something appropriate, Sibel continues, “Niko, hör zu.” The take changes at this point back to show Sibel. “Wir haben zusammen gebumst. Ich wollte wissen, wie du im Bett bist.” As she continues, the take changes once again to show Niko’s face. “Jetzt weiss ich’s.” The cut returns the viewer to a shot of Sibel’s face. “Geh du mir aus dem Weg, und ich geh dir aus dem Weg, okay?” The entire time she is speaking she has a careless smile on her face. She talks to him very condescendingly, which by the reaction seen on Niko’s face comes as very unexpected. The conversation is controlled by Sibel, and up until this point in the scene Niko appears very hurt and confused. As Sibel ends her last sentence however, and turns to walk away from him, Niko’s confusion turns to anger and he grabs her arm and demands, “Was soll die Scheisse?”

At this point in the scene it is Sibel whose anger flares. As he spins her around she begins to yell. “Lass die Finger von mir! Ich bin eine verheiratete Frau! Ich bin eine
verheiratete türkische Frau!“ Her inclusion of the adjective „türkisch“ the second time emphasizes the word. In order to bring yet more attention to the word “türkisch,” a cut changes the view from that of her face, to a shot of the two characters from the viewpoint of inside the salon. As Sibel speaks the word “türkisch” the axis of action is violated. She continues shouting, “Und wenn du mich zu nahe kommst, bringt mein Mann dich um! Kapierst?” As she completes the sentence, the cut brings the view back to her face. She turns to leave, and the next shot returns the to Niko’s face. His expression is confused and angry. He watches her walk away. A cut to Sibel shows her walking away from him, her black coat trailing behind. Just as when she stormed out of the salon earlier, the sound of her boots clicking quickly and solidly emphasizes the fact that she is leaving in anger. We then see Niko’s face once again, as he watches her walk away for one more moment before turning and walking angrily down into the salon.

The scene changes entirely and now Niko is sitting on a couch inside the salon. His back faces the window, outside of which he was standing only moments ago with Sibel. The window is the same window out of which the shot showing the two fighting outside was filmed. As it is still daylight this window allows for much natural light to enter into the salon, creating a very realistic image. The camera is shooting from inside, this time focusing on the two characters who are present: Niko and Maren. Niko angrily lights a cigarettes and throws the lighter across the room. Maren is blow-drying her still wet hair. She abruptly turns off the appliance as she notices Niko throw the lighter. Niko takes a couple of very deep breaths, and then asks Maren, “Mit wem ist die verheiratet?” As he asks this question, Maren turns to face him and a slight smile appears across her lips. She offers no reply, but pauses, perhaps to build suspense before answering. Just
before the scene ends Maren raises her eyebrows, as if she is preparing to offer the answer to Niko. Before she does however, the scene ends and a cut takes the viewer to the last scene of the sequence.

This last scene is dramatically different from the scene preceding it. While Niko and Maren sat in the salon, the 17 second scene was a long shot with barely any dialogue and no music. This new scene begins with a song, “After laughter comes tears,” which will be the only sound throughout the duration. The camera begins shooting Sibel, who is sitting in the car of a carnival ride. She is rocking back and forth, holding onto the handlebars and laughing. In addition to the sudden change of sound from the last scene, this new scene appears immediately very different. It is now nighttime, and the sky is dark. Around Sibel however, the colors are much more dramatic and artificial than in the previous scene. The ride is made up of bright colors: greens, reds and yellows, some of which are painted with sparkles in them. Some of these colors are the lights themselves, lighting up the dark Hamburg evening. Sibel is still wearing her black jacket, which combined with her dark hair makes her appear very muted in contrast with all of the lively colors surrounding her. However, because of the huge smile on her face and the fact that she is moving and laughing, she does not appear as dark as the colors would imply. As the camera rolls Sibel begins moving away, as the ride spins her around the axis. The camera simply follows her as she is lifted further back. No cuts interrupt this shot, although the constant movement of the ride insures that what the camera films is ever-changing. The light on Sibel changes constantly from yellow to red to green, as the lights from the ride alternate. She eventually disappears and other cars from the ride move between her and the camera. A cut moves the shot to show another ride, where
Sibel is riding once again, still smiling and appearing to enjoy herself. Again with this ride there are no cuts in between. The camera simply films as the ride swings and twists all over the place. Sibel is sometimes visible, sometimes blocked by the other cars and riders. The idea of the carnival ride harkens back to the very beginning of the sequence, when Seref tells Cahit that love is a merry-go-round, which spins and spins but always in a circle. Just as Cahit laughed off this idea, Sibel too seems completely unbothered by this fact. She laughs and smiles throughout the entire scene, expressing a jubilation that echoes Cahit’s shouted exclamations of being in love and his energetic and exhilarated dancing earlier in the sequence.

Next we see Sibel walking through the fair. The camera begins shooting when she is far enough away for her entire body to appear in the shot. Behind her a ride with red lights spins, and all around her people are walking. She is still smiling as she walks casually towards the camera. As she approaches the people around her fade out and the camera focuses only on Sibel. The other people moving at their own paces and the ride spinning in the background create the illusion of Sibel moving in slow motion. Her movements are fluid and light, almost as if she is floating through the fair. The shot lasts fifteen seconds, uncut, until she is close enough to the camera that only her face is still in the shot. She is looking off-screen to her right side before the cut. After the cut the camera is now shooting from the side she was looking at. As this new cut begins Sibel is walking into the shot from the left, which creates a fluidity of movement, as if the camera never stopped rolling, but magically moved itself to film the same movements from another angle. Sibel comes to a stop in front of the camera and is looking at something directly in front of her. Her smile remains on her face as she studies whatever is in front
of her. A cut reveals what she is looking at: Lebkuchen Herzen. This shot, filmed with a handheld camera, lingers on around a dozen gingerbread hearts hanging from a booth. Greetings such as, “Grüße vom Hamburger Dom,” “Du bist mein Typ,” and “Dem besten Vater der Welt” are written on the various hearts. Written on the hearts in the very center of the shot is, “Ich liebe dich.” I love you. The camera lingers here long enough for the viewer to read the many hearts. The handheld effect gives us a realistic feel in the middle of such a surreal atmosphere. The hearts, an extremely well-known image of German culture, are an interesting choice here. What more German way to express one’s feelings than with one of these hearts.

After the next cut Sibel is no longer at the fair. Instead she is placing one of the Lebkuchen hearts on Cahit’s pillow. Right away it is apparent from the soft, rosy lighting that Sibel is now in the apartment. The camera shoots a close-up of the heart, and all that is visible is the heart itself, the pillow behind it, and Sibel’s hands carefully arranging the heart against the soft pillow. The crinkling of the plastic casing of the heart is audible, making it the only diegetic sound heard since the beginning of the fair scenes. On the heart is written, “Ich liebe dich.” As Sibel pulls back the camera follows her, unbroken, and focuses on her face. She is looking down at the heart, and as she does this another wide smile appears across her face. Simultaneously we hear the voice of Niko speaking and asking, “Sag mal, was bist du eigentlich für einen beschnissen Ehemann?” With this phrase, which comes out of the following scene, the sequence ends.

Just as the song, “After Laughter Comes Tears,” foreshadows the dooming atmosphere that is ahead, so too does the end of the sequence’s segue into the dialogue of the following scene. After this sequence it will become a very rare occasion to see Sibel
smiling. Never again will she appear as light-hearted and carefree as she does at this point in the film. Cahit admits he has fallen in love with Sibel, Sibel realizes she has fallen in love with Cahit, and where does this get the two of them? Their bliss will end in the very next scene, when Cahit smashes the side of Niko’s face with an ashtray. This sequence therefore alludes to the possible happy-end variation of the narrative; the two could be in love and simply live out the rest of their lives in total happiness. However this variation is not the one Akin chooses for his figures.
CONCLUSION

_Gegen die Wand_ reveals much about the continuing problems between Germans and Turkish Germans without staging the dichotomy as the centerpiece of the film. Subtly the film brings attention to the problems that exist in modern-day Germany, while keeping the characters and their love story at the center of the film. The question becomes, will Sibel and Cahit run off together? Or, will Sibel end up happy? The question is never, how will Germany solve the Turkish problem? Yet in avoiding these direct questions, and not placing the problematized version of events at the center of the film, _Gegen die Wand_ does offer some answers.

The reoccurring shots of the band playing in Istanbul are very significant in the film. The river in front of which the musicians are performing is the Bosporus, the river that runs through the city separating the European continent from the Asian continent. By choosing to pose his musicians in front of this geographical dividing line, Akin brings attention constantly back to the fact that many Turks living in Germany often face this same dividing line in everyday life. It isn’t about choosing one culture over the other, it is about accepting that Turks bring with them a different cultural background than most Germans. After passing some of this culture on to their German-born children, the second generation must then make a synthesis of the two cultures. The way they choose to do this is personal and unique, and no longer can we assume that all second-generation Turks in Germany make the same decisions or live the same lives. Identity, regardless of cultural background, is a construction one assembles from the pieces around him or herself.
Cases of honor killings in Germany are a disturbing trend that must be combated both politically and socially. Women, regardless of their culture or nationality, should never be subjected to patriarchal violence. Cases like Hatun Sürürçü’s are important in raising awareness of this terrible epidemic in a country where turning a blind eye has been the rule for the past forty years. Unfortunately when cases like Sürürçü’s are the only stories most Germans read about their Turkish neighbors, many false notions emerge. Many begin to see all Turkish women as being hopelessly lost in the male-dominated world they supposedly live in; helpless victims beyond rescue. This serves only to further the separation between Germans and Turks, because many Germans have the impression that their two worlds are too radically different from each other. In reality there are many Turks in Germany, both second and even third generation Turks, who live very peaceful lives among Germans. Though one can not fail to remember those Turks who end up in extremely conservative or even fundamentalist homes, and the problems they face, the generalization should not be made that that is the only lifestyle of all the Turks in Germany.

By introducing into public consciousness concepts such as hybridity, Bhabha has opened a new space for discussion of Turkish German identity. A film like Gegen die Wand helps to prove that Bhabha’s theories can indeed be applied to situations outside of the traditional colonial experience. Akin’s film is a fiction, yet it is a story written and told by a director and cast made up of many second generation Turkish Germans. These people have lived the struggle that Gegen die Wand exposes which lends a very natural and believable element to the film. Their personal struggles to create an individual hybrid identity are recreated in the filmic portrayal of Sibel and Cahit. The film itself ends up
being a creation in the third space, incorporating elements from both the German and the Turkish world.

After the Berlin International Film Festival, when Akin’s film took home the goldener Bär, German newspapers ran stories on the film proclaiming the award a victory for Germany. And indeed it was. Far beyond the award that Akin took home that night, his film, and its ability to make a wide audience engage in new ways of approaching the debate over Turks in Germany, came at just the right time and has the ability to make a difference in German society. The film was a victory for all of Germany, a victory that no single award can honor, but that continues to impact German life in a positive way.
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