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Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time: Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)

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Turkish-German Cinema between the National and the Transnational

During the last five years of the twentieth century, films by the children of the so-called Turkish “guest workers” exploded onto the German film landscape. By then “guest worker” had become an outdated term from the vocabulary of the West German government’s recruitment program from the late 1950s to the early 1970s addressing the labor shortage produced by the “economic miracle” and exacerbated by the closing of the “Iron Curtain” that prevented labor migration from East to West. These films ushered a new minority subject onto the silver screen: young, self-confident, outspoken, multi-ethnic, and self-proclaimed German.

Gone was the iconic image of the lone, suffering, and silent foreign worker of famed director Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s exemplary film *Ali: Fear Eats Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*, 1974). Film directors Buket Alakuş, Fatih Akın, Thomas Arslan, Aysun Bademsoy, Seyhan Derin, Ayşe Polat, Yüksel Yavuz, and Turkish director Kutluğ Ataman made films that marked, according to Deniz Göktürk, the shift from a “cinema of duty” to the “pleasures of hybridity” (1999). What was then an emerging generation of filmmakers on the margin of German society has since become an integral part of German national cinema, out of which Fatih Akın—the director of *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*, 2007)—has emerged as the nationally and internationally most successful director.

The Golden Bear Award at the 2004 Berlin Film Festival for his film *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*, 2003) marked Akın’s status as one of Germany’s preeminent filmmakers; it also highlighted the importance of Turkish-German cinema in general and its status as German cinema in particular. Akın’s substantial body of works includes documentaries, such as *We Forgot to Return* (*Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren*, 2001), *Crossing the Bridge – The Sound of Istanbul* (2005), and currently in post-production *Garbage in the Garden of Eden* (2009). He

also directed the road-movies *In July* (*Im Juli*, 2000), the multi-generational migration family-drama, *Solino* (2002), the ghetto-gangster film *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und schmerzlos*, 1998), and *Soul Kitchen* (2009), which Christina Tilman described as “comedic” and “melancholic” and a “new variation of a *Heimatfilm*.” His feature-length narrative films *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven* are the first and second part of his trilogy “love, death, and the devil.”

The biographical story of Akin as a member of the second generation of Turkish-Germans can be told as a bi-national, post-WW II story of Turkish labor migration to West Germany, and his film *We Forgot to Return*, for example, tells a version of this story. I argue, however, that more importantly, his films also intervene in transnational cinematic practices. The emergence of Turkish-German cinema took place shortly after the fall of the Wall in 1989, symbolic of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. The films therefore coincided with a watershed moment for globalization marked by decreasing power of nation-states in the face of increasing global flows of capital, information, commodities, and labor forces (see Beck, Sassen). These processes of globalization engender concomitant cultural dynamics that the concept of transnationalism allows us to theorize (see Halle, Ezra and Rowden). Film’s extreme dependence on economic capital and its technological independence from a national language through subtitles—both in contrast to literature, for example—situate visual culture at the vanguard of transnational cultural production. *The Edge of Heaven*, I propose, reflects globalization’s pressures and possibilities in the aesthetic language of transnational cinema.

In this essay, I argue that *The Edge of Heaven* constitutes a sophisticated and complex, and in part seemingly paradoxical, response to globalization. I suggest that the film captures the effects of globalization’s most pronounced characteristics. Transnational mobility, digital media, and the increased speed of transportation and information technology have changed narrative

conventions, perception of time and space, and the structure of intimacy and familial relations. The film portrays the interconnected local belonging and global mobility characteristic of transnational culture and captures what geographer David Harvey has labeled the “time-space compression” of globalization, the result of increased speed of transportation and communication technologies (see particularly 260-323). The film’s alternative familial arrangements reflect the restructuring of social relations as result of migration, which produce fantasmatic long-distance intimacies and substitute-kinship affiliations in localized places. The film’s multi-faceted representation of globalization moves beyond the simplistic position articulated by its character Ayten in the film: “It is globalization and we are fighting against it.”

The Edge of Heaven captures the effects of globalization in its non-linear narrative structure, the mobility of the figures, and their accents and dialects. But the film also engages in a seemingly paradoxical reaction to the digitalization of communication technology’s association with globalization: a narrative organization according to music and literary forms, the film’s bibliophilic aesthetics, and its evocation of earlier models of temporality. It would seem paradoxical that *The Edge of Heaven* also values what many theorists posit as that, which globalization has left behind: the bibliophilic worlds of books, national high culture based on a canon, traditional left-wing politics defined by a distinct philosophical-political system, regional attachments, an understanding of space and time rooted in pre-scientific knowledge and lack of surveillance technologies, and foundational religious and mythical beliefs that underwrite humanist values and enable human encounters. But *The Edge of Heaven* neither presents globalization as all-encompassing totalizing world view, nor does it disavow its social reality by creating the illusion of a lost whole and resurrecting a national grand narrative, as in the European heritage cinema, for example (see Koepnick, Higson).

Consequently, *The Edge of Heaven* exceeds the different academic categories of national, European, or minority cinema. With its multilingual dialogues, actors and actresses, and its multinational locations and relationships, the film questions the traditional category of national cinema. While the film includes a lesbian love story, it does not belong to the classic lesbian and gay cinema based on identity politics. And even though the importance of tropes of “the journey” and “the jail” in the emblematic Turkish landscape, as well as the film’s proximity to melodrama, conjure up the work of Turkey’s most famous filmmaker and actor Yılmaz Güney, *The Edge of Heaven* is not rooted in traditional-left cinema’s political imaginary and ideologies of 1970s Third Cinema (see Pines and Willemsen). The category of Turkish-German cinema with its biographical dimension and emphasis on cultural encounter has also become inadequate to account for the film’s transnational complexity of relationships and centrifugal power of references.¹

Two Deaths in Three Chapters

Before I develop my argument in detail, let me offer a brief summary of the plot. The film is organized in three chapters. Chapter one, “Yeter’s Death,” begins in Bremen with Ali, an older Turkish migrant of the first generation visiting a prostitute, Yeter, on May 1. Ali later proposes a domestic and sexual relationship of convenience to her. When Islamic fundamentalists threaten Yeter, she decides to take up Ali’s offer and moves in with him. Ali’s son Nejat works as a professor of German literature in the nearby city of Hamburg. He learns from Yeter that she has a daughter in Turkey who does not know that Yeter works as a prostitute

¹ Several of these categories are also undergoing significant revision. For a sophisticated rethinking of Turkish-German cinema in the context of Turkish-German literature and film, see Ezli 2009. The increase of global film culture has also produced an awareness of national cinemas, as evidenced by recent publications; see for example *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort, and the ca. 15 titles that have been published in the Routledge National Cinema series between 1998 and 2009.

in Germany and that she has lost contact with her. In a drunken and jealous fit, Ali unintentionally kills Yeter and is sentenced first to prison in Germany and later deported to Turkey. Nejat consequently denounces his father and travels to Turkey in search of Yeter's daughter to atone for his father's deed by financing her education. Coincidentally, he sees a German bookstore for sale in Istanbul, which he acquires and moves into an apartment nearby.

In chapter two, "Lotte's Death," Yeter's daughter Ayten participates in a demonstration for democratic rights in Istanbul on the same May 1 that begins chapter one. When her political cell is arrested, she flees to Germany where she searches for her mother whom she believes to be working in a shoe store. Unable to find her, she begins eating and sleeping at the Hamburg University where she quickly meets Lotte, a young woman who takes her in. They fall in love with each other, and drive around looking for Ayten's mother, but are stopped by the police. Ayten is arrested and deported to Turkey after about a year. Lotte travels to Istanbul to try to rescue Ayten from jail, meets Nejat at the German bookstore, and sublets a room in his apartment. Nejat and Lotte are both looking for Ayten, but because Lotte has been instructed by a Turkish lawyer to use a false name when referring to Ayten, they do not know that they are looking for the same person. When Lotte visits Ayten in jail, Ayten asks her to retrieve a gun she has hidden at the demonstration on a rooftop of a building in Istanbul. Tragically, after Lotte finds the gun, she is killed by street kids with said gun.

In chapter three, which gives the film its title, "The Edge of Heaven," ("Auf der anderen Seite"), Lotte's mother Susanne travels to Turkey to fulfill Lotte's wish to help Ayten. Meanwhile Ali arrives in Turkey and travels to the Black Sea. Susanne meets Nejat because his apartment was the last place where Lotte stayed before her death and sublets her daughter's former room. During the celebration of Kurban Bayramı, the Festival of Sacrifice celebrating the

Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in demonstration of his loyalty to Allah, Susanne inquires about Nejat's relationship to his father. Nejat explains that he was scared of the story as a little boy but that his father told him that he would even make God his enemy to save his son. Nejat then leaves Istanbul and drives to the Black Sea region to look for his father. The final shot shows him waiting at the ocean for his father to return from fishing.

Accents and Dialects

This summary alone encapsulates the complexity of transnational movement and mistaken identities at play in the film, which calls for a theoretical approach to the cinematic production under globalization. Important approaches in Film Studies, such as Hamid Naficy's concept of an "accented cinema" are productive but cannot ultimately explain a film such as *The Edge of Heaven*. In his book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Naficy argues that films by exiled filmmakers in the diaspora are characterized by an accent. In his model "accent" does not refer to the speech of characters but to the "displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes" (4). Even though Naficy discusses earlier Turkish-German filmmakers and Turkish filmmakers living in Germany, his model cannot explicate the films directed by Akın's generation; Naficy's term "displaced" implies that a place exists where directors or characters would be at home, but which they cannot access at that historical moment. On the contrary, contemporary Turkish-German filmmakers inhabit a cosmopolitan and transnational cultural perspective. While Naficy's model captures the reality and filmic production of filmmakers who have been displaced from their homeland, his model relies on the sovereignty of nation-states and therefore cannot encapsulate the entire dynamic of globalization, in which mobile subjects criss-cross the globe in multiple directions.

Despite the fact that his theoretical model might not be entirely applicable to contemporary transnational cinema, such as the example of *The Edge of Heaven*, the concept of accent nevertheless proves to be a productive entry into the discussion of this film. Even if “accent” in Naficy’s model does not refer to linguistic markers of dialogues or characters in films, the shared importance of this term for his theoretical apparatus and for a film such as *The Edge of Heaven* is neither coincidental nor solely metaphorical. In *The Edge of Heaven* accent results from the characters’ location in space and time, an effect of their mobility, which in turn defines their relationships to each other. The accents of the individual figures are either audible or not, appear and disappear, depending on where the figures are located, and which of the three languages, German, Turkish, or English they speak. This means that all main characters, Nejat, Ali, Susanne, Lotte, Ayten, and Yeter at some point in the film speak with an accent, depending on time and place. Accent is not attached to an essential characteristic of a figure but instead becomes mobile, highlighting movement in temporal and geographical coordinates.

This mobile topographical and temporal constellation of filmic characters creates a dynamic network, in which accent marks the interconnection of time, place, and characters, all of whom partake in temporary displacements from normative and non-marked language. The repeated displacements in *The Edge of Heaven* rely on a complex organization of criss-crossing characters within the filmic space and time, which in turn is produced by a plot about people who move between different countries and regions. The parallel temporal organization of the narrative employs the repetition of individual shots with movement from left to right and vice versa to visually evoke a criss-crossing movement. This structure contrasts to Naficy’s model of “accented cinema,” which delineates a one-directional movement from homeland to diaspora and

a linear temporal movement from the past to the present, paradigmatically expressed in a linear narrative.

The Edge of Heaven not only marks accents that appear when characters speak in a foreign language as a result of transnational movement, but also dialect, or the marking of the dominant language spoken in a local region as a result of immobility. For example, when Nejat arrives in the Black Sea region and inquires with an old woman about the whereabouts of his father, her dialect marks her as being from that region. Thus the film illustrates the simultaneity of mobility (Nejat's journey to the Black Sea region constitutes the leitmotif of the film) and immobility under globalization. These different kinds of accent and dialect markings also point to the audience: to be able to hear an accent and locate a dialect relies on knowledge about the spoken language beyond linguistic meaning. The answer by the old woman to Nejat, for example, can be located by native speakers of Turkish, particularly those from the Black Sea region, but not by those viewers who are dependent on the translation of dialogues in subtitles.

Doublings, Pairings, and Crossings

The appearance and disappearance of accents highlights the temporal and spatial organization of the film's narrative, which is organized in doublings, pairings, and crossings. This element of the film, I suggest, captures the increase in multidirectional mobility and multidimensional cultural production and reception under globalization. The constellation of the figures relies on doublings of parent/child pairings: one father/son pair (Ali/Nejat) and two mother/daughter pairs (Yeter/Ayten and Susanne/Lotte). In these pairings the person who claims to love the other causes her death: the death of the mother in one pair (Yeter) and the death of the

daughter in the other (Lotte). Their deaths, in turn, lead to a non-biological maternal relation between Ayten and Susanne, who also enables the reconciliation between Ali and Nejat.

The film applies spatial strategies to its temporal organization.² The composition of doublings, repetitions, and pairings—often with variations—connects to the film’s contrapuntal composition of stillness and movement of the figures that produces the appearance and disappearance of accents and dialects.³ Literally this captures their movement between Bremen, Hamburg, Istanbul, and the Black Sea region. The movement and stasis on geographic and temporal planes mirrors characters’ emotional and psychological developments. Stillness and movement in the film’s temporal organization rely on strategies that are spatial in nature: parallels, overlaps, expansion, contraction, and crossings, highlighting the changing perceptions of space and time under globalization.

“Doubling” as an organizing principle does not only organize character constellations but also applies to the film’s narrative structure. Repeated individual shots are embedded in parallel time lines. *The Edge of Heaven* begins with a shot at a gas station—a stopping point that enables mobility—in the Black Sea region, which reappears toward the end of the film. The opening shot introduces an unknown character as stranger and traveler. The scene then efficiently illustrates the dialectics of unknown and familiar; what seems an unanchored landscape is very quickly localized through dialogue when the gas-station attendant explains to the stranger that the singer of the music playing in the store is Kazım Koyuncu, a well-known artist from the Black Sea

² Turkish-German cinema has been a particularly spatial cinema, which is reflected in the critical literature. See Baer, Fenner, Gallagher, and Göktürk 2000. Ezli observes in relation to *The Edge of Heaven* that the connection of the characters through spatial means also results from the “dominance of long shots” [“die Dominanz totaler Einstellungen”] (2009: 214 [my translation]).

³ Edward Said has introduced the term from music into the discussion of exilic cultural production. I am particularly interested in the musical quality that the term evokes to capture the movement of the characters in relationship to each other. Noah Isenberg makes productive Said’s term of “contrapuntal” for a reading of German-Jewish filmmaker Edgar G. Ulmer’s films, in which movement, space, and a “plurality of vision” also play an important role (3). In that context, he expands the notion of “exile,” since “Ulmer may not be considered a ‘true’ exile according to Said’s typology” (4).

region who died of cancer at a relatively young age, presumably because of the effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe. This explanation anchors the place in a regional culture and its socio-political context, which expands through the music into the unfolding spaces of the rest of the film.⁴ The gas station attendant also introduces the topic of politics connected to death, in which the global affects the local. The opening sequence does not follow narrative order and functions as a prelude before the title of the first chapter. This privileging emphasizes the sequence itself as a key moment for the narrative but also points to a meta-level concerning the importance of the non-linear structure of the film, in which doublings of shots subvert conventions of linear narrative story-telling, but also create the rhythm of the film's poetics. [See clips 1 and 2.⁵]

I am using the term "filmic poetics" intentionally here to intervene in a theoretical Film Studies debate, in which the model of "Hollywood," as shorthand for industrially produced narrative cinema, dominates its theoretical paradigms. Film theory in general presumes that continuity editing, the 180 degree rule, and coherent setting create the illusion of reality and constitute the base for suture and identification.⁶ According to this theoretical paradigm, films destroy continuity when they foreground the cinematic apparatus through Brechtian alienation effects, such as non-linear narrative strands, "jump cuts," slow motion, speed up and so on. In *The Edge of Heaven*, however, doublings and repetition function akin to a musical refrain, especially the repetition with variation, and not as a Brechtian alienation effect.⁷ The film creates parallel musical and visual structures, accords diaries and books important roles, and relies on

⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of the film's staging of the regional, unraveled from the perspective of music, see Göktürk 2008a.

⁵ All clips cited in this paper can be viewed on the *TRANSIT* website, <http://german.berkeley.edu/transit/>

⁶ For a discussion of "continuity editing," "the 180 degree rule," and "coherent setting" see Bordwell; for a discussion of "suture," see Silverman.

⁷ Göktürk makes a closely related argument about Akin's film *Head-On*, in regard to which she also argues against reading the musical interludes as Brechtian and instead as "music video aesthetic" and the "source of inspiration" from "Indian cinema," "where dramatic action is frequently interspersed with song and dance sequences that provide emotional relief, and underscore or counterpoint the narrative" (Göktürk, 2008b: 159).

the literary structure of chapters. In times of digital media, a linear narrative based on a singular temporality situated in a topography that can be comprehended in one glance does not constitute the precondition for filmic illusion, fantasy, and identification anymore. The hypertext-quality of computer games and DVDs allows users to navigate in non-linear and multi-directional ways and create shifting identifications. By now, the possibility to reassemble texts has influenced narrative organizations across different media.

Because viewers are accustomed to non-linear and multidimensional narratives, literary and musical structures of repetitions can organize filmic narratives without breaking cinematic illusion and viewer identification, a past mainstay of Film Studies. The connection between music and chapters was prefigured in *Head-On*, Akın's film prior to *The Edge of Heaven*, which used musical interludes as chapter headings and refrains that interrupted the narrative but repeated the visual setting (see also Göktürk, 2008). Viewers do not experience film solely on the large screen anymore but increasingly as digital text, as DVD, as a download from the web or parceled up on youtube, in which consumers have the power over chronology and are thus independent of continuity of time and space. A film text is increasingly organized in arbitrary chapter headings and multiplied with different additional texts for different regions. For example, the German releases of Akın's DVDs come with significantly different additional materials than the American versions of his films. Director's comments on DVDs create multiple film-texts under one title in contrast to the non-digital medium of celluloid film with the attendant practice of watching a film from beginning to end in the movie theatre.

The Collapse of Space and Time under Globalization

The Edge of Heaven tells its story with consecutive partial overlap in time and space, each with a focus on a different character. This pulling apart in consecutive narrations of overlapping time lines allows for seeming repetitions of shots that point to what David Harvey calls “time-space compression” (see 240-323). For example, two scenes with coffins at the airport appear in the first two chapters. The first shot shows a medium long shot of the Turkish aircraft at the Istanbul airport and a coffin (with Yeter’s corpse) leaving the aircraft on a luggage conveyer belt from right to left. The inverted shot appears in chapter two, as no shots are doubled within one chapter. In this shot, in the same setting and composition, a coffin (with Lotte’s corpse) is transported on a conveyer belt into the aircraft from left to right. [See clips 3 and 4.] In relative close succession, a third shot of luggage being unloaded from a plane is added, which then cuts to both Ali and Susanne arriving in Istanbul. This succession of three shots mirrors the chapter structure of the film, in which two narratives of death dominate, to be dialectically resolved in a third chapter/shot. The shots are composed the same in setting and camera distance, and highlight the coffins’ movements in the different directions, creating the meta-textual visual motif of criss-crossing.

The return of the dead Turkish body to its homeland is a reoccurring trope in Turkish-German and Turkish cinema and literature. In Turkish cinema, the journey to return a dead body to its homeland or region constitutes narratives in Ali Özgentürk’s film *Balalayka* (2000) and Yeşim Ustaoğlu’s *Journey to the Sun* (1999).⁸ In Turkish-German literature and film Güney Dal’s *Europe Street 5* (*Europastrasse 5*, 1981) tells the story of Salim returning his father to Turkey via car and Akın’s earlier film *In July* has Isa drive from Germany to Istanbul with his

⁸ For a discussion of *Journey to the Sun* in the context of European Cinema, emphasizing the film’s funding by Eurimages, see Göktürk, 2002.

dead uncle in the trunk of his car.⁹ Whereas the dead bodies central to the plots of these texts are transported arduously from one country to another or from one region to another, in *The Edge of Heaven* dead bodies are exchanged via planes and the time and space between the place of death in one country and burial in another is collapsed in one cut.

Through the similarity of the shots, the composition emphasizes the moment of criss-crossing, a chiasmus, which appears in the “formulaic exchange in Arabic, where greeting and reply are nearly mirror opposites” (Adelson, 2005: 156). This traditional exchange is invited very early on in the film, when two Islamists confront Yeter in the streetcar and greet her, to which she first responds that she neither understands, nor speaks Turkish. Yet at the end of the conversation, she participates in the the Turkish variant of this exchange of greeting: “‘Selamünaleyküm’ (peace upon you) and ‘Aleykümselam’ (upon you peace)” (Adelson, 2005: 156). The moment points to another repetition with a difference: the possibility and demand to repent, which is offered by the Islamists to Yeter, for her sinful life-style, and to her daughter Ayten by the Turkish government, for her supposed terrorist acts.

The chiasmus of death (the crossing of returned dead bodies) is counter-balanced by a more hopeful criss-crossing organized around forgiveness and atonement. Susanne enables Nejat to overcome his accusatory position vis-à-vis his father by asking about their relationship after Nejat has told her his memory of Kurban Bayramı. Her question: “Is your father still alive?” is a variation of Nejat’s question for Yeter, whether she has children, while they are riding in the streetcar. Susanne’s interest in Nejat’s relationship to his father and Nejat’s question for Yeter about her daughter constitutes another criss-crossing in the film, mirroring its spatial and temporal organization. The chiastic structure connects aesthetic, compositional, and narrative structures of the film. Criss-crossing in time and space captures contemporary mobility under

⁹ For a discussion of Dal’s *Europastraße 5*, see Leslie Adelson 1997.

globalization on a phenomenological and symbolic level. The linguistic and poetic tradition of chiasmus frames globalization's criss-crossing movement in an older aesthetic form that, while acknowledging the particularity of contemporary mobility, also captures its historical continuity.

The Edge of Heaven reflects the simultaneous global and local characteristic of the current global moment not only through the foregrounding of accent and dialect, but also through the simultaneous collapse of transnational space and time, and expansion of local space and time. Flights between Germany and Turkey structure the narrative of the film, but their time and distance is collapsed: Ayten flies from Turkey to Germany; Nejat, Lotte, and Susanne fly from Germany to Turkey; Ayten and Ali are deported from Germany to Turkey. In contrast to the temporal compression of transnational mobility, the travel by car or train that is prolonged in the film take place between Bremen and Hamburg—a regional distance—or within Turkey, illustrating the diversity between different regions. Because long-distance time and space is increasingly compressed, local time and space appears extensive. The seeming elasticity of space and time throughout the film underscores the fact that local and global perception of spatiality and temporality exist in relationship to each other.

Particularly the repeated “road movie” shots of Nejat driving through the Black Sea region celebrate the landscape through movement. Celebrating mobility in space, the road movie was once the privileged genre of American cinema. Curiously, it has almost disappeared in Hollywood but recently reappeared in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe (see Rascaroli and Mazierska). In part this results from EU-funding, in part from the possibility of Eastern

Europeans to travel after the fall of the Iron Curtain, but also from subsequently changing spatial perceptions.¹⁰

Models of Temporality

The Edge of Heaven not only stages shifting perceptions of time and space under globalization but also references past models of conceptualizing time as unfolding in space by referencing conflicting ideas of revolutionary and evolutionary concepts of history. In the first two chapters of the film, we watch Nejat giving his lecture at the university. The first of the two shots begins with the camera focusing on Nejat lecturing to then move to Ayten sleeping in a seat in the foreground of the shot while Nejat is positioned out of focus in the background. The second time the sequence appears the camera starts with Ayten in the foreground and Nejat out of focus in the background and then moves onto Nejat lecturing. Thus, both scenes temporally overlap but advance in Nejat's lecture: repetition with a difference, or to put it differently: a minor narrative advancement that results from a temporal overlap.

We only hear a section of his lecture, of which a part is repeated in the two different chapters of the film. Nejat explains that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe endorsed evolution and condemned revolution and reads: "Who would want to see a rose bloom in the depth of winter? Everything has to take its time: leaves, buds, blooms...Only the fool demands this non-temporal intoxication." Helge Martens elaborates: "Goethe was appalled by a lack of rules: death, the unstructured world of mountains, violent uproar. He preferred an evolutionary world view following exact and consistent laws...The evolutionary creation through water, in phases and rules, was much closer to his model of growth" (n.p.). During the eighteenth century two schools

¹⁰ I thank Holly Raynard for sharing her insight into Jan Sverak's *The Ride* (*Jizda*, 1994), "the first Czech road movie," which illustrates the postwall changes of cinematic movement, spatial reorganization of (Eastern) Europe, and cinematic genres.

of thought—“neptunists” and “plutonists”—conceptualized the earth’s development differently. The “neptunists,” named after Neptune, the Roman God of the sea, believed that all geological stratification was sedimentation from the ocean. The “plutonists,” named after Pluto, the Roman God of metals and the underworld, believed that geological stratification resulted from sedimentation from different mountain formations.

Pluto and volcanoes symbolized revolution, while Neptune and water stood for evolution. E.P. Hamm, in his study of Goethe’s mineralogical collection explains neptunism as a term “associated with those who thought the most important formations of the Earth’s crust were the product of crystallization, precipitation and sedimentation out of some sort of aqueous solution” (285). Andrew Piper argues that Goethe’s “late novelistic writing” was shaped by a “geo-logic,” which participated in “the innovative ways that space and self were being reconceived around 1800: from the stratification of temporal consciousness, to the disaggregation of the perception of different scales of space and self, and finally, to the relationality of spatial perception that helped shatter the exclusivity of notions of space and species and ushered in a new relativity of the idea of ‘location,’” (n.p.). He elaborates on a historical shift in the perceptions of space and time that constitutes a layer in *The Edge of Heaven* but that is also echoed in the film’s interest in how contemporary locations function under the new global, temporal, and spatial regimes.

Ayten endorses revolution and Nejat embodies evolution. He ends at the ocean. Ayten sleeps while Nejat lectures. Their presence in one shot emphasizes the fact that the person for whom they are searching is right before their eyes, but not recognizable for them. The repetition of the shot illustrates to the audience that the significance of what we see changes through what we know. [See clips 5 and 6.] The first time we see the shot of Nejat lecturing we do not recognize or even remember Ayten, since she carries no meaning for us. This also happens in

relationship to the moment when the paths of Nejat and Yeter and Lotte and Ayten cross: Lotte is driving Ayten in her mother's car looking for Ayten's mother, while the street car is moving by with Nejat and Yeter in the background. While other chiasmic crossings take place across time, this shot includes the chiasmic crossing of the two pairs in one shot, one pair moving from right to left and one from left to right.

Bibliophilia in the Age of Globalization

Similar to the integration of philosophies of temporality that predate modern scientific understanding of evolution, *The Edge of Heaven* ascribes a curious importance to literature, its activities of reading and writing, and its material dimension of bibliophilia.¹¹ In each of the film's pairings of parents and children an emotional moment occurs that engenders a deeper understanding of the other through the medium of reading and writing. After Lotte's death, Susanne lies on Lotte's bed in Nejat's apartment in Istanbul and reads Lotte's diary. We learn that Lotte had more insight about herself and her mother than we expected from her character up to this point. Susanne reads: "Even if mother does not understand me, which I do not understand....She sees herself in me." After Susanne has read the passage in the diary, a vision of her dead daughter Lotte appears in front of her. Connected via a cut, we next see Ali reading Selim Özdoğan's book *The Daughter of the Blacksmith* (*Die Tochter des Schmieds*, 2005; *Demircinin Kızı*, 2007) in Turkish, which his son Nejat had given to him as a gift. This sequence of cuts positions the Turkish father in the urban, Turkish public sphere. He is moved by the book, an indirect communication with his son.

¹¹ While Ezli does not use the term "bibliophilia," he does emphasize the "haptic" ["haptisch"] dimension of Nejat's relationship to the store and its books, when he "touches the spines of the books while he moves past the shelves" ["streichelt beim Vorbeigehen die Rücken der Bücher"], which is part of bibliophilia (2009: 218 [my translation]).

Turkish-German author Özdoğan belongs to Fatih Akin's generation of writers and directors. His book, which at the time of the making of the film had only appeared in German, but appears in Turkish in the film, tells the story of Gül, maturing from a child into married woman until the day that she gets ready to migrate to Germany in the 1970s. *The Daughter of the Blacksmith* portrays its character Gül in an ethnographic register that authenticates a history of migration. She has limited agency among the historical forces around her that manifest themselves in her mundane everyday life. Özkan Ezli suggests that this kind of literature signals an interest and understanding of the children's generation in the life of their parents prior to migration.¹²

In *The Edge of Heaven*, reading becomes mediated communication between father and estranged son and mother and her dead daughter. Ali's moment of reading points into the future through the not-yet-existing-translation of the book, and the past, which is contained in the book. With a slight of hand, Özdoğan's book appears in Turkish in the film but with its German cover. This moment collapses the relatively long process of literary translation in contrast to the simultaneous translation of subtitles that enables the use of multiple languages in one film. The fictive translation of the book points to another signifier that circulates throughout the text: the Turkish name Gül literally means "rose."¹³ "Gül" in *The Edge of Heaven* becomes a name dislodged from a single character: in addition to being the main character's name in Özdoğan's novel, it is used as a form of endearment by Ali to express thankful recognition of his sexual

¹² Ezli distinguishes Turkish-German literature in three phases (2006). In the first phase from the beginning of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, the theme of suffering and identity crisis characterized the literary negotiation. The subsequent second phase, beginning at the end of the 1980s and continuing through the mid-1990s is marked by a negotiation of the topic of migration on a meta-level. Ezli characterizes the last phase with the concentration on the migration experience of the parents' generation told through an ethnographic gaze (2006: 61-62). Ezli argues that the migration experience does not occupy the center of Özdoğan's novel but instead a story about "a life without home" ["das heimatlose Leben"], encapsulated for example by the main character Gül's alienated life with the family of her husband who has already left for Germany (2006: 70).

¹³ I thank David Lee for pointing this out to me.

pleasure to Yeter, then as Ayten's false name in her passport, and finally as Lotte's misguided attempt to protect Ayten by misnaming her. "Gül" translated as "rose" also connects to Nejat's rhetorical question: "Who would want to see a rose bloom in the depth of winter?" "Rose" links Gül of the novel, Yeter, and Ayten across time and space highlighting the question about human agency, but the name also leads characters astray with confusing masquerade, global mimicry, and well-intentioned misunderstandings.

The character Nejat is closely associated with books in their function as mediation between characters and their relationship to literature, but also their material, bibliophilic dimension. Intriguingly, in the context of globalization his close alignment with books enables him to be a mobile character because books constitute his home in Hamburg as much as in Istanbul. The shot of him in Hamburg shows him surrounded by books and does not define the place spatially, leaving it open whether he is his office or his apartment.¹⁴ The German bookstore in Istanbul is shot only in warm colors and bathed in soft lighting. German literature is dislodged from its proper geographical location of the German nation-state. This kind of bibliophilic mobility, the dislodging of national literature from the place of the nation via books is a reminder of the history of media in which books function as mobile carriers of culture. By incorporating the history of media, *The Edge of Heaven* moves beyond the cultural imaginary of globalization as detached from history.

¹⁴ Different viewers have interpreted the shot of Nejat sitting at his desk surrounded by books as either Nejat's office at the University of Hamburg or his office at home. While the shot might have not been intended as ambivalent at all, the fact that viewers read the setting differently illustrates the proximity of the labor of reading and the sense of belonging that Nejat embodies as character, but the film implies for intellectual labor in general. If we assume the shot shows him at work, the viewers' ambivalence illustrates how the material manifestations of Nejat's work are staged so that they evoke a sense of home. If we assume that the shot shows Nejat at home, the indecidability about the location illustrates how his home life is dominated by this love for books. That books and literature do not only signal his profession as a professor becomes clear when he seemingly easily leaves the high-status profession of a professor of German literature in Germany to buy a bookstore in Istanbul.

Generations

The Edge of Heaven's narrative trajectory of reconciliation and mutual understanding between children and parents (biological and substitute) opens up new possibilities for the conflict between generations, a recurring theme in films by Turkish-German directors. The parents' generation is primarily absent in Akın's earlier films *Short Sharp Shock* and *In July* and appear as violent threat in *Head-On*. Akın's film *Solino* and his film *We Forgot to Return* are exceptions. As a migration melodrama of a family saga, *Solino* accompanies the story of two generations of a family. Akın's earlier films share this characteristic with other films by Turkish-German filmmakers of his generation. In Arslan's *Brothers and Sisters* (*Geschwister – Kardeşler*, 1997) the parents do not understand their children and are helpless vis-à-vis their issues; in Yavuz's *April Children* (*Aprilkinder*, 1998), the parents are absent, and in his film *Little Freedom* (*Kleine Freiheit*, 2003), two young men function as substitute parents for each other. In Polat's *Tour Abroad* (*Auslandstournee*, 2000) the dead father and the absent mother motivate the narrative. Derin's *I am the Daughter of my Mother* (*Ich bin die Tochter meiner Mutter*, 1998) and *Between the Stars* (*Zwischen den Sternen*, 2003) are both organized around conflicts between parents' and childrens' generations.

German sociologist Lydia Potts has captured the migration of the second generation of Turkish migrants to Germany as a "double trauma." For the second generation the first trauma was often constituted by the loss of their parents when they migrated to Germany leaving behind the children to be raised by grand-parents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings. The second trauma occurred when the children were united with their parents years later, as they had by then become estranged from each other. Labor migration produces fantasmatic long-distance intimacies with absent parents or other loved ones on the one hand and substitute kinship

affiliations in the localized place of the left-behind on the other hand.¹⁵ This particular form of “double trauma” in Turkish migration to West Germany is part of the larger context of labor migration under globalization, in which “chains of care” result in “internationalization of intimacy,” particularly in regard to women’s domestic labor migration (see Rotkirch and Hochchild). Women from the Global South move to the Global North in caring professions (nannies, domestic care, nursing) to take care of the children and elderly of working women in the Global North, while their own children are taken care of by their older children, parents, female relatives, or poorer migrants. The surrogate families and parenting in Turkish-German cinema and the mediated and fantasmatic connections between children and parents captures attachment across spatial and temporal distance. Reading and writing in letters, for example, structure and provide the voice over in Derin’s *I am the Daughter of my Mother*. The repeated references to reading and writing in *The Edge of Heaven* double the self-reflexivity of the medium of film, which originates from the children’s generation, also addressing their parents.¹⁶

The final and crucial reconciliation between characters—most importantly between Nejat and his father Ali, but also between Susanne and Ayten—occurs towards the film’s end. Paralleling biological and substitute families, both are incomplete and gendered mirror images of each other. One crucial scene towards the very end of the film engenders Nejat’s search for his father, the third search in the film. [See clip 7.] Susanne and Nejat stand at the window in his apartment in Istanbul, connecting interior to exterior space. Men walk down the urban steps to attend the prayer for Kurban Bayramı. When Susanne asks Nejat about his father, he answers that he was scared when his father told him the story of the Prophet Abraham’s promise to

¹⁵ Mario Rizzi’s experimental documentary *The Chicken Soup* (2008) includes in part heart-wrenching interviews with Indonesian and Vietnamese women who often leave behind their children for marriages and indentured labor in Taiwan in instances only to loose their children, even though their original motivation is the betterment of the life for their children.

¹⁶ This is particularly explicit in Seyhan Derin’s film. For further discussion, see Eren, Mennel.

sacrifice his son as a child, but that his father promised that he would even make God his enemy to protect him. This memory initiates his departure to search for his father. Nejat leaves Susanne in charge of his store and travels to the Black Sea region to search for his father. The narrative development of his journey gives meaning to shots that show Nejat driving that have appeared earlier without narrative context. The familial reconciliation thus coincides with a narrative integration of images for viewers and establishes a sense of intellectual and emotional closure. This journey leads up to the final shot, which shows Nejat looking out to the sea, awaiting his father from beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the film.

The story underlying *Kurban Bayramı* exists in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and this moment of revelation conjoins the individual familial reconciliation with the humanistic reconciliation between the three major religions.¹⁷ In the meta-conflict between radical politics embodied by Ayten, and the humanist values embodied by Nejat, this key scene ultimately privileges humanist values over radical politics. The holiday of *Kurban Bayramı* relies on the Islamic calendar based on the lunar calendar, in contrast to the Gregorian calendar. The reference to the Islamic calendar thus frames the narrative through the opening scene, in which the first words we hear, are Nejat's "Happy Bayram" to the gas-station worker, and the final scene of Nejat driving to search for his father (the repetition with a difference). Through this conclusion the instantiating earlier moments are endowed with narrative meaning. *Kurban Bayramı*, a significant date in the Islamic calendar frames the film as a whole. The two parallel temporal strands each begin on May 1, and are based on the Gregorian calendar and the "old" transnational model of international workers' solidarity. *The Edge of Heaven* creates a

¹⁷ The key scene enables a reading of the entire film in relationship to Akın's trilogy "love, death, and the devil." For such a reading, see Tezcan. The brief section in this essay is inspired by his discussion.

transnational cinematic aesthetic language that integrates globalization's compression of space and time with the histories of temporality and spatiality in its narrative.

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