Chancellor's Honors Program Projects

Supervised Undergraduate Student Research and Creative Work

5-2011

Representation and Deconstruction of Turkish German Stereotypes through Gegen die Wand and Kebab Connections

Charli Celine Kerns
ckerns@utk.edu

Representation and Deconstruction of Turkish German Stereotypes

through *Gegen die Wand* and *Kebab Connections*

Charli Kerns

Honors Thesis submitted

German Section of the Department

Of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures

College of Art and Sciences

Introduction:

When we as the audience watch a film, we step into a world overtly comprised of plot, climax, and resolution. However, in every film, cultural nuances covertly exist that repossess the ability to shape our perceptions of people. These cinematic tones can and have bolstered already negative ideologies regarding the "others" of societies. For example, such films have long been accused of confirming and creating ethnic stereotypes. A.M. Lopez "All Latins from Manhattan" in *Unspeakable Images,* wrote:

> Classic Hollywood cinema was never kind to ethnic or minority groups…be they
> Indian, black, Hispanic, or Jewish, Hollywood ethnics and minorities as
> stereotypes … Classic Hollywood film [is] ethnographic discourse … Hollywood
> does not represent ethnics and minorities; it creates them and provides the
> audience with an experience of them.[1]

What is the relationship between cinematic representation and cultural and ethnic stereotypes? Aside from confirming and creating such roles, could one not argue that certain films play with and possibly even break down stereotypes? If so, how? This particular question becomes more complicated in films that transverse cultural boundaries, especially in an increasingly globalized world.

Films that bounce back and forth between cultural perspectives are complex in their ways of interpreting and possibly breaking down stereotypes because they deal with more stereotypes than non-transnational films. For example, films that depict Turkish German continually struggle with the question of Turkish stereotypes within Germany, especially because the Turks represent the largest minority in Germany. The lines become blurred as to whether a Turkish German can call himself a "Turk," a "German," or both based on his familial background and his societal acceptance. Scholars such as Bob Burns claim that, at least in

---

[1] Friedman, Lester D. *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema.* University of Illinois Press. Urbana and Chicago, 1991. Pg 404.

regards to films made during the Federal Republic era, German cinema simplified their Turkish

protagonists to cardboard cutouts, depicting the Turk as victim and concentrating primarily on

irreconcilable conflict of an intercultural nature. For example, Burns described the film *Yasemin*,

a 1987 film praised for its profound and thoughtful depiction of the battle between Turkish

tradition and Western modernity[2]. The heroine, Yasemin crosses over cultural boundaries by

speaking both fluent German and Turkish, having German friends (when at this point in time up

to 65 percent of Turkish Germans only had Turkish friends), and remaining top in her classes.

However, the balance between Turkish traditionalism and Western liberalism is broken when

the father is ashamed of Yasemin's older sister's unchasteness, tightening his patriarchal grip

on the rebellious younger sister. Yasemin eventually escapes with her German boyfriend by

threatening to take her own life. According to Burns, this film's narrative logic requires that the

father turn from caring "dad" to cruel patriarch in response to Yasemin's rendezvous with both

the Western and Turkish worlds, an impossible feat that forces her to choose one or the other.

However, Burns does describe in his argument how later films by Turkish-German

directors (starting in the 1990s) did try to break down Turkish stereotypes. He credits the film

*Berlin and Berlin (*1993) and *Nur der Hauch von Paradies* (1993) as two films that had made the

attempt, however, ultimately both were branded as either "cultural exotica" or "effectively

marginalized." [3] The films still fall short as *Berlin Berlin* reduces the Turkish woman to a victim

being saved by a German man like most of the other preceding films, and *Nur der Hauch von*

Paradies comes from a director never seen by the Germans as more than "a foreigner writing in

German"[4].

---

[2] Burns, Rob(2007) 'The Politics of Cultural Representation: Turkish-German Encounters', German Politics, 16: 3, 358 — 378Pg. 364.
[3] Pg. 366
[4] Pg. 370

I argue that two popular and recent films have been able to touch upon the stereotypes of Turkish Germans and, through various means, break them. In this honors thesis, I discuss how two German films—one drama called *Gegen die Wand* and one comedy named *Kebab Connections*—use and deconstruct the stereotypes that exist in Germany of Turkish Germans. To organize my thesis, I first discuss various stereotypes that exist of Turkish Germans. I examine also how different genres of film—comedy and drama, German and transnational film, and "women's film,"— affect the overall "mood" of each film. This examination will add extra depth to the reasoning behind how each film approaches stereotypes. Afterward, I analyze the films according to various categories: the director and his role in making the particular film, the plot, the characters, gender roles, family roles.

I also address, in the section of my thesis that interprets each film, the "Germanness" of the film: how German is each film? How much does each film raise awareness of the German perspective regarding a person of Turkish descent's life? Where does the line separating Turk from German lie for these characters, or in fact does such a line exist? *In what form* does that line exist, or rather how do the films' identities depict and deconstruct the stereotypical identities of their characters? For example, some critics argue that *Gegen die Wand* is both a transnational film and a "women issues" film, and both genres play into the roles of the main character Sibel. Understanding the many layers of each film will help with my critique of how each film deconstructs the stereotypes of Turkish Germans.

I seek to address the following questions regarding the two films. How do the films work with stereotypes? Do they undermine any? Do they encourage any? What roles do the stereotypes play in each film relating to the genre? What roles do the stereotypes play in each film relating to the gender?

Stereotypes of Turkish Germans:

According to dictionary.com, [5] the definition of a stereotype is the oversimplified and standardized image invested with special meaning and made commonplace by group members. The idea of a stereotype is a caricature of a type of person that encompasses the entire identity of that person, and subsequently any reaction to that person. This caricature of the person transverses to the group to which that person belongs, be it his race, ethnicity, gender, or even social clique. To illustrate, bright blue-eyed, blonde-haired men wearing Lederhosen is a stereotype that many Americans have of Germans. Meanwhile, many Germans can be seen with brown, black, even red hair and unless Oktoberfest is going on, Lederhosen are a rare and often facetious gesture of the Germans.

Like Germans (and every other culture, race, and ethnic group), Turkish Germans are also often judged according to stereotypes. However, as a minority in Germany, Turkish Germans have particular stereotypes that ostracize them from the majority of the country. I chose both films—*Gegen die Wand* and *Kebab Connections*—for their ability to tackle four of the most prominent stereotypes of Turkish Germans[6].

The first stereotype is harshly patriarchal. I include the word "harsh" because most of the people who stereotype Turkish people as patriarchal are in patriarchal cultures themselves. So the distinction is that the stereotype attached to Turkish patriarchal structures is one of a harsh father, oftentimes physically abusive. According to some scholars, this type of social structure stems from interpretations of the Qur'ran; they read very specific passages regarding marriage, inheritance, and divorce and conclude from these readings that women are different from and inferior to men[7]. All the males come first in the family, which leads to the second stereotype.

---

[5] Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stereotype. January 18, 2011.
[6] Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Between Cinema and Social Work: Diasporic Turkish Women.* 2006. Pg 410.
[7] Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an Asma Barlas Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002. Pg 137

The second stereotype is the submissive female. This stereotype creates the image of a silent, docile woman who walks behind her husband, remains at home or without a job. According to the *Feminist Review,*

> The 'ideal' Muslim woman in Islamic 'fundamentalist' discourse is
>
> defined as being submissive to male authority, while being modest
>
> and virtuous in a patriarchally-defined sense. She is to be carefully
>
> controlled and monitored, at all times, by patriarchal authority[8].

Most people depict this stereotype in their head as the woman wearing strictly Muslim garb as well. For example, in Germany, German media and German cinema, the young, independence-seeking woman of a Muslim family is often depicted as in a dichotomy of "black sheep of the family, and not fully accepted by society." Dr. Katherine Pratt Ewing, professor in the anthropology department at the University of Wisconsin, explained this idea: "Polarized images of the Muslim woman as victim are a product of this process. Within this discourse, the Muslim woman is readily cast as the embodiment of the "other" to the liberated Western woman. She is oppressed by her "culture" and in need of liberation by enlightened Western saviors."[9] According to Pratt Ewing, German public discourse often tries to mediate the cultural contradictions of Turkish woman's background (as the contradictions are understood through that dialogue) by creating forms of dichotomy that actually challenge and even attack Turkish cultural identity, making German-Turkish coexistence that much more difficult.

---

[8] Shirazi, Faegheh. "Velvet Jihad: Muslim Women's Quiet Resistance to Islamic Fundamentalism'. Published 18.9.2010 on http://feministreview.blogspot.com/2010/08/velvet-jihad-muslim-womens-quiet.html . University of Florida Press. Accessed on March 21, 2011.
[9] Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Between Cinema and Social Work: Diasporic Turkish Women.* 2006

The third stereotype is one of a Muslim conservative[10]. The woman is thought to wear a hijab[11], specifically an al-amira, which is the scarf wrapped tightly around her head. Apart of the Islamic faith, Turkish people are often depicted in western media, such as sitcoms, as from a desert, oftentimes with camels in the background and palm trees (interesting to note, camels do not exist in Turkey). The idea among many western societies is that the Muslim men often wear turbans and plot jihads against nations. For example, in October 2010, Juan Williams made the comment on Fox News that, "when I get on the plane, I got to tell you, if I see people who are in Muslim garb and I think, you know, they are identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried. I get nervous."[12]

Germany is included in this insecurity among most nations of Muslim people (Muslims from any country). As Katherine Pratt Ewing explains: "But these images of Islam, I argue, are taken up in German public culture and transferred onto Germany itself, so that the visible, practicing Muslim is constituted as a threat to the foundations of German democracy and the German constitution."[13] For Germany, the concept of the Muslim Turk is one who does not completely assimilate into western (in this case, German) society. For example, the girl with the headscarf mentioned earlier, along with examples of her being pulled out of school at an early age and expected to marry only a Turkish man picked by her family became a powerful symbol of the cultural difference and the failure of the Turks to embrace cultural assimilation. [14] This symbol was further imprinted on the Turkish stereotype when a study of the living conditions of

---

[10] Esmen, Yasemin Sim. 'Turkey's Stereotyped Image in Foreign Press. 4.10.2007 on Turquie Europeenne at http://turquieeuropeenne.eu/article2176.html. Accessed on January 19,2011.

[11] Huda. 'Islamic Clothing Guide'. Copyright The New York Times Company 2011. About.com http://islam.about.com/od/dress/tp/clothing-glossary.htm. January 19,2011.

[12] Mirkinson, Jack. 'Juan Williams FIRED: NPR Sacks Analyst over Fox News Muslim Comments'. 20.12.2010 on *Huffington Post* website at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/21/juan-williams-fired-npr_n_770901.html. Accessed on March 10, 2011.

[13] Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Living Islam in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany.* Duke University Press. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2/3 (2003) 405-431. Pg 412.

[14] Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Living Islam in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany.* Duke University Press. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. 102.2/3 (2003) 405-431. Pg 412.

Turkish women was conducted by an organization of social workers in Berlin. They lived among the Turkish community of Berlin for a month and thereby established themselves as "experts." During their time, Pratt Ewing stated that, "From their perspective, the father makes decisions concerning the affairs of his children autocratically, with little or no input from his wife. The children, especially daughters, have the status of objects, to be traded off in marriage at the highest price possible (Baumgartner-Karabak and Landesberger 1978:55). The writers indicate that the position of a woman is unconditional subordination to her father and husband. Male authority is justified in terms of the man's honor and the principles of Islam, which handicap and oppresses women."[15]

The fourth stereotype is that of a strongly familial identity. The family is the most important part of an individual's life as well as his/her adherence to that family. In this case that means performing the specific roles identified in the family. This identity may mean performing the role of mother, daughter, wife, sister, which includes submission, servitude, etc. One example of how this has played within a German context is again, when *Der Spiegel* wrote a long cover story depicting the fate of a young Turkish woman raped by her uncle and oppressed by the rest of her family—to the point where she escaped and lives under another alias. This story came in the fall of 2003 during the wake of a Federal Court decision in Germany regarding the headscarf, which to many westerners is a symbol of oppression.

All four stereotypes exist in media and cinema in various levels of interconnectedness, almost in cause-effect relations. If the submissive female exists, she exists because a harshly patriarchal stereotype is in conflict with her (as seen in *Gegen die Wand)*, or she is a submissive female because of the roles placed upon her by the strongly familial identity. Also, the males in the cinema may be portrayed as harshly patriarchal because of their "typical" roles within the

---

[15] Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Living Islam in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany.* Duke University Press. The South Atlantic Quarterly, Volume 102, Number 2/3, Spring/Summer 2003. Pg 419.

conservative Muslim stereotype. The important issue is how these stereotypes exist within the

scope of each other and in cinema to shape the audience's notions of Turkish Germans. Only

within that context can we understand how the two particular films—*Gegen die Wand* and

Kebab Connections—break those stereotypes down.

Both *Gegen die Wand* and *Kebab Connections* deal with instances of all of these

stereotypes, which I delve into more deeply later in the research. However, before I examine

how these particular films work with and eventually deconstruct the Turkish stereotypes, I will

touch briefly on film genres and gender roles in films. What will factor in my analysis are

elements of both film genres and gender roles in film and how they shape the stereotypes in

each of the films analyzed in this thesis.

Gegen die Wand

The director of *Gegen die Wand*, he first film I am discussing, is by Fatih Akin. He was

born in Hamburg, Germany on August 25, 1973 to two Turkish Germans who immigrated to

Germany in the 1960s. Akin interweaves the theme of Turkish German lives throughout most of

his films. He has always thought of himself as belonging to each culture—Turkish and

German—and yet at the same time sees himself as an outsider to both[16]. He admitted to a lack

of knowledge about Istanbul and Turkish pop culture, however, he felt that this lack of

knowledge has served him well in portraying Turkish Germans beyond their stereotypes that

most people associate with a more extensive knowledge of Turkey[17]. For example, Akin

constructs his film more in the audio and visual effects of *Gegen die Wand*, like the usage of the

singers between each "act" of the film and the camera angles he uses to depict Istanbul as a

modern city of lights and culture, instead of focusing so much on extensive intrapersonal

---

[16] Suner, Asuman. *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory.* New York: Palgrave McMillan. 2010

[17] Adams, Sam, 'Interview with Director Fatih Akin.' 20.8.2010 on AV Club website at
        http://www.avclub.com/articles/director-fatih-akin,44341/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

dialogue among the main characters with other Turkish Germans. His other films, aside from *Gegen die Wand*, include *Crossing the Bridge,* a documentary of Turkish music; and *Edge of Heaven,* a fictional film that demonstrates his interest in the permeability of national and interpersonal borders. Many consider Akin to be a serious, politically minded filmmaker and a de factor spokesman for Germany's large Turkish population. His films create separate microcosms of intercultural issues to which Turkish Germans, particularly the younger generations, can relate.

Akin sums up his philosophy—the ideology one can see in his film *Gegen die Wand*—in his own words:

> I can't accept the world how it is. There are certain things I don't want to accept, and I reflect these things. I know that the cinema or art can change things. Rock 'n' roll changed things. Rock 'n' roll was not just Jimi Hendrix playing guitar. Rock 'n' roll was much more; the new Hollywood culture was rock 'n' roll too, and it really made me think about a lot of things. Through films I had discovered, certain things inspired me to read certain books, and these books made me think in certain directions. I'm not the only one. I'm one in a million. I don't believe that cinema can change the world with a huge impact, but maybe one drop.[18]

What Akin meant was that whatever we perceive in cinema helps shape whatever we perceive of the world around us. The inspiring thoughts in turn spurred him to create types of films that set people to think in particular terms regarding Turkish Germans. In what terms does his film *Gegen die Wand* set people to thinking and how?

---

[18] Adams, Sam. 20.8.2011. 'Interview with Director Fatih Akin' on AV Club Website at
    http://www.avclub.com/articles/director-fatih-akin,44341/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

Gegen die Wand is set in two cities: Hamburg and Istanbul. Two Turkish Germans meet in the hospital after both attempting suicide, one to escape the binds of her family, the other to escape the binds of his past. Sibel proposes the idea that Cahit marry her so that she can gain the freedoms she wants, while they only have to be together as roommates, each able to lead his/her own life. This plan ultimately fails when they fall in love, progressing more tragically in the movie when Cahit kills one of Sibel's lovers, ending up in jail. During this time, Sibel is now in Istanbul where she is raped, beaten almost to death and then ends up the rest film living in Turkey with her cousin and child. Once out of jail, Cahit travels back to Turkey and the heritage he had abandoned to find her. He tries to convince her to come with him and says he'll wait for her at the bus station. She never comes. He gets on the train, possibly to his birth town Mersin.

Kebab Connection (Arno Saul, 2004)

Anno Saul directed Kebab Connection, which was released in the same year as Gegen die Wand[19] and was also written by Fatih Akin. Saul was born in Bonn, Germany on November 14, 1963. From 1985-1990, Saul studied at the Munich School of Television and Film and later became a docent at the International School of Film in Cologne, Germany[20]. Saul made his debut with his first major film, Gruene Wueste, or Green Desert, for which he won the Audience Favorite Choice Award at the Cinequest San Jose Film Festival in 2000[21]. Kebab Connection was his second film, which he directed in 2004.

In his second film, Kebab Connections, the main character Ibo is a Turkish German with the dream of producing his own karate films. This dream almost gets squashed when he finds

---

[19] Anno Saul Information. The International Movie Database. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0766649/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

[20] Anno, Saul InformationThe International Movie Database. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0766649/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

[21] 'Anno Saul: Biography and Filmography'. 15.12.2009 at the Daily Press: Theme for Daily Publishers website at http://movietex.net/anno-saul-biography-and-filmography/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

out his girlfriend, Titzi, is pregnant. Ibo's family is outraged because for one, it is out of wedlock and two, she is not of Turkish heritage. To be honorable, Ibo is still expected to marry her and learn the ways of fatherhood, which he fails miserably (or humorously) throughout most of the film. His girlfriend is struggling with his inadequacies and finally can take it no more and leaves him. He tries to gain her back, in the meantime finally producing his first karate masterpiece—a commercial for a restaurant. Ibo's uncle offers to help relieve his tensions with his family if Ibo makes another commercial for his parents; however the attempt proves to be a failure. Frustrated, Ibo gives in to his family's rival—a Greek restaurant across the street—and agrees to make a commercial spot. This is a huge success in his community, and with it, he is starting to be able to support himself. He also wins back his Titzi, the two marry at the end of the film and receives the blessing and pride of his father that he had been working so hard for throughout the film.

The Use of Stereotypes in Both Films

At its most basic level, *Gegen die Wand* is a drama. The main characteristic of a drama is that conflict needs to be present. The plot tends to be serious and characterize events of real life as well as the emotional effects those moments have on the characters. Dramas also tend to evoke catharsis, meaning that it allows the audience to experience a purging of emotions or relieving of any pent-up tensions. In many ways, *Gegen die Wand* follows these characteristics. The film is seen through the perspectives of both Cahit, the hero, and Sibel, the heroine. For purposes of this thesis, I focus on Sibel's perspective. Throughout the film, Sibel is in conflict with constrains set by her family to remain a "faithful Turkish daughter." The plot is serious, dealing with issues of suicide attempts, love, murder, prison, rape, and escape to Turkey.

To analyze the highly gendered stereotypes described above, it is crucial to briefly recount the history of gender representation in cinema. Scholars such as Steve Neale claim

that, "though gender identification is not simply a matter of men identifying with male figures on the screen and women identifying with female figures," most every film still tends to render male and female characters according to socially constructed notions of men and women identities[22]. Such characterizations are described below:

Traditionally, the notion of the man's role in film is one of dominance and typical societal gender roles[23]. In most films, the hero tends to be on a pilgrimage where he moves down the path of life and finds himself in the end. The man's plot typically leads to a resolution of some sort (regardless of the physical outcome of the hero); he "finds" himself, in other words.

The female's role, however, can be described as either an object of the man's quest or as an irreconcilable conflict of inner self that leads to her downfall. The former description is that traditionally, women in film play submissive, supportive, or subordinate roles[24]. As the renowned art critic and author John Berger put it, "In film, men act—women appear." She is not the central figure in films most of the time, or if she is, the plot is circled around her struggles as one not wanting to assume the submissive role she's supposed to have. This conflict often makes her the "other," and she is constantly struggling against the norms in which she's placed. The lead woman's plot as struggle from societal expectations placed upon her usually leads to a tragic ending. Those societal expectations usually lead to the classic paradigm: that of conventions representing women is as the subject to, indeed sometimes victim to, masculine desire. [25] When mixed with the transnational notion of Turkish Germans, the woman's tragedy could be the inability to escape her conservative family's clutches, or how that escape eventually leads to her downfall, as depicted in *Die Fremde* (2010, with English title *When We Leave*). Sibel Kikelli, also

[22] Neale, Steve. *Screening the male: exploring masculinities in Hollywood Cinema.* Psychology Press. 1993. Pg. 11.

[23] Winchell, Mark Royden. *God, Man, and Hollywood: politically incorrect cinema from "The Birth of a Nation" to "The Passion of the Christ."* Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books. 2008.

[24] Cowie, Elizabeth. *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis.* Basingstoke : Macmillan. 1997.

[25][25] *Representing the Woman: Notes on Women in Film.*

the heroine for *Gegen die Wand*, plays a young Turkish woman named Umay who fights against her family's resistance to gain an independent life in Germany. This cultural and familial battle eventually results in a life-threatening situation. While *The Fremde* seems a little extreme, articles in *Der Spiegal*

Fatih Akin described in his interview with the Deutsche Welle how "There is a certain kind of pressure, a certain kind of dogmatism, that especially Turkish females face in our society, here in Germany more, than in Turkey. And she is fighting against it.

On another level, *Gegen die Wand* is a "women's film. "Women's films" often revolve around the woman's critical self-consciousness of her own life and identity. Fatih Akin described Sibel in his interview with die Deutsche Welle, which states:

> Sure, she was rebelling, but as an outsider, not as someone typical.
> We tried to show the family not as a typical one. Her mother is very
> modern, even the brother accepts the male hero, even if he is a lump,
> because he loves her, because it is good for the sister[26].

Becoming aware of their subordinate condition in patriarchal society, female protagonists struggle to take control of their own lives. Early Turkish (and elsewhere) women's films often portrayed women as either vicious or virtuous. Promiscuous and devious or having proven themselves worthy through devotion, loyalty and honor (usually as virginity). One of the most transgressive aspects of the women's films of the 1980s is their frankness about female sexuality. No longer defined as a matter of chastity, sexuality is presented in these films as an indispensible aspect of women's lives. One can even suggest that women's emancipation in these films is often associated with their sexual awakening[27]. The heroine is also never the

---

[26] 14.02.2004. 'Interview with Fatih Akin.' *Die Deutsche Welle (online article).* Retrieved April 25, 2011 from http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,1114779,00.html

[27] Sunner, Asuman. *Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory.* I.B. Taurus. New York, New York. 2010.   Pg. 165.

conqueror of her struggles; a man always comes to the rescue, and she remains the object of *his* conquest.

Scholars also classify *Gegen die Wand* as a "transnational film." [28] According to Christensen, the past two decades of political, cultural, and economic globalization; international migration; and rise of the EU as a new economic and political power have created the need to alter the European audiovisual domain's identity. All the countries within and bordering the EU have had to redefine the various landscapes—physical, mental, metaphorical, and virtual—that their citizens inhabit, and those altered perspectives have had quite an impact on cinema, namely with the creation of transnational films[29] Transnational (also known as transcultural) films often depict the idea of "migrant" cinema, often pitting the "intact" European nations with their broken transgressive Eastern counterparts, instilling the high-tragic nature of these "migrant" films. Specifically in terms of German-Turkish relations, these transnational films can create "othering."

Gegen die Wand contains the stereotypes mentioned in the beginning of the thesis. Sibel is a submissive female oppressed by the harsh patriarchal structure of her Muslim, tightly knit family. But does this film simply use these stereotypes for comic effect or does it contain them only to force the audience to realize the stereotypes they hold in their minds, thus helping to deconstruct the Turkish caricatures in Germany, and if so, how?

Gegen die Wand ostensibly continues reproduces the stereotypes of Turkish Germans. For example, the plot is set in motion by the fact that a young Turkish German woman is fleeing her domineering father's grasp. However, *Gegen die Wand* does deconstruct the stereotypes and it does so by being in and breaking through its genre barriers. Take, for example, the fact

---

[28] Suner, Asuman. *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory.* New York: Palgrave McMillan. 2010

[29] Christenensen Miyase. *The Many Faces of Film and Media in Europe.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Newcastle UK. 2008. Pg 2.

that *Gegen die Wand* can be characterized as a "women's film" in the fact that Sibel is struggling to free herself from confines of her oppressive family, which she eventually does by marrying Cahit. However, while this film deals with external struggle that defines a "women's film," most of Sibel's struggles are internal—her destructive, even suicidal tendencies—and only Sibel can and does save herself from her own destruction. By the end of the film, with Cahit gone, Sibel moves to Turkey, is in what appears to be a healthy relationship, has a stable job and is taking care of her daughter. Cahit comes from Germany to find her, and this is seen as a heroic move, but is it? Could Cahit simply take Sibel back to Germany and her own destruction? By making the decision to stay in Istanbul, Sibel chooses the stable life, the life that she can maintain without destroying herself. In this sense, Sibel has rescued herself, not Cahit, who could have possibly sent her to her demise, and in this notion has Sibel broken *Gegen die Wand* away from the "women's film" genre and the stereotype of the submissive female. In fact, an argument could be made that she rescued Cahit as well. He came to rescue her, bring her away from her life in Turkey and take her with him (whether back to Germany or elsewhere), and yet she refused. With nothing left in Germany and no Sibel, Cahit boards a train (supposedly back to Mersin(?), his birth town that he had abandoned for so long. In a way, for him his life goes full circle, ending where his life began. Sibel's life moves forward with a new man and a new life in Turkey. She is the ultimate heroine. By breaking away even from the genre of "women's film," *Gegen die Wand* breaks Sibel away from the stereotype of submissive Muslim female character.

Another example of how the movie uses and then deconstructs the submissive female stereotype is with Sibel's reasoning for staying within the family until she married Cahit (fix sentence). At first glance, one could think that Sibel remains in the family to obey her father; however, various scenes with her mother indicate otherwise. The connection Sibel has with her mother is strong, beyond cultural implications set by the stereotypes, and is simply the kind of

relationship a mother and daughter can have. This closeness makes leaving the family and breaking her mother's heart out of the question for Sibel. Akin had set the scene for a Turkish stereotype to exist that was then deconstructed with covert meanings behind the actions in the film.

Alongside plot and dialogue, *Gegen die Wand* uses cinematic effect to deconstruct the stereotype of submissive female in Sibel. According to Neale, the man is the one who sees (the subject of the film), and the woman is the one who is seen (the object of the film)[30]. This notion is gathered from the camera angles and how they focus on the man's reflective gaze from a close shot, while the female's shot is viewed from a distance (for example as she stands across the street, on a stage or from the other side of the bar). However, we see in *Gegen die Wand* many instances where Sibel is the subject of the camera angle, personal moments where she gazes out of a window (end of the film), or where she lies bleeding to death on the street after goading strangers to attack her. Much of the film rests on her inner struggles as well as Cahit's. Moments of the film do exist with close camera shots of Cahit as the seer; however, giving Sibel the same camera angles sets them both as equals rather than Cahit as simply the seer and Sibel as the seen.

The mother herself displays characteristics unlike the traditional roles of Turkish women as portrayed in most cinemas. Though she does wear the traditional garb and remains loyal to her husband, Sibel's mother gives her daughter words of encouragement to be strong. This lending of strength is, though not absent from the Turkish or Muslim culture, is absent oftentimes from films. Having the mother exhibit that strength also bolsters the idea of *Gegen die Wand* as a "women's film."

---

[30] Neale, Steve. *Screening the male: exploring masculinities in Hollywood Cinema.* Psychology Press. 1993. Pg. 11.

The film also addressed the stereotype of harshly patriarchal family structures. Sibel speaks of how her brother broke her nose as a child because he caught her holding hands with a boy in public. Sibel's father is often strict and refuses to let her go and experience freedom, only allowing her to leave the home when she marries Cahit, a Turkish. The stereotype permeates throughout the film until the very end, which promotes the main element of the drama, the conflict that moves the plot along. Sibel is in conflict with her Turkish heritage *as her father and brother* have created it for her. I emphasize the fact that her father and brother instigate the issue because toward the end of the film, the father and brother relent, seeing the error of their actions. This realization emphasizes the individual not the cultural reaction to Sibel's actions. The brother realizes how *he* thought and acted, not how his culture dictated how he should act.

The contrast between the scenes of Sibel interacting with her father and brother versus her interactions with her cousin in Istanbul deconstruct the third stereotype: the conservative Muslim. At the beginning of the film, the oppression Sibel experiences by her brother and father are expressed in a way that suggests the Muslim culture and belief system. However, toward the end of the film, Sibel escapes to Istanbul to live with her cousin. Note the word *escape*. Sibel escapes the repression by moving *to* Turkey, the Muslim country. Sibel's escape to Turkey suggests the idea that she is not escaping Muslim tyranny, but her *father and brother's* tyranny. In his interview with die Deutsche Welle, Fatih Akin describes both Sibel and Cahit's ending:

> Both are on a quest. He is trying to find himself. She tries
> to find herself. And the moment when the film stops,
> it is just the moment, where the film stops. We don't know
> what happens next. Do they stay there, do they go away. She
> accepts her new life, but we don't know if she is very happy with
> it. He goes back to his roots, to the place where his parents come
> from, where he was born. But he does not go as a lucky man. The

quest still continues.

This notion of "quest," again, becomes an issue of individual struggle with conflict against other individuals rather than individual struggle against a cultural collective. If *Gegen die Wand* had pitted the story against the conservative Muslim stereotype, Sibel would have ultimately escaped to a country less saturated with Muslims, particularly Turkish Muslims. Instead, she travels to Istanbul, and it is there that the audience sees a side of Turkish culture: that of modernity and diversity.

For example, Sibel's cousin is the manager of a big hotel, unmarried, and wears modern clothes. The many backgrounds of Istanbul are also of brightness: modern, city lights, streets, big buildings; one might even forget that the city is an Eastern European one and think of it more as a Western city in its modernized structure. Istanbul breaks down the stereotype of conservative Muslim by being such a hotspot for modernity with the buildings, the female manager, the western-style clothes, etc.

The film compares this depiction of a modern, light Turkey to a rather dark picture of a suppressive Germany through Sibel's eyes. The "Germanness" of the film comes out through this cold, dark portrayal of Berlin. Sibel feels ostracized from her Turkish family by her desire to be more like Germany, an independent, culturally liberal philosophy.

However, it is in Germany that she is expected to marry only another Turk; she is expected to remain within her father's household until she marries; she is expected to follow strict, conservative norms. Her mother still dresses in traditional Muslim garb; her father and brother are harshly dominant over her and her mother. This contrast is used to show how within Germany, certain traditional Turkish families have come to represent all Turks.

Interpretation of Kebab Connections

The film *Kebab Connections* uses comedy to address and deconstruct the stereotypes that exist of Turkish Germans in German cinema. By definition, *Kebab Connections* is classified as a comedy. Comedie [31] often have a "happy ending." Most comedies have plots that act almost as funny caricatures of real life-type events. Scenes are often hyperbolic of real-life events.

By inserting various comedic examples throughout the film, the director Saul forces the audience to realize the stereotypes that they have when they laugh at the humor of hyperbolic actions and events brought on by stereotypes. The film plays on the notions that people would not laugh if they did not think it was funny, and they would not think it was funny if they did not believe it was (at least partly) true. That hyperbolic representation of the "jokes" is the crux of the film's deconstruction of Turkish stereotypes.

An example of how a hyperbolic situation in *Kebab Connection* works to deconstruct Turkish German stereotypes is the scene with Ibo, his friend, and the baby carriage. Titzi gives Ibo an empty carriage to practice playing a modern father figure (sharing in the domestic aspects of child rearing), which he is loath to do. Through negligence and carelessness, Ibo manages to lose the empty carriage and obtains one with a baby, and a scene unfolds where he and his friend try to correct the mistake. In the end, his friend saves the day, wins the young mother of the child, and Ibo is left looking like the goof who messed up. Furthermore, the entire scene is played with a kung-fu-style action scene in Ibo's head, adding to the ludicrousness of the event. This over-embellishment of an otherwise serious situation depicts the humor behind a Turkish German male's inability to handle childcare, something left for the woman. By laughing

---

[31] Nelson, T.G.A. *Comedy: An Introduction to Comedy in Literature, Drama, and Cinema.* New York. Oxford University Press. 1990.
Horton, Andrew. *Comedy/Cinema/Theory.* Berkeley, California. University of California press. 1991.
Mast, Gerald. *The Comic Mind.* London, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1979. Pg 24.

at this situation, the audience is forced to realize that they hold, at least to some degree, certain ideas of a Turkish Germans that create the stereotypes mentioned in this paper.

The central focus of the film is how Ibo wants to be a kung-fu film maker, which establishes a transnational nature about the film—a Turkish German in Germany wanted to direct an Asian martial arts film. *Kebab Connections* plays on the stereotype of macho Turkish male to an over-the-top extreme, making the idea of holding that stereotype to all Turks equally as exaggerated. This film transverses even more cultural boundaries when Ibo ends up making a kung-fu film for his father's restaurant rival, the Greek restaurant across the street. By playing into all sorts of multicultural conflicts (Greek vs. Turkish restaurant, Turkish vs. German intermarriage, Turkish-German vs. Asian depiction of film) in such exaggerated ways, *Kebab Connections* breaks down each stereotype brought on by exaggerated ideas that people have of the minorities depicted in the film.

One of the first and major examples of a Turkish stereotype is the father's relationship with Ibo. The relationship touches on the stereotype of the harshly patriarchal family structure. Throughout almost the entire film, Ibo father threatens to disown him for going against the father's wishes, oftentimes declaring the fact dramatically. The overly dramatized reaction of the father's reactions to Ibo actions forces the viewers to accept the reality that they—at least to some extend—honestly believe in fathers within Muslim families disowning their children for various reasons like having relationships with people outside the Muslim faith or Turkish ethnicity.

Another stereotype touched upon in *Kebab Connections* is the conservative Muslim family structure. This notion is stretched a little with the idea that Ibo family is more upset that he got a German girl pregnant than they are with the fact that he got her pregnant out of wedlock; however, it still plays into the idea of marrying outside of the cultural affinity as taboo. For this

example, the scene where Ibo explains to his family that he got Titzi pregnant plays out with the father saying. The father, yet again wants to disown Ibo for his disgracing the entire family by mixing with a German girl, much like the same way as Sibel's father will not let Sibel leave his household until she marries another *Turkish* person. What makes the particular scene in *Kebab Connection* comedic is the hyperbolic way in which it is expressed. While in *Gegen die Wand* Sibel actually had her nose broken by her brother and truly feared her father, Ibo overdramatically cowers under his father's exaggerated anger.

However, as a comedy, *Kebab Connection* has a positive ending. This positive ending for the hero, which means he gets the girl he's been after, means that Ibo does marry Titzi, which introduces a German into family and breaks up the conservative Muslim family structure. Unlike most media portrayal and issues of Turks in Germany, *Kebab Connection* has a German integrate into the Turkish family, creating a multicultural family. In order for the film to remain a comedy, a Turkish stereotype had to be broken; both could not have existed with the way the film's plot played out.

Though the submissive female stereotype is not as ostensibly used? Present? In *Kebab Connections* as in *Gegen die Wand*, instances of female objectivity, which underlie the notion of female submissiveness, are represented in the film. The Greek restaurant owner's daughter is used as a means of enticing Ibo to make a commercial for him, thereby leading Ibo to the "dark side." The daughter has become an object upon which Ibo must choose whether or not to act. She must submit to her father's desires and potentially Ibo's whims.

However, even this stereotype is broken at least somewhat by the daughter for comedic effect. Rather than a submissive object at the end of men's actions, she is a femme fatale, an independent seductress. How her character breaks down the stereotype of submissive female is that Saul exaggerated her sexiness to the point of it being ludicrous, thus creating another

comedic effect that the audience must realize can only be comedic if they realize they hold some ideas of this stereotype. Also, by scheming *with* his daughter (which means out loud so that the audience may know what is transpiring), the Greek restaurant owner effectively makes her a "partner in crime," not simply the object of his silent conniving ideas.

By utilizing various comedic techniques such as hyperbolic situations/reactions, positive ending, and ridiculous nemesis conflict, *Kebab Connection* breaks down stereotypes about Turkish Germans living in a German society.

Conclusion

Throughout their existence, films have impacted the perspectives of the audience regarding minority representations. This impact is particularly relevant and important in regards to transnational films depicting stereotypes of Turkish Germans. Throughout the 1980s and into the mid-1990s, films and news/social media have depicted Turkish Germans as religiously conservative, harshly patriarchal, strictly familial, and with extremely passive females.

For example, stories posted on Spiegel Online that negatively represented Turkey and Turks have included the following; a Turk who raped an 8-year-old Turkish girl and fled to Turkey; an honor killing involving six people from the same family; Turks are incapable of integrating into Germany. Also, Süddeutsche Zeitung negatively depicted Turkey and Turks mocking news stories as follows; "open-closed diplomacy between Turkey and Armenia" to make fun of talks between Turkey and Armenia, "Honey and milk flow from the taps of Germany", "Turkey recognizes the NATO Secretary General" [32].

However, as time progressed into the 21st century films emerged that challenged the stereotypes. Both *Gegen die Wand* and *Kebab Connection,* for example, take these stereotypes

---

[32] Mora, Necla. 'Turkey and Turks in the German Media.' *International Journal of Human Sciences.* Vol 6 Issue 2. 2009. Pg. 622

and deconstructed them—*Gegen die Wand* with its breakdown of gender roles as defined by both conventional and "women films" and *Kebab Connections* with its use of comedic effects. Both of these films delved into underlying cultural issues regarding stereotypical interpretations of particular minorities—in this case, Turkish Germans in Germany. The way these two films portrayed the stereotypes and then broke them down is especially significant as with an every shrinking world, the matrix of transnational identities becomes ever more complex. For example, *Gegen die Wand* was shown in the United States—a western country with its own issues regarding cinematic depiction of minority and Muslim stereotypes— back in February 2005. This release illustrates how films have become much more transnational than ever before and underscores the importance of how cultural stereotypes are depicted in these new films. Both *Gegen die Wand* and *Kebab Connections* demonstrate that films do not simply recreate stereotypes, but also challenge and even deconstruct them, leading the way for more films to follow.

Works Cited:

1. Friedman, Lester D. *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema.* University of Illinois Press. Urbana and Chicago, 1991. Pg 404.

2. Burns, Rob(2007) 'The Politics of Cultural Representation: Turkish-German Encounters', German Politics, 16: 3, 358 — 378Pg. 364.

3. Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stereotype. January 18, 2011.

4. Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Between Cinema and Social Work: Diasporic Turkish Women.* 2006. Pg 410.

5. Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an Asma Barlas Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002. Pg 137

6. Shirazi, Faegheh. "Velvet Jihad: Muslim Women's Quiet Resistance to Islamic Fundamentalism'. Published 18.9.2010 on http://feministreview.blogspot.com/2010/08/velvet-jihad-muslim-womens-quiet.html . University of Florida Press. Accessed on March 21, 2011.

7. Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Between Cinema and Social Work: Diasporic Turkish Women.* 2006

8. Esmen, Yasemin Sim. 'Turkey's Stereotyped Image in Foreign Press. 4.10.2007 on Turquie Europeenne at http://turquieeuropeenne.eu/article2176.html. Accessed on January 19,2011.

9. Huda. 'Islamic Clothing Guide'. Copyright New York Times Company 2011. http://islam.about.com/od/dress/tp/clothing-glossary.htm . Accessed on January 19,2011.

10. Mirkinson, Jack. 'Juan Williams FIRED: NPR Sacks Analyst over Fox News Muslim Comments'. 20.12.2010 on *Huffington Post* website at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/21/juan-williams-fired-npr_n_770901.html. Accessed on March 10, 2011.

11. Pratt Ewing, Katherine. *Living Islam in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany.* Duke University Press. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2/3 (2003) 405-431. Pg 412.

12. Suner, Asuman. *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory.* New York: Palgrave McMillan 2010. Pg 23.

13. Adams, Sam, 'Interview with Director Fatih Akin.' 20.8.2010 on AV Club website at http://www.avclub.com/articles/director-fatih-akin,44341/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

14. Anno Saul Information. The International Movie Database. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0766649/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

15. Anno, Saul InformationThe International Movie Database. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0766649/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

16. 'Anno Saul: Biography and Filmography'. 15.12.2009 at the Daily Press: Theme for Daily Publishers website at http://movietex.net/anno-saul-biography-and-filmography/. Accessed on January 27, 2011.

17. Neale, Steve. *Screening the male: exploring masculinities in Hollywood Cinema.* Psychology Press. 1993. Pg. 11.

18. Winchell, Mark Royden. *God, Man, and Hollywood: politically incorrect cinema from "The Birth of a Nation" to "The Passion of the Christ."* Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books. 2008.

19. Cowie, Elizabeth. *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis.* Basingstoke : Macmillan. 1997.

20. 14.02.2004. 'Interview with Fatih Akin.' *Die Deutsche Welle (online article).* Retrieved April 25,2011 from http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,1114779,00.html

21. Christenensen Miyase. *The Many Faces of Film and Media in Europe.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Newcastle UK. 2008. Pg 2.

22. Stephen Neale, Frank Krutnik. *Popular Film and Television Comedy.* Routledge 1990. Pg 4.

23. Mora, Necla. 'Turkey and Turks in the German Media.' *International Journal of Human Sciences.* Vol 6 Issue 2. 2009. Pg. 622