

“Turkish” is the New German

The Politics of Identity and Representation in the Comedies of Bora Dagtekin

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

Through the broad lenses of film theory, German film and cultural history, and gender and race studies, this thesis offers a close analysis of identity and representation in the films *Türkisch für Anfänger* (2012) and *Fack ju Göhte* (2013). As a key figure in contemporary German mainstream cinema, Turkish German comedy director, producer, and screenwriter Bora Dagtekin has distinguished himself with his signature satirical style, which challenges, among others, hierarchies of art/popular, the macho male/weak female, and German/Turk. Defying expectations of obvious “culture clash” and subsequent integration, the primary conflicts in Dagtekin’s films are more multi-faceted, delving into other areas of identity. Furthermore, these conflicts are enhanced with the exaggerated aesthetics of camp and devices such as protective irony, both of which are valuable tools for minority artists working in a dominant culture. At the heart of his films is superstar Elyas M’Barek. Although the narrative downplays the characters’ Turkish ethnicity, the formal qualities of the films exoticize and objectify M’Barek. Despite the German historical precedence of such a problematic mode of representation for ethnic males, Dagtekin ultimately crafts a relatively positive portrayal of masculinity that breaks away from the weakened male so prevalent among post-World War II ethnically German actors. Dagtekin’s films, with M’Barek in the lead, thus, provide a critical intersection of nation, gender, and the popular.

I. INTRODUCTION

The films *Türkisch für Anfänger* (2012) and *Fack ju Göhte* (2013) are an anomaly. With his first two productions, director, screenwriter, and producer Bora Dagtekin has accomplished what other young filmmakers can only dream of: each was Germany's most commercially successful film of its respective year. Further adding to the unprecedented success of the films is Dagtekin's multiethnic background. While a few Turkish German filmmakers, such as Fatih Akin and Kutlug Ataman, have been able to craft renowned "art films" and international favorites, very few have been able to succeed in mainstream national cinema—Dagtekin has done just that with his smash-hit comedies. Yet, an auteur quality guides his work. On the surface, his main selling point is the depiction of "culture clashes" in an exaggerated, witty and satirical way. In contrast to viewer expectations of a "culture clash," however, his work prioritizes the intersectional representation of other struggles of identity, such as age/authority, gender, and class/education, filtered through exaggerated camp aesthetics. Dagtekin prospers by complicating multiple hierarchies—art/popular film, German/Turkish Other, macho male/weak female, etc.—and repackaging them in an entertaining and (seemingly) digestible way. At the forefront of Dagtekin's films is superstar Elyas M'Barek. The politics of his heightened visibility as an ethnic Other dictate that his representations on film be exoticized. Despite all odds, M'Barek's characters are reflected in a predominantly positive manner, especially in comparison to the image of the weakened postwar German male. To what extent are Dagtekin and M'Barek's cinematic collaborations indicative of new directions for nation, gender, and the popular?

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The historical context for Dagtekin's films can be traced to the post-World War II era. In the wake of the Marshall Plan-induced *Wirtschaftswunder*, Germany sought *Gastarbeiter* to bolster the labor force. In 1961, Germany entered into a guest worker agreement with Turkey (Hake and Mennel 2), and so Turkish German relations as we know them today were born. Despite the *Anwerbestopp* in 1973 that was meant to halt the influx of any further *Gastarbeiter* (3), there were already a number of Turks who defied the short-term *Gast* element of their title, opting instead to stay and raise families in Germany, their *Wahlheimat*. Currently, almost 3 million people of Turkish descent reside in Germany, a country of over 80 million inhabitants, making them the country's largest minority group ("Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund").

Due to societal strain, both real and perceived, Turks in Germany are often scrutinized and pitted against the majority German culture. Conservative political scientist Samuel Huntington gained acclaim in the 1990s for his theory of a "Clash of Civilizations," which seemed all but confirmed with the tragedy of 9/11. According to Huntington, "the central and most dangerous dimension of the emerging global politics would be conflict between groups from differing civilizations" (13). His book even includes a world map of "Post-1990" civilizations that situates Germany in "Western" civilization and Turkey in "Islamic" civilization (26-27). With diagrams like his, it is easy to fall into binaries of East vs. West, imagining the friction that could ensue when "Islamic" peoples, Turks, migrate to the West, Germany. Since the *Anwerbestopp*, the discourse in Germany has shifted from an insistence on temporary *Gastarbeiter* to a push for "integration" (Hake and Mennel 3). However, many Turks in

Germany have been accused of establishing “parallel societies” and of refusing to participate in the process of integration (4).

Throughout its history, Turkish German cinema—I adopt Sabine Hake and Barbara Mennel’s “absent hyphen” to describe its unique position of representing both “self and Other” simultaneously (10)—has mediated the overarching themes of the times. Hake and Mennel report in their edited volume *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium* that the film movement began in the 1970s, first calling attention to the struggles of guest workers and their families (5). This “cinema of duty” included films like *Shirins Hochzeit* (Helma Sanders-Brahm, 1976) and *40 qm Deutschland* (Tevfik Başer, 1986). Such films, maintains Deniz Göktürk, contributed to perpetual “victimization,” particularly of Turkish German women (7). German film financing also played a role in “reinforcing a patronizing and marginalizing attitude” toward Turks in Germany (6). This ensured that filmmakers would only have the financial means to make certain kinds of Turkish German films, limiting the creative output and scope of representation to that which was crafted by the German film industry. In the 1990s, however, there was a shift in Turkish German cinema towards what Göktürk refers to as “the pleasures of hybridity” (1). Since the 2000s, Turkish German cinema has incorporated everything from Akin’s critical investigations of migration and transnationalism to genre cinema and more cosmopolitan films, where Turkish actors can conceivably play the roles of ethnic Germans. 50 years after the arrival of Turkish Gastarbeiter in Germany, the film *Almanya – Willkommen in Deutschland* (Yasemin Şamdereli, 2011) premiered, with its “reworking of history as comedy...asserting the new normalcy of Turkish Germans and, by extension, German

multicultural society” (Hake and Mennel 7). Such a Turkish German cinematic and comedic achievement undoubtedly paved the way for Dagtekin’s first film.

Dagtekin was born in 1978 to a German mother and a Turkish father. He graduated from the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg in 2006 (*German Films Quarterly* 20). That year, he landed a screenwriting credit for the Til Schweiger film *Wo ist Fred?*, as well as the head author role in his first hit TV series, *Türkisch für Anfänger*, which ran from 2006-2008. He is credited with the idea and pilot for *Doctor’s Diary*, another hit series, which ran from 2008 to 2011. In 2012, he pursued his directorial film debut. *German Films Quarterly* reports that each of his three films has been more triumphant than the last. The *Türkisch für Anfänger* film managed to sell almost 2.4 million tickets, making it the most commercially successful domestic film of 2012. *Fack ju Göhte* followed suit in 2013, but this time with over 7 million tickets, making it not only the most successful German film of 2013, but also the fourth most successful German film of all time. His most recent film, *Fack ju Göhte 2*, raked in 2.1 million ticket sales in just four days, making it the largest German film opening in history (“SANK U GÖHTE!” 12). In total, the sequel drew over 7.6 million viewers (Hubert Burda Media), usurping the original film’s place as the fourth most successful in German history. Clearly, Dagtekin’s sensational cinematic track record cannot be ignored.

One of the indisputable factors of Dagtekin’s ascent is his continued collaboration with actor Elyas M’Barek. Born in 1982 to a Tunisian father and an Austrian mother, M’Barek began acting in the early 2000s. His work with Dagtekin began in 2004 with the TV series *Schulmädchen*, of which Dagtekin is credited with writing a number of episodes (“Schulmädchen – Episodenguide”). After the aforementioned *Türkisch für Anfänger* series,

M'Barek also played a side character in *Doctor's Diary*. In 2010, he played a role in *Undercover Love*, a TV film written by Dagtekin. Finally, he has starred in all three of Dagtekin's films, securing his popularity as Germany's biggest "Schwarm" at the moment, with reportedly young women (Radović) and gay men (von Uslar) as his primary fan base.

The film that started it all was *Türkisch für Anfänger (TfA)*, released in March 2012. Conceived as a "reboot" of the *TfA* television series (Constantin Film 18:59), about a modern Turkish German version of a Brady Bunch-style patchwork family, the film retells the entire storyline, bringing the German Schneiders and the Turkish German Öztürks together after a plane crash on the way to Thailand for vacation. The two parents make it to safety, but the two Öztürk children Cem and Yagmur, the German Lena Schneider, and the Greek outsider Costa are all marooned on an island after washing ashore in a lifeboat. As in the TV series, Costa introduces a complication to the binary of German and Turk. Cem and Lena initially butt heads, but eventually fall in love, in typical romcom fashion.

Fack ju Göhte (FjG) followed the next year, in November 2013. M'Barek plays the streetwise ex-convict Zeki Müller, just released from a 13 month stint in prison. Hoping to recover his buried money, he takes a job at the Goethe-Gesamtschule, where he acts as a substitute teacher for the troublesome "Loser-Klasse" (*FjG* 33:52). Despite his harsh exterior and unconventional teaching methods, Zeki and the disobedient students all come to understand each other by the end of the film and Zeki falls in love with his "Spießerin" colleague Elisabeth (1:40:50). *Fack ju Göhte 2 (FjG 2)* was released in September 2015 and features a class trip to Thailand. Because it was just released on DVD in March 2016, I will solely refer to more general facts about the film or what is presented in pre-release trailer clips.

Considering that Dagtekin's films represent the pinnacle of commercial success in Germany currently, it would seem natural to label him a creator of "popular films." As a significant force in German popular culture now, it is critical to subject Dagtekin's filmography to some of the Frankfurt School's canonical thought about mass culture. In the 1936 essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," Walter Benjamin explains that one of the defining aspects of a unique work of art is its "Aura" (6), which owes itself to an "Eingebettetsein in den Zusammenhang der Tradition" (7). In a time of consumerism, however, the idea of "art" is diametrically opposed to the "popular" products of commerce, which are cycled through the "reproducibility" of mass culture. Film is one such medium of mass culture (3) that is quite literally reproduced, with the distribution of film prints to every single movie theater and later, the sale of DVDs for home consumption. However, Benjamin does acknowledge the new accessibility of reproducible work, saying "[d]ie sehr viel größeren Massen der Anteilnehmenden haben eine veränderte Art des Anteils hervorgebracht" (25).

A decade later, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's seminal "Kulturindustrie" chapter in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is a much more cynical account of mass culture. As the title implies, they see culture as an industry, including media like radio, magazines, and of course film (Adorno and Horkheimer 128). What the culture industry effects is sameness, "Ähnlichkeit." Because of the dependence of film and other limbs of the culture industry on banks and financing, they are tied to the forces of capitalism (131). To this end, the culture industry mobilizes "Amusement" as a means to placate the worker, "der dem mechanisierten Arbeitsprozeß ausweichen will, um ihm von neuem gewachsen zu sein" (145).

Both Benjamin's essay and the chapter from Adorno and Horkheimer treat the status of the film star quite skeptically. Much like a work of art loses its "Aura" in mass culture, the film actor, whose image is replicated for mass consumption, reflects the "fauligen Zauber ihres Warencharakters" (Benjamin 16). Further emphasizing a lack of substance, Adorno and Horkheimer identify the film star as "seine eigene Kopie," (148). Moreover, the most prosperous film stars are hand-picked to continue facilitating mass-produced sameness with their "Gebrauchsschönheit" (165). But does M'Barek, who is so strongly recognized as an ethnic Other, represent a shift toward a new model of *Schönheit*?

III. DAGTEKIN AS AUTEUR: INTERTEXTUALITY AND HIGH CULTURE

Although art and the popular are often imagined at odds with one another, Dagtekin complicates this binary. What distinguishes his three films from his prior television work is his level of involvement. Prior to 2012, he was only credited with screenwriting, mostly for television productions. However, in addition to writing all three of his films, he also took on the role of co-producer and most importantly, director, ensuring that the films are all stamped with his creative signature—anyone who watches his films can instantly recognize his work. Key stylistic conventions of Dagtekin's oeuvre, I contend, include vibrant décor, exaggerated performances, biting humor, the playful handling of clichés, the continued destabilization of identity, the use of current pop music, intertextual references, and repeat appearances by certain actresses and actors. Such a “distinguishable personality” of a director's filmography is one of the criteria identified in Andrew Sarris's “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” (562). Due to what I view as the auteur status Dagtekin has assumed in his films, my analysis will concentrate primarily on them, rather than his television work.

Dagtekin uses the intertextuality in his films to write himself into an auteur tradition through a series of subtle citations. The rapid fire citations in his *TfA* television series verge on postmodern “pastiche” à la Seth MacFarlane's *Family Guy* series, in which the references are an amalgam of “blank parody” (Jameson 16-17), less about the content and more about the ability to forge allusions, no matter how tenuous. The intertextual connections in his films, however, are much more calculated, pointing to a “deliberate attempt at establishing a network of authorial association” that can also “enhance the status of the belated film-maker by such association with

former masters” (Lim 230). In one scene in *TfA*, Lena, who has stepped on a sea urchin, is to receive an antidote injection through a sizable needle. Wide-eyed with horror, she comments in voiceover, “Die Spritze hat aber auch schon Christiane F. benutzt” (*TfA* 1:05:00). This references the cult film, *Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (Uli Edel, 1981). Based on a non-fiction book, this film is a grisly account of the teenage drug epidemic in West Berlin with its protagonist only thirteen when she becomes addicted to heroin. While the *TfA* film can seem ludicrous at times, particularly in this scene where Lena’s face is comically swollen, this reference to something so bleak brings a heaviness to more cinema-savvy viewers and hints that Dagtekin knows more than his popular films let on. In *FjG*, there is another reference that invites a connection between Dagtekin and the “auteur film,” like those of the New German Cinema movement, of which *Christiane F.* came at the end. One of the two leaders of the trouble class in *FjG* is named Chantal Ackermann. As the German “Assi” equivalent of the valley girl stereotype, Chantal is the embodiment of a high school airhead, inventing words like “Geisteskranker” (*FjG* 58:46), not knowing what static electricity is, and resorting to “voll süüüß” as her descriptor of choice. If, however, we recall that Chantal Akerman is a Belgian auteur, the likes of whose films are released by the curators of auteur cinema *par excellence*, Criterion Collection, then, it becomes apparent that Dagtekin is making a statement with his character. By using the name of a well-respected art filmmaker to depict a character that is as “bildungsfern” as they come (*FiG* 31:29), Dagtekin seeks both to raise his own status and to destabilize the supposedly strict boundary between art and popular film.

Using his auteurism, “one of art cinema’s most basic building blocks” (Andrews 37), Dagtekin upsets the hierarchy of art and popular film through an “aperture” approach to

filmmaking. Peter Wollen explains that aperture was a common trait of European “Counter-Cinema” that opened up the seams of the film world (Wollen 78). His definition of aperture consists of the following keywords “open-endedness, overspill, intertextuality—allusion, quotation and parody.” Dagtekin continues to use the character Chantal to lampoon highbrow culture with “Chantals Klassiker,” a series of shorts uploaded to the Constantin Film YouTube channel. There, she reviews, in her distinctly-Chantal register, German literary classics like Goethe’s *Faust* (1808), Dürrenmatt’s *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (1956), and even *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (1978); she describes Christiane F. as “asozial 2.0.” These, of course, strengthen the connection of Dagtekin’s work, not only to auteur cinema, but also to the annals of German literature. Furthermore, these videos invite a far-reaching intertextual approach to reading Dagtekin’s films, indicating that the experience of *FjG*, in particular, is not only contained within the 113 minute film, but extends beyond it. Outside of the film, in the paratext, one finds continuations of and supplements to the world within the film. In addition to YouTube, *FjG* has an active Facebook where the unique phoneticized language from the film’s title endures, with uploads including trailer videos captioned with “Wotsch it nau!” (Watch it now) or photos with the hashtag “Throhbäcksörsdei” (Throwback Thursday). The film has even come up with more creative forms of advertising, such as the “Kotz leise!” motion sickness bags available on Berlin Air, alluding to one of the film’s most quoted lines, when Zeki tells Chantal to “Heul leise!” so as not to disturb her classmates. Another instance of aperture occurs by having the title phrase, *Fack ju Göhte*, surface *within* the diegesis—exceptionally, the title first appearing over an hour into the film—as graffiti artwork (*FjG* 1:11:45). Aperture is also demonstrated during the ending credits of *TfA*, in which skit-like vignettes featuring each of the film’s six main

characters play out in the airplane lavatory. Considering that the final vignette suggests a bomb detonation in the airplane, it is unclear if these scenes truly take place within the film's diegesis or not.

Perhaps the most essential citation is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in *FjG*. To begin with, the *Gesamtschule* where the film takes place is named after Goethe. Similar to the way the character Chantal subverts the prestige of auteur Chantal Akerman, the school, which is filled with "asoziale" remedial students (*FjG* 31:24), seems to function as the antithesis of the learned literary icon Goethe. Furthermore, *FjG*'s title appears to be the ultimate condemnation of German high culture, disrespecting the cultural hero by misspelling his name as "Göhte" and using the expletive F-word to denounce him.

Beyond literary citations, it becomes evident that Dagtekin steeps his films in the context of German national film. Through the use of cameos, he fashions a link to a Benjaminian sense of artistic tradition, one that is grounded in a specific time and place. Besides the cameo of actress Uschi Glas as a disgruntled older teacher pestered by the very kind of rascal students she used to play in the original 1960s "Schulkomödie," *Die Lümmel von der ersten Bank* (Armknacht), an unmistakable connection to director Rainer Werner Fassbinder is forged by the casting of Günther Kaufmann in *TfA*. While Fassbinder was known for his political films, he also yearned for popular approval (Elsaesser 46). Dagtekin, on the other hand, displays almost the opposite—he makes popular films that touch on political topics. Fassbinder was known to reuse a circle of actresses and actors, an auteur method that Dagtekin even emulates with Katja Riemann and of course with M'Barek, working with him in five different film and television franchises so far. Kaufmann was one such actor for Fassbinder, appearing in a number of his

films, including a starring role in *Whity* (1970), a stylized Western playing with themes of race and “exoticism” (Elsaesser 273). As an Afro-German, the “Besatzungskind” of an American GI and a German woman, Kaufmann stood out from many of Fassbinder’s other regulars (“Günther Kaufmann”). The Fassbinder Foundation website reiterates Kaufmann’s “exotische” appearance and the fact that Fassbinder himself was drawn to the actor’s “Verführungskünste” both on and off screen. In *TfA*, Kaufmann’s final film before suffering a fatal heart attack, he plays the indigenous tribesman Tongo of the fictional island Bori Bori. Despite being well into his sixties, he appears almost in the nude, with nothing but a small loincloth and some streaks of body paint to “cover” him (see Figure 1, Appendix). What is also interesting about the casting of Kaufmann is his partnering with actress Katja Riemann, the ethnographer Uschi, who came to the island for research, fell in love with Tongo, and decided to make a new home on the island. While Riemann’s character represents a potential colonial influence, it is Uschi who actually assimilates into Tongo’s culture, dressing, eating, and living the way he and his tribe do; in this sense, she also performs a learned identity, thus, abiding by Katrin Sieg’s sense of ethnic drag, “the performance of ‘race’ as a masquerade” (2). Uschi did, however, teach Tongo and their son to speak German, demonstrating a dynamic like that of the *Winnetou* films, in which German is spoken incongruously in Native American communities.

In *TfA*, Riemann, who previously formed the 90s filmic power couple with white romcom star Til Schweiger, is now depicted in an interracial relationship with one of Germany’s oldest black film icons. She emerged during the wave of popular German comedy of the 90s, with *Der bewegte Mann* (Sönke Wortmann, 1996), Germany’s tenth most successful film in the past half century (“Die erfolgreichsten deutschen Filme seit 1966”), boosting her to stardom

(Brockmann 419). Besides mainstream success, another commonality between *TfA*, *FjG*, and *Der bewegte Mann* is the mediation of “othered” populations, the ethnic Other in Dagtekin’s films and the (homo)sexual Other in Wortmann’s film. Playing across Schweiger, “Germany’s answer to Brad Pitt” (Brockmann 419), Riemann became the overnight first lady of 90s German popular cinema. To see her now as part of Dagtekin’s cast of regulars, playing across Kaufmann in *TfA*, not only draws a continuity from the New German Cinema period to the 90s and into the present, but it also reflects a filmic shift to a more multiethnic Germany. Yet, the collective presence of Kaufmann and Riemann only serve to support the real star of the show: Elyas M’Barek.

With his black hair and brown skin, M’Barek has often played a non-specific Other or the token “Turk” in his works, despite his Tunisian and Austrian roots. His character Cem is clearly of Turkish descent, while Zeki’s ethnicity is only briefly addressed in a passing sarcastic remark that he’s from the “Nahen Osten.” Beyond these characters, however, there’s Ali (*Schulmädchen*, 2004), Sinan (*Die Welle*, 2008), Young Bushido (*Zeiten ändern dich*, 2010), Okke (*What a Man*, 2011), Yussuf (*Sprich mit! Deutsch lernen ist cool!*, 2011), Salim (*Offroad*, 2012), Can (*Heiter bis wolkig*, 2012), Karim (*Der Medicus*, 2013), and the list goes on. The name Ali recalls one of German cinema’s most poignant portrayals of immigrants, namely the pivotal character in Fassbinder’s *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974), which deals with the issue of interracial and intergenerational relationships during the era of the *Gastarbeiter*. M’Barek’s role in *Zeiten ändern dich*, a biopic about Bushido, a popular rapper also with Tunisian heritage, further suggests that even from the time of M’Barek’s earliest roles, his characters already had the potential to cite canonical film and real-life icons in an intertextual manner. Everything that was

released since then has simply added weight to the constellation of his star text. For instance, his role in *Sprich mit!*, a motivational short film encouraging German language acquisition among immigrant children, is tied directly to “Toleranz und Integration,” for which it received the Merkel-approved *Hauptstadtpreis* in 2011 (“Preisverleihung”). Considering his filmography as a whole, it is not unreasonable for viewers to approach Dagtekin’s films with certain predispositions, if only based on M’Barek’s previous starring roles. Dagtekin ensures this kind of reading when he incorporates a scene of “wholetrain,” spray painting trains with graffiti, in *FjG*. The phrase alludes to an earlier film of M’Barek’s, namely *Wholetrain* (Florian Gaag, 2006), which directly encourages viewers to see him within the context of his entire filmography. As an auteur, Dagtekin puts his films in communication with his actors’ and actresses’ previous works, prompting us to see shifts in their representations.

IV. DIFFUSING DAGTEKIN: MANEUVERING A “CULTURE CLASH”

The film posters and titles of *TfA* and *FjG* reveal a lot about the potentially misleading way they were marketed. The poster for *FjG* shows an exaggerated dispute between Zeki and lead actress Karoline Herfurth’s character, Elisabeth the “Spießerin” (see Figure 2). Their posturing seems to exhibit a fight over who will have more room in the image—so far, Zeki is winning. Both have their hands on the other’s face, and Herfurth manages to bite down on one of M’Barek’s fingers. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” or the more direct term “culture clash” capitalizes on differences between two perceived opposing groups, such as ethnicity, language, religion, and more. While the image does not necessarily have to convey a “culture clash,” M’Barek’s star text carries a lot of implicit baggage that strongly suggest that a “German versus Turk” (or in Huntington’s terms, “Western versus Islamic”) scenario is indeed at play. One of the superficial buzzwords used to describe the Dagtekin’s films was “Integrationskomödie,” as mentioned in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*’s Feuilleton video review for *TfA*. The term *Integration* highlights culture as the primary difference between two groups and implies that this difference is an obstacle to be overcome, as the Other is integrated into the dominant culture. The title of *FjG* has the aforementioned quality of derision of German high culture and this seems exacerbated by the credits hovering above Elisabeth’s head “Von den Machern von Türkisch für Anfänger,” which ostensibly stresses ethnic differences. By considering that film’s title, viewers would anticipate that *TfA* could serve as a sort of filmic handbook for the German *Anfänger* on multiculturalism. In his article of the *TfA* television series, Brent Peterson asks rhetorically, “After all, who are the beginners in the title if not the Germans[?]” (Hake and Mennel 96).

Combined with M'Barek's general film legacy as the perpetual "Turk/Other," this would lead most undiscerning viewers down a misleading path, priming them for a Turkish German "culture clash comedy" (Cooke 139). Paul Cooke utilizes this term to describe contemporary films like *Kebab Connection* (Anno Saul, 2004), which thematize conflicts arising from Turkish German interethnic relationships. Almost all "clashes" imaginable take place in Dagtekin's films, but interestingly enough, he actively defies directly representing the ominous "culture clash."

Implementing a number of narrative and formal techniques, Dagtekin demonstrates that "culture clash" is never quite to blame for his characters' *many* conflicts, but is, at most, one of numerous complex dynamics that play out in a globalizing world—in other words, the fear of "culture clash" or "clash of civilizations" is a myth. Both films downplay the role of ethnicity. Dagtekin also eschews depictions of direct Turkish German "culture clash" in favor of other less inflammatory struggles. His films are infused with intergenerational conflicts of age and authority. The conflict of gender, or the "battle of the sexes," is apparent too, particularly within *TfA*. Finally, the films also exhibit disputes of class and education, or rather, "street smarts versus book smarts," a tension especially notable in *FjG*.

In *TfA*, key opportunities to enhance the anticipated "culture clash" are sidestepped. This is hinted at as early as the title screen. With opening credits that use a photo album motif, the title appears in bright block lettering. Adorning the left hand side of the title is the easily overlooked star and crescent moon from the Turkish national flag, designed here as a faded water stain (see Figure 3). Compared to the *TfA* TV series logo, which features a prominent red crescent moon, the film downplays the Turkish symbolism. Furthermore, the film takes place neither in Germany nor Turkey, but rather in an island paradise setting in Thailand. The

Frankfurter Allgemeine video review maintains that the film is, thus, situated “auf neutralem Boden.” The potent power dynamics of having the characters in either Germany or Turkey is nullified. The uprooting of the plot to a setting so incredibly far from Germany invites viewers to witness Dagtekin putting vast distance between his film and what may or may not be happening within Germany. Next, the film features no spoken Turkish from the Turkish German characters, outside of the word *Baba* (papa). In any case, there are no scenes of subtitled Turkish dialogue, a recurring motif in the television series. For instance, in the first episode of the series, Cem remarks to his father in Turkish that there is no point for the German mother to move in if she is not going to prepare food for them (“Die, in der ich meine Freiheit verliere” 13:40). Cem’s father salvages the awkward exchange by assuring his German partner that Cem merely complimented her outfit. This scenario of manipulated translations is nowhere to be found in the *TfA* film. Finally, completely unlike the original series, the film features a subplot in which the Öztürk family lives under witness protection. The father Metin works as a police detective and, in order to protect his children from the perils of an insidious crime clan, he changes everyone’s names prior to the events of the film. Toward the end of the film, Metin fears for his children’s safety again and secures them new passports. The Turkish German known as Cem Öztürk becomes Magnus Amundsen, the Norwegian, who dons a sleek suit and horn-rimmed glasses. Meanwhile, his sister Yagmur becomes Marianne, shedding her conservative attire and headscarf, in exchange for a frilly pink dress, nail polish, and free flowing hair. In his analysis of *TfA*, Martin Nies explains the following: “[i]n diesem Kontext zeigt sich, versteht man Kleidung auch als Zeichen der filmischen Person, dass sowohl Cems Street Fashion als auch Yagmurs Kopftuch nicht als identitäre, sondern lediglich austauschbare äußerliche Merkmale eines *Kanak Style*

gesetzt sind” (13). Through this witness protection subplot, ethnicity is rendered utterly performative in nature, deflating any arguments about a Turkish German “culture clash,” because the Öztürks could, hypothetically speaking, just as easily *become* Germans, as they became Norwegians. After all, it only requires the appropriation of a few external markers. This scene highlights the artifice of constructs like ethnicity and race, exposing what Sieg has pinpointed in *Ethnic Drag* as the “impossibility of knowing ‘race’ by sight” (18). It also raises the question of where the characters’ performativity stops. Might the characters’ personalities—Cem’s macho attitude or Yagmur’s chaste demeanor—be merely extensions of their coded attire, accessorized or exchanged as easily as a piece of clothing? Nies alludes to this performative identity by reminding viewers that despite Cem’s image as the product of a harsh life on the streets, he actually lives in an upper-class “Villa in Berlin-Zehlendorf” in the film, implying that his apparel and attitude are “ein identitäres Hilfskonstrukt...als Folge der kulturellen Mehrfachzugehörigkeit” (19).

Despite the knowledge of Cem’s Turkish ethnicity in *TfA* and the anticipation of an overt “culture clash” viewers might have had upon viewing the *FjG* film poster, Dagtekin’s second film features only a few subtle references to ethnicity. The first occurs soon after Zeki walks into class 10b. He introduces himself as “Müller” and Burak, a Turkish German student with the kind of “street style” clothing that Cem would wear, retorts “Wieso heißen Sie eigentlich Müller, ja? Sie sehen gar nicht aus wie ein Müller! Sie sind ein Bruder, Mann!” (*FjG* 29:18). Zeki quickly responds with an annoyed tone, telling Burak “Kanack mich nicht an hier.” Multiple levels of discourse are in effect with this brief exchange. First of all, Burak seems to doubt Zeki’s “Germanness,” which, to Burak, seems incongruous with his appearance; at this point, Burak

does not know “Müller’s” first name, which would be a more apparent indicator of his non-German ethnicity, much like M’Barek’s previous character names: Cem, Sinan and so on. Perhaps Burak speaks from personal experience, in which he is never accepted by his peers as just “German.” As such, Burak seems to identify almost instantly with Zeki, who swiftly rejects his offer of brotherhood. Without more dialogue, it is ambiguous whether Zeki replies this way as a rejection of his own ethnic background or simply as a rejection of being “brought down” to the same level as a student—his subordinate. Though Nies interprets the scene as the former (20), knowing the way that Zeki interacts with students—his underlings—throughout the film, the latter seems more plausible. The second reference to his ethnicity occurs when a social worker comes to Elisabeth’s house, where Zeki has been staying, to assess her capacity as a guardian over her orphaned younger sister. Zeki, who poses as the father figure, establishes an immediate rapport with the chatty Isolde, who comments on his “schöner Name” and asks the all too blunt question, “Kommen Sie aus dem Nahen Osten?” (*FjG* 1:17:43). Zeki answers jovially, “Ja, aber keine Angst, ich schieße nicht!” As soon as Isolde turns her head and bursts into a hearty guffaw, Zeki lets out a sarcastic eye roll, as if he has said this canned phrase time and again to placate ignorant Germans. Though Zeki is otherwise portrayed as very crass and always ready with a comeback, he demonstrates the intuition in this scenario not to make waves. Turkish German SPIEGEL journalist Özlem Gezer similarly reports that “Deutschen zu gefallen ist wichtig. Das bringen Gastarbeiter ihren Kindern früh bei,” showing that minority children often learn to just grin and bear microgressions. Whatever the case may be, Dagtekin intentionally leaves the ethnicity of his main character fairly elusive. This could reflect a move towards writing more “ethnically unmarked” characters, to use Berna Gueneli’s term, a recent

development of Turkish German cinema that does not value the need to “explain” characters’ ethnic backgrounds (Hake and Mennel 140). Though M’Barek has depicted numerous Turks and ethnic Others in his previous acting roles, his recent filmography is indeed beginning to suggest a shift toward “ethnically unmarked” characters, such as Max (*Who Am I – Kein System ist sicher*, 2014) and Joseph (*Traumfrauen*, 2015). Even Dagtekin’s screenwriting creations for M’Barek after the *TfA* series include the Austrian character Maurice Knechtelsdorfer (*Doctor’s Diary*), after the maiden name of M’Barek’s own mother (“Elyas M'Barek (Interview)”), or even the highly Anglicized Sam McPhearson (*Undercover Love*).

Although ethnicity is downplayed, one of the first conflicts to emerge in the films is one of age and authority. In *TfA*, one interfamilial conflict *does* occur early on in the film over the topic of authority. On their way to the airport, both families happen to drive past one another, or rather, the Schneider car speeds around Metin, the “Lahmarsch” (*TfA* 09:09). After both cars come to a halt at an intersection, Metin, the police detective and chronic rule follower, makes a smug comment to Doris after the chaotic driving he has witnessed on the part of the Schneider women: “’n kleiner Tipp, 30er-Zone” (9:45). Doris feigns a smile, saying “Danke für die Info,” but her cheerful expression quickly fades. She brands him a “Spießer!” while rolling up her window. As noted by Nies, this is typically an insult reserved for Germans (16). Of course, Doris, with her anti-authoritarian viewpoints will not stand for Metin’s comment, regardless of his perceived ethnicity. Due to Metin’s respected position of authority—he considers her act “Beamtenbeleidigung” (*TfA* 9:52)—and since even ethnic Germans ascribe traditionally “German” traits to him, it is not surprising that even Metin’s actor Adnan Maral sees his character as “deutscher als manche andere Deutsche” (Constantin Film 12:58), a theme that also

emerges in the *TfA* series, when daughter Yagmur tells her father in retaliation, “Von einem Deutschen lass ich mir gar nichts befehlen” (“Die, in der ich keine Freunde finde”). Due to this dynamic, Dagtekin, from an early point in the film, already begins to disrupt expectations about what a Turkish or German character would do, complicating the notion of a simple “culture clash.”

In *FjG*, the struggle of age and authority abounds in the school setting. First of all, “sociolinguistic difference” (Androutsopoulos 308), which is demarcated along ethnic lines in films like *Kanak Attack* (Lars Becker, 2000), has more to do with age/authority in *FjG*. Despite prejudice of Turks having difficulty with the German language, Principal Gerster assumes that German is one of the two subjects Zeki will teach, when he comes in to inquire about a position—in fact, it is Zeki who more stereotypically assigns *Sport* as his second subject, relying on his physical capabilities. To presume that Zeki is the most incapable of speaking standard language would be based on a racist assumption—in fact, it is the white student Chantal, with her made-up words and her omission of articles, who is most clearly targeted for her sociolinguistic difference. When Zeki first enters the school, he pulls an alarm to clear out his competitors and two pesky squabbling students. Principal Gerster arrives in a fluster and the opportunistic Zeki blames the nearby student, Burak, for the commotion. Gerster has no problem believing Zeki, of course, knowing nothing of his criminal background, and she reprimands Burak. Dagtekin complicates the oversimplified conflict of a white administrator unfairly accusing a student of color, by having Gerster immediately believe Zeki, also a man of color. On the hierarchy that the principal of a troubled school like the Goethe-Gesamtschule would be used to, however, Burak will *always* be wrong if an adult accuses him of something. When Gerster apologizes to Zeki for

the poor first impression of her school, he dismisses the situation, describing students as “doch nur Kinder” (7:26). Due to this hardline approach, students like Burak and the others can only rebel—and they *do*. Led by the head-troublemakers Chantal and Danger, class 10b takes their first days with Elisabeth and Zeki as occasions to torture them. Elisabeth gets soaked by a faulty water faucet and wipes black soot on her face in an attempt to dry off. Zeki is tarred, glued to his chair, and later feathered. Assuming that the students would behave this way, it is no wonder that Zeki instantly writes off Burak—“Kanack mich nicht an hier!”—when he encounters him in class.

However, the aforementioned conflicts over age and authority spill over into gender. It is conceivable that Metin’s comment in *TfA* had an element of “mansplaining” (Rothman), drawing on the sexist stereotype of women being worse drivers than men. In *FjG*, Burak’s and Zeki’s struggle exhibits a display of alpha males trying to assert dominance over one another; Zeki only wins, because he has age—and thus, in a school setting, authority—on his side. The volatile “battle of the sexes” between Lena and Cem brews shortly after their first fleeting encounter at the intersection. On the plane, Cem recognizes Lena as the “Schlampe, die [ihm] den Mittelfinger gezeigt hat” (*TfA* 11:40). Not tolerating his misogynistic language, Lena promptly tells him with classic Dagtekin wit, “Nenn mich noch einmal ‘Schlampe,’ und du kriegst von mir persönlich einen Abschiebestempel und zwar zwischen deine Beine” (11:51). While she is justified in defending herself from misogynist language, her inclusion of racist “go back to where you came from” discourse in her response indicates a lack of understanding of intersectional feminism. What Lena exhibits here is a case of what might be called today “white feminism” (de la Cretaz). Cem is in fact a “Migrant mit deutschem Pass,” as he is described in a diegetic news

report within *TfA*, meaning that Lena's assumption about his origins is based on ignorance (14:39). Following the plane crash, Cem secures some food for the group and condescendingly tells Lena to think of a recipe for their dinner, because *she* is the woman. Throughout the film, Lena disagrees with the way Cem does things, whether it is his "fishing" with dynamite or the fact that he stabs and kills a shark, perhaps unnecessarily. At some point, however, she admits that the mere fact of him, a male, making the decisions—thus, the fulfillment of traditional gender roles—is a "rotes Tuch" for her (1:02:37). Meanwhile, Cem struggles to shed his macho exterior, which serves as a protective shell against genuine emotions. After Cem engages in a fistfight with Costa for peeking at his sister while swimming, Lena nurses his wounds. When Cem flatters Lena with a positive comment about her appearance, she coyly asks "War das ein Kompliment?" (41:00). Cem then reverts back to his chauvinist self and makes a crude remark about her breast size. She scolds him saying, "[Du hast] gemerkt, dass du aufmachst und jetzt hast du Angst vor dir selbst." Lena's comment exposes the fragility of Cem's hypermasculinity and shows that she is not afraid to poke holes in it. To summarize Cem and Lena's quarrels, the back cover of the *TfA* DVD states "Deutsche Emanzipation trifft auf türkischen Machismo." While this quote and the film's title reference ethnicity as a possible source of "culture clash," it would be more accurate to acknowledge how gender dynamics are at play, or at least, how ethnicity *and* gender intersect.

Although the displays of gender conflicts within *FjG* are less frequent than those in *TfA*, they nonetheless continue the complication of potential representations of "culture clash." In an effort to diversify the students' learning styles, Elisabeth and Zeki ask the students to perform an improvised scene, as if for a play. Zeynep and Danger, two of the problem students, depict a

newly married couple, resorting to stereotypical gender roles almost instantly. She married him for his money and he wants her to have dinner ready when he comes home. When Zeynep steps out of her role to complain to Herr Müller, Danger maintains his sexist, possessive character, asking why she is consulting “einen Deutschen” (*FjG* 49:05). Interestingly enough, this hypothetical scenario, although largely about gender roles, does touch on an ethno-cultural “clash” as well. Danger’s improvised character, presumably a Turk, does not want to see his wife associating with a German. This scene, however, also hints at a very important aspect of Zeki’s name. Obviously, Danger’s character has interpreted “Herr Müller” as a German, though this same Herr Müller was denied identification with Germanness by Burak earlier in the film. The name alone reads as “German,” while Herr Müller the man is not afforded this privilege. His name indicates that he was adopted—this is suggested in a voiceover referencing foster families (*FjG* 52:49)—or even *multiethnic*, like the Austrian-Tunisian M’Barek himself. Unfortunately, no further time is dedicated to this dynamic. As evidenced in this scene, gender conflicts continue to play a role in the film’s dialogue, but it is most interesting that they harbor, so to speak, an instance of perceived “culture clash.”

After authority and gender, the final prominent complication of “culture clash” emerges via conflicts of education and class. Due to the nature of Dagtekin’s comedy archetypes, M’Barek’s characters in both films fall under the category of “street smart.” Leading women Lena and Elisabeth serve as M’Barek’s opposites, thus, fulfilling the role of “book smart” in their respective films. Lena posits that she may be the only one on the island “mit Abitur [und] in der Lage...abstrakt zu denken” (*TfA* 18:16). Interestingly, Lena, no stranger to racist remarks, uses her perceived superior education and *not* her role as the only ethnic German as a

justification for why she would be the best “Führer” of the group (*TfA* 18:28). She quickly corrects this self-proclaimed label to “Führerin,” when she realizes the Nazi connotations her initial word choice has, especially among those with “Migrationshintergrund.” Even when Lena is hanging upside down from a trap she set off in the woods, she still remarks on Cem’s lack of intelligence, “Du Idiot,” because he refers to the speech of an approaching indigenous man as Latin (42:30). Later on in the film when Cem and Lena are beginning to develop feelings for one another, Lena finds out that Cem was attempting to read her copy of *Anna Karenina*, underlining unknown words like “Quaste” (1:16:28). He tried to improve his literal “book smarts,” in order to impress Lena, knowing that she prizes this kind of knowledge. In *FjG*, Elisabeth uses one of her first meetings with Zeki to revise his non-standard grammar after he says “wegen dem Lehrerplan” (10:43). In a later scene, Zeki proves his street smarts, informing Elisabeth of her erroneous usage of the phrase “Don’t suck with me” (27:49). In a humorous moment, she takes out a notebook filled with slang terms and jots down Zeki’s correction. When Elisabeth fails to connect with her students, Zeki takes her under his wing and plans a nighttime excursion to “wholetrain” with her and class 10b (1:10:39). Through this illicit act, Elisabeth indeed gains some “street cred” and afterwards, she has a noticeably better rapport with the students. While there is mutual learning in both films, it is apparent that street smarts are privileged and the female protagonists end up gaining more from M’Barek’s characters than the other way around. The concept of “street smarts” is, to a certain degree, tied to Cem’s and Zeki’s respective cultures, calling into question the favoring of traditional education, as exhibited by Lena and Elisabeth. Yet, the anticipated condemnation of education as such in *FjG*’s title is not fulfilled. By the end of the film, Zeki does tame class 10b, getting them to read Friedrich Schiller’s classic

Die Räuber. He achieves the conventional in highly unconventional ways, an approach mirrored in Dagtekin's style of representation—rocking the boat, while still staying afloat.

Clearly, most of the moments of apparent “culture clash” in Dagtekin's films are mediated through other struggles. In a post-Holocaust and post-9/11 world and in a Germany, where xenophobic politicians like Thilo Sarrazin have caused uproar with his generalizing views of immigrants and statistically “proven” prejudices, the myth of “culture clash” simply carries more weight and urgency when compared to other relevant conflicts of identity like age/authority, gender, and class/education. Though these other forms of conflict appear to act as a buffer, cushioning the blow of any messages delivered to viewers about “culture clash” or about the perceived failures of multiculturalism, there is more agency in Dagtekin's chosen mode of representation. By the end of both films, the characters make concessions, proving that they are able to overcome their initial differences. What Dagtekin actually shows, however, is that rarely is there a single, *pure* conflict. Rather, and frankly, more realistically, he uses his characters to stage conflicts and humorous situations that are multifaceted and intersectional in nature. “Culture clash” only exists insofar as culture and ethnicity are part of a *number* of simultaneous and overlapping sources of conflict.

V. CAMP AND IRONY: THE AESTHETIC MODES OF THE OUTSIDER

Combined with an intentional narrative diffusion of “culture clash,” Dagtekin’s films function in a highly “campy” mode of representation. In her “Notes on ‘Camp’” from 1964, Susan Sontag tries to distill the concept of camp down to its essence, namely “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (275). With this definition, it is already evident why Dagtekin’s work could be described as such. One need only view the films’ DVD covers to see where the exaggeration begins; the antics within the films only further this. Note #2 of Sontag’s essay champions style over content (277). Like other auteurs, Dagtekin’s films have an instantly recognizable look; the cinematography in his work is distinguished by bright, saturated colors, especially sky blues and pinks (see Figures 4 and 5). In Dagtekin’s work, his use of pop music, an exaggerated mode of performance, and bubblegum cinematography all point to an emphasis on style. Additionally, these neon colors match the 90s atmosphere that Dagtekin admits to citing (Constantin Film 13:41), forging a connection to the importance of time and nostalgia in perceiving camp, noted in Sontag’s note #30 (285). Thus, Dagtekin’s 90s sensibility and color palette serve to enhance his films’ camp factor. Moreover, his mise-en-scène is teeming with an attention to detail that further clues the viewer into the diegetic worlds. In *TfA*, Cem has a dartboard in his room with Thilo Sarrazin’s face as the bullseye. Costa reads *Playboy* magazine on the plane while sitting next to the devout Yagmur. The youth-obsessed Doris has a bathing suit adorned with Justin Bieber’s portrait. In *FjG*, the classroom chalkboard is often scribbled with “colorful” drawings or captions, on par with the maturity level of class 10b—one surprising and politically conscious instance of graffiti is the “good night, white pride” scrawling on the

classroom wall. With regard to fashion, Burak dons a Chicago Bulls tee while Chantal sports hip brands like Pimkie or her custom “Chantal No. 5” shirt. Editing in the films remains tight with lightning-quick pacing, only seldom pausing for a longer take and with a noticeable dramatic effect, such as the long take of Zeki’s crying in *FjG*. Overall, these attributes point to a filmmaker very clearly focused on style, something paramount for camp.

The films’ stylistic choices, combined with Dagtekin’s obfuscation of “culture clash,” point to a “depoliticizing” or, at least, neutralizing of his content, as noted in Sontag’s note #2 (277). Nies also perceives this, despite not treating the film’s camp aesthetic, saying that Dagtekin’s “immerzu überspitzte, verzerrte und medienselbstreflexive Inszenierung” actually has the potential to call the entire validity of his works into question (15). After all, camp does have the strength to turn the “serious into the frivolous” (Sontag 276). Having said that, note #6 reminds us that an adherence to the camp sensibility does not necessarily disqualify a work from being taken seriously, especially in the academic sense. In other words, art that is considered camp *can* have a political element, in spite of the more apparent emphasis on style and aesthetics. For instance, respected directors like Fassbinder are noted for films that are both political and camp.

If style—“the frivolous”—and political message—“the serious”—*can* be reconciled under camp aesthetics, why does Dagtekin insist on obscuring a more direct political message? Jack Babuscio’s 1977 article “The Cinema of Camp (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility)” offers a productive interpretation of the use of camp in film. Crucial to camp is the “gay sensibility,” defined as “a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the

mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression” (118). With his fluid 1977 definition of “gay” not necessarily referring to sexuality, perhaps reimagined as “queer” today, a camp reading in the vein of Babuscio can apply for the work of Dagtekin, as an ethnic Other in Germany. Because Dagtekin operates in the sphere of the popular, he wants his films to maintain a certain level of easygoing accessibility. The mode of camp is the way to achieve this. With too heavy of a political message, perhaps he feared that the films’ comedy would suffer; after all, one of Babuscio’s four criteria for camp is humor. Bearing in mind that Germany’s top-performing films are predominantly comedies (Fisher 245) and the fact that Dagtekin’s two *FjG* films made the nation’s top five, it is obvious that he has capitalized on the humorous camp mode to concoct a winning comic formula.

Also central to Babuscio’s understanding of camp is irony, which builds “incongruous contrasts” (119). Incongruity is witnessed in the films’ unlikely romances, the conflicts—especially that of class/education—and even formally with the way Dagtekin highlights the tensions between art/popular film. Johannes von Moltke contends that “there is a strong sense in which camp always involves the signs of America” (101), and Dagtekin admits to an American influence in his comedy (Mühling and Lippitz). I claim, however, that his references to national film, literature, history, and culture lend his work a distinctly German flair. He also works in a culture where his uniquely obscene scripts, which would earn an exclusionary R rating within minutes in the United States, can still achieve an FSK 12 rating, incongruously maintaining some semblance of a family-friendly atmosphere among German audiences. Irony combines with humor, as “a means of dealing with a hostile environment” and “undercutting rage”

(Babuscio 126-127), evidenced in the way Zeki sarcastically deflects the social worker's invasive and loaded question about his ethnic background. In her book *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, Linda Hutcheon explains that "self-deprecation" or a "defensive" form of irony can be utilized, in order to permit a minority artist to "participate in the humorous process without alienating the members of the majority" (48). The technique of protective irony, "Schutzironie" (Wolf 41), creates distance to afford an artist more leeway with regard to depicting potentially problematic topics. For instance, in this example from *FjG*, everyone can laugh, but Zeki's frustrated eye roll can also serve as a point of departure for conversations about why such comments should not be endured by minority groups. Hake and Mennel point out the extra challenges that minority filmmakers face, simultaneously "resisting and relying on the demand for typical stories" (11). Dagtekin has an aptitude for playing with these (stereo)typical plot points, invoking Christopher Isherwood's understanding of camp: "you're not making fun of it; you're making fun *out* of it" (Babuscio 128).

One scene in *FjG*, in particular, strengthens the reading of the protective irony mode in Dagtekin's work. Zeki's students put on an updated rendition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, performed in luminescent body paint with modern slang and concluding with a cocaine overdose rather than with the traditional "death" by poison. Elisabeth sits in the audience watching the play and remarks to Zeki what a good job he's done, creating a production that is even somewhat "subversiv" (*FjG* 1:27:30). Ultimately, he maintains the original content of the play but undermines the integrity of an admired figure like Shakespeare. Moreover, the *Binnenspiel* is a historical technique, citing, among others, the canonical work of prominent German *Romantiker* like Ludwig Tieck. Using asides or populating the work with audience

members who would comment on—like Elisabeth—or even *join* the play within the play, Tieck introduced distancing via *Potenzierung*. By grounding his film in this German literary technique, Dagtekin invites savvy viewers to see that it is *his* films that are subversive and destabilizing, although he creates enough distance with the *Binnenspiel* to have plausible deniability. Viewers might think they came up with the idea themselves, even though his character planted the idea in our minds. Never one to be open or direct about politics, Dagtekin works best when shielded by a veil of protective irony. In his article about the modern state of irony, Diedrich Diederichsen declared, “Über Politik kann man nicht mehr unironisch reden.” This is a technique in Dagtekin’s arsenal that is frequented.

The double-edge of Dagtekin’s protective irony might imply that his films are tending towards the “bland and provincial, infantile and harmless” films of the 90s, which Eric Rentschler calls “the cinema of consensus” (248). Such films “studiously and systematically skirt the ‘large’ topics and hot issues,” seemingly like Dagtekin does (246). Potentially condemning is the presence of actress Riemann, the female face of the cinema of consensus, due to her roles in films like *Der bewegte Mann*. However, Dagtekin’s motives for his displacement do not derive from “an overdetermined German desire for normalcy” (248) but rather the avoidance of victimizing and depicting a problem of the products of multiculturalism, like the original “cinema of duty” era films about the *Gastarbeiter* and their families. Although his comic style has been perceived as a detriment to espousing more “serious” messages (see: Nies), Dagtekin’s work is not as superficial as it might seem. In fact, critics and reviews consistently remark on his exceptional comic mode, considered “witzig” (*spielfilm.de*), “geistreich” (*Das Entertainment Magazin*), “satirisch” (*Online-Magazin für Filmkritik*), “sarkastisch” (*filmreporter.de*), with

“gesellschaftskritischen Verballhornungen” (*artehock.de*), and playing with “Klischees” (*DER SPIEGEL*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Feuilleton*, *digitalvd.de*, etc.). Despite the mainstream popularity his films have achieved, rather than seeking “consensus” Dagtekin uses protective irony and exaggerated camp as an intentional aesthetic mode to “emphasi[ze] style as a means of self-projection, a conveyor of meaning” of his ethnic experience (Babuscio 122). Through camp and also as Hutcheon also writes, irony, humor can be used in a way that is not alienating to the dominant culture.

Near the end of her treatise, Sontag discusses the capacity of camp to be used as a tool for integration. Note #52 describes how camp can be used as a means of “self-legitimization” (290). From the perspective of the 1960s, she writes about how camp has aided in the integration of Jews and homosexuals. In Germany, could those of Turkish descent, a more recent marginalized group than those Sontag mentions, also benefit from the integrative properties of camp? Babuscio celebrates the potential of camp’s humor to “defin[e] a positive identity” among various minority groups (126), so, I assert a resounding yes. Sontag echoes these claims, writing how camp “neutralizes moral indignation [and] sponsors playfulness” (290). Despite Dagtekin’s apparent reduction of “culture clash” to a myth, that at most, imbricates with a number of other conflicts, producer Lena Schömann declares in the *TfA* “making of” featurette that behind all of the exaggeration “ist aber natürlich ganz klar eine Botschaft versteckt... das Thema Integration” (Constantin Film 19:20). Interestingly enough, it is the producer, ostensibly the one with the keenest sense of the film’s marketability, who expresses this very implicit message—in this case, explicitly stated intent seems to have more clout for financing than what is actually shown. Even so, Babuscio sees “[a]ny appreciation” of camp as a communication of “empathy with typical

gay experiences” (127), which, due to his definition of “gay,” can be extrapolated to account for the experience of ethnic Others. Dagtekin’s films clearly have found an abundance of “appreciation” in Germany and, hopefully, thus, a new generation of empathy for Turkish German experiences.

VI. EXOTICIZING THE “ARSCH MIT HERZ”

NEGOTIATING A MORE POSITIVE GERMAN MASCULINITY?

Currently, the clear “face” of the Turkish German film experience is Elyas M'Barek, who portrays the main male characters in Dagtekin's three films. Despite their initially abrasive personalities, expletive-ridden language and sometimes blatant sexist or even racially-prejudiced comments, Cem and Zeki have become beloved pop-culture icons thanks to M'Barek's natural charisma and sympathetic performances. One online critic even regarded him as “fast etwas zu liebenswert” (*cinetastic.de*). This incongruous mix is identified by Zeki's prostitute friend, who labels him an “ein Arsch mit Herz” (*FjG* 1:22:57). M'Barek himself has risen to unbelievable superstardom since the release of *TfA*, his first major film sensation, with *GQ Deutschland* dubbing him in 2015, “ein Allgemeingut, von dem alle profitieren. Die Filmindustrie, er selbst und, klar, das Publikum” (Radović). But what are the politics surrounding an actor of color finding such immense success in a national film industry marked by a lack of diversity? Arguably, this represents a break in the *Kulturindustrie* cycle of “Ähnlichkeit” (Adorno and Horkheimer 128) among white male German film stars' *Gebrauchsschönheit*. Although M'Barek is a self-identified *Münchener* (“Elyas M'Barek lernt Türkisch!”), he acknowledges the struggles he still encounters. When he initiated his acting career in the early 2000s, he lamented the lack of “Identifikationsfiguren,” because there were so few performers with “Migrationshintergrund,” like him (Höbel). M'Barek has used his star status to prop open the door of opportunity for many actors and actresses of color to come in Germany, but his performances *do* come at a price. Even though Dagtekin crafts an overall positive image

with Cem and Zeki, he does resort to moments of exotification, emblematic of the problematic portrayals of men of color throughout German film history.

Following some primary assumptions about the nature of cinema, M'Barek also proves to offer an interesting intervention of national identity and masculinity for contemporary Germany. As Mosse argues in *The Image of Man*, since the mid-18th and early 19th century, masculinity has defined the German nation (3-6) and projected the “ideals and hopes of society” (12). In their co-edited volume *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam posit the following: “As the products of national industries, produced in national languages, portraying national situations, and recycling national intertexts (literatures, folklores), *all films are in a sense national*” [my emphasis] (10). They go on to say, “All films...project national imaginaries.” Andrew Higson, writing in a European film context, corroborates this view, pointing to the way that European films are especially marketed as national cultural products to lend the nation a “distinctive brand name” (63). In *A Critical History of German Film*, Brockmann discusses the fact that German comedies, regardless of domestic success, do not have as much international power as German tragedies, usually about World War II (420-421). Instead, comedies are mostly “language- and culture-specific.” To support this argument, even though Dagtekin’s outrageous comedies were the biggest German box-office hits in 2012 and 2013, they still have not seen an official DVD release in English-speaking regions. Curiously, however, US-based Latino production company Patnelion Films is set to release the Spanish-language *FjG* remake *No Manches Frida* in fall 2016 (Becher). Meanwhile, recent films like Christian Petzold’s Holocaust drama *Phoenix* (2014) enjoyed a swift theatrical release in the United States, now even available for streaming on Netflix. This reflects a similar dynamic to

what is identified as the “familiar tensions between high and low art biases towards the cinema” (Fisher 244). In his 1947 book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* Siegfried Kracauer states that “[p]opular films...satisfy existing mass desires” (5). Thus, there is a link between the popular, the nation, and via Mosse’s intervention, masculinity. Because comedy, the most “popular” strain of German cinema, is more limited to local, rather than international interests, and because film is the ultimate projection of the nation’s desires, what can one gather from the masculinity portrayed through M’Barek’s characters? After all, *FjG* in particular belongs to the “Schulkomödie” genre, which Dagtekin himself esteems “ein deutsches Genre” (Making of 0:49).

Although M’Barek’s roles have gained him critical recognition as a “Herzensbrecher” (Hartung), this persona stands in stark opposition to other white male German film stars. In “The Fragmented Body: Masculinity and Nation in Contemporary German Cinema,” Heidi Schlipphacke maintains that following the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, Germany seeks normalcy. This has manifested itself in recent films with the “proliferation of ‘average’ male types” (31). Stars embodying this model include Moritz Bleibtreu, Daniel Brühl, and Jürgen Vogel, according to Schlipphacke. Characteristically, these stars possess average looks and often quite “weak” film personae. Although this privileging of “weakness” stands in opposition to other Western ideals of masculinity, it acts as a reaction to and rejection of the Nazi admiration of the “[c]lassical beauty” of ancient Greece (Mosse 172), most clearly exemplified in Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia*, which documented the 1936 Olympic Games on Nazi Germany’s home turf, Berlin (Schlipphacke 39). This “tainted the Western masculine stereotype of strength

and beauty,” because any subsequent display of a more traditional form of masculine identity could be misconstrued as having ties to Nazism.

Investigating some of M'Barek's contemporaries, who mostly rose to prominence after Schlipphacke's article, it is revealing how they not only continue the tradition of weakened masculinity, but also display ties to Nazism in key roles. In *Die Welle* (Dennis Gansel, 2008), a film with M'Barek as a supporting character, Frederick Lau plays the fanatic who gets most enraptured in the simulation of fascism. As a social outcast, he is initially quite insecure, only gaining confidence when he is included on the class formation of “Die Welle,” an elitist group that is a reincarnation of the Nazi party, unbeknownst to the easily molded students. When the teacher reveals that everything was just an experiment, a lie, Lau's character pulls a gun on the teacher, before eventually killing himself. Lau also stars in *TfA* as Lena's suicidal, pill-popping wannabe-boyfriend. Before the film's resolution, when Lena and Cem's relationship is strained, she tries to use Lau's character to make Cem jealous, aiming to hurt his masculine pride by choosing a markedly weaker male partner. Lau's latest role in the one-take sensation *Victoria* (Sebastian Schipper, 2015) continues the trend of emasculation, recalling Bleibtreu's dependence on his female counterpart in *Lola rennt* (Tom Tykwer, 1998). Denis Moschitto, starring in popular films like *Kebab Connection* (2004), *Chiko* (Özgür Yildirim, 2008), and *Almanya – Willkommen in Deutschland* (2011), held the throne as the perpetual “Turk” throughout the 2000s, before M'Barek relieved him of that role in the 2010s. Compared to M'Barek's physique, Moschitto is scrawny at best. Supporting in *Rubbeldiekatz* (2011), Moschitto's character makes a bizarre toast to his actor friend about Hitler, explaining that without him, Germany wouldn't have its film industry today; this actually allies with Brockmann's comment about the majority

of Germany's internationally renowned hits being about the Holocaust and other tragedies.

Another prominent contemporary of M'Barek's is Matthias Schweighöfer; the former provided the "buddy role" for Schweighöfer in *What a Man* (2011). With the release of *TfA*, a number of posters spoofing other films were used for marketing and one such parody was "What a Türk," a nod to the first Turkish president Atatürk, showing a lone Cem in the center of the image, highlighting M'Barek's progress from side character to now starring role. Despite Schweighöfer's casting of himself as the heartthrob in a number of self-directed romantic comedies, he is known for his boyish clean-shaven look and somewhat feminine features. In *Rubbeldiekatz*, Schweighöfer brings this to the extreme, cross-dressing in order to get a starring role in a transnational Hollywood Nazi epic, somewhere between *Aimée & Jaguar* (Max Färberböck 1999) and Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). The *Sächsische Zeitung* review reveals that this drag role that was reportedly tailor-made for the actor, "auf den Leib geschneidert" (Wittich). Fascinatingly, in December 2015, Schweighöfer posted a composite photo to his Instagram, mixing features of his and M'Barek's faces, namely M'Barek's darker skin tone and beard stubble (see Figure 6). The caption and hashtag reads "Endlich Bart! #elyasschweighöfer." This ethnic drag clearly points to M'Barek's status as a venerable symbol of (ethnic) masculinity in Germany, even influencing his contemporaries. But is he respected or just exoticized for his ethnic features?

In her article "Sexualized Masculinities, Normalized Ethnicities," Gueneli traces the historical sexualization of men of color in German film. One of the first examples she mentions is Ali from Fassbinder's *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974), in which the lithe, but middle-aged Moroccan guest worker is depicted fully nude in a mirror reflection while taking a shower (Hake

and Mennel 136). Despite the mediation of the mirror, Ali is the clear object of the “longing gaze” of Emmi, a much older German woman. Gueneli also goes to the beginning of German cinema, citing an eroticizing of male “Others”—“Jewish, Slavic, pathological, or effeminate”—in works like Robert Wiene’s 1920 film, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (138). The “effeminate” form of Conrad Veidt, a homosexual man who portrayed the somnambulist Cesare, is accentuated in this film by the elongation of his spindly limbs, as he approaches the home of his abduction victim. The year before, Veidt portrayed a gay man in the early Weimar filmic appeal for homosexual rights, *Anders als die Andern* (Richard Oswald, 1919). Even in *Jud Süß* (Veit Harlan, 1940), one of the most insidiously anti-Semitic feature films of the Third Reich, the Jewish antagonist Süß is “fantasized as a sexual threat” (139). Further adding to this puzzling dynamic, the “swarthy” (Schulte-Sasse 66) Austrian actor Ferdinand Marian became a sex symbol as a result of his role in this film, even receiving fan mail from his infatuated audience (Brockmann 145). In *Der junge Törless* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1966), the New German Cinema adaptation of Robert Musil’s fin-de-siècle novel about an all-male boarding school, the perceived Jewish outsider character Basini is targeted by the school’s alpha males. The effeminate, young Peter Lorre lookalike becomes a victim of physical and sexual abuse by his more masculine peers. Examples like these show that the mere representation of “othered” characters is not enough to ensure a cosmopolitan attitude. Filmmakers on both ends of the spectrum—anti-Semitic Nazis and the ultra-critical Fassbinder—have a tendency to portray marginalized male actors in exoticized ways. Mosse identified such “countertypes” in history as “an image against which [“normalized” German masculinity] could define itself” (56). The main contemporary example Gueneli presents is Mehmet Kurtuluş, who played Detective Cenk Batu in the long-

running crime drama *Tatort*. As the first non-ethnic German detective in the historic television series, she purports that his character “brought ethnic normalization onto German screens” (143). Still, his character is not immune to the kind of exoticizing masculinity seen throughout German history, as his “gratuitous” shower scenes indicate (136). In fact, Gueneli asserts that his ethnicity is emphasized, by being shown “shirtless or naked” more than almost any other detective on the series.

In her seminal 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey details the dynamics of scopophilia and the male gaze. The medium of mainstream film, Mulvey argues, naturally gravitates towards depictions of the “human form” (836). As such, scopophilia, which occurs from the “pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation,” goes hand-in-hand with film. Mulvey explains that the roles in the process of “looking” are divided into “active/male and passive/female” with “[t]he determining male gaze project[ing] its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (837). She also controversially contends that males “cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (838). Additionally, fetishization is used to render threatening femininity, such as the *femme fatale*, into something pleasurable again (840). While Mulvey’s understanding of the filmic gaze involves viewers identifying with male characters and engaging in a scopophilic gaze with sexualized female characters, my application will challenge the original usage. As seen in Gueneli’s essay above, it is rather the “othered” male characters that become objectified. Did Mulvey’s quote account for ethnic masculinity, or was the exclusion from objectification that she mentioned strictly referring to normative white males? A decade later, Miriam Hansen also disputed the point of Mulvey’s essay in “Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship,” citing silent film actor

Rudolph Valentino as an important case study for defying the hegemony of the male gaze.

Valentino's southern European background even afforded him an "exotic" appeal, embodied in characters like the Arab sheik or Indian rajah (Hansen 24).

In Dagtekin's films, Elyas M'Barek is the clear object of the gaze. Similar to Valentino, his "exotic" phenotype is used to lure audiences in. Like Kurtuluş' detective character, Cem and Zeki are often depicted sleeveless, shirtless, or even nude, a Dagtekin trademark that becomes evident as early as the second episode of the *TfA* series, in which Cem is depicted in his underwear. In the *TfA* film, where most of his scenes take place on an island with a tropical climate, his scantily clad scenes are at least plausibly justified. After exiting the lifeboat, the most he ever wears above his torso is a white tank top. While this flaunts his lean biceps, he often wears even less. He brawls with Costa in his swimming trunks, he fishes in only his boxers, and later, he and Lena engage in nude foreplay on the beach. After the group's rescue, he also sports only green briefs during a short indoor scene at the resort. In *FjG*, such scenes are less probable, due to the general school setting, but Dagtekin still manages to include some. Again, there are a number of scenes featuring Zeki in tight tank tops or shirtless, and also an instance, in which he drunkenly exposes his buttocks, comically defaced with the word "ARSCHLOCH" (54:15). Riemann, who plays the strict Principal Gerster in this film, gets a brief glimpse of his buttocks and faintly raises her eyebrow before returning to her administrative work—is she impressed or merely surprised? In any case, *he* is the object of hers and the viewer's gaze. *FjG* 2's trailer takes this one step further, showing how students have trapped a completely stripped Zeki inside of a vending machine.

Gueneli's concept of "exoticized masculinity" is illustrated in various scenes featuring Cem and Zeki. In *TfA*, Lena wanders into the woods on the first morning and comes to a clearing. Framed by a medium close-up, something (or someone) catches her gaze. The sleazy twang of "bom chicka wah wah" music chimes in and viewers are shown the over-the-shoulder reverse shot. From afar, Lena sees none other than Cem bathing under the flow of a small waterfall. In voiceover, she remarks, "Ich wollte nicht gucken, aber ich war fasziniert" (*TfA* 29:18). Though Lena bashfully tries to have a look, she suddenly turns the other way and covers her eyes, saying in voiceover, "Sorry," implying that she had accidentally caught a glimpse of *something* in particular. Even as an outspoken feminist, her initial reluctance to participate in gazing shows her struggle to defy her traditionally "passive" female role. Nevertheless, a glimpse at Cem's body is worth fighting for and she slowly turns towards him again, peeking through her fingers. Meanwhile, shots of Cem under the waterfall alternate between medium-long shots (see Figure 7) and medium close-ups. However, the shots at the closer scale appear in slight slow motion, a form of extradiegetic fetishization to emphasize the fantasy-nature of what the spectator is seeing—at this closer scale, the spectators have surpassed the range of Lena's gaze and are fetishizing Cem on their own. In keeping with the exaggerated, comic style of the film, once Cem realizes that Lena has been staring at him, the sound of a record scratching cuts the music and Lena turns the other way, embarrassed. In a reversal of Mulvey's gender roles, Cem immediately grabs his swimming trunks to cover himself up, denying Lena's penetrating gaze. While Lena was "fasziniert" by what she saw, the night before, she expressed the perceived threat of the "ostensibly promiscuous, ethnically Other sexuality" (Hake and Mennel 142), saying to herself "Hoffentlich bin ich morgen noch Jungfrau," at the prospect of sleeping in the

same hut as Cem (*TfA* 28:20). Like the threat of the *femme fatale*, the threat of a male body of color is defused and made pleasurable through “fetishistic scopophilia” (Mulvey 840). Lena, the face of female “Emanzipation,” senses a threat of “castration,” a loss of power, in the presence of Cem’s seemingly traditional masculinity.

While the waterfall scene was Lena’s first transgression, she continues to think about and sexualize Cem. When she begins to develop feelings for him, she has a dream one night. In a strange twist, Lena fantasizes that she and Cem are the infamous 1970s Rote Armee Fraktion terrorists Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader. The reference itself is a very radical and political one, as the RAF was a militant, anti-Fascist group that resorted to terror attacks and bombings. However, like many of Dagtekin’s references to more serious elements, the scene is filtered through campy exaggeration—in this case, the caricatured portrayal of these terrorists by the lead actors, complete with ‘70s hairstyles (Gudrun’s bangs and Andreas’s long sideburns) add to the comic effect, amplified when the two national antiheroes start kissing passionately to the incongruous sound of modern electronic club beats. As the daughter of a therapist, Lena wakes up, exclaiming, “Cem hatte bereits mein Unterbewusstsein erobert. Jetzt hieß es: Verdrängen...” (*TfA* 52:04).

Ignoring her own advice, Lena begins flirting with Cem and splashing in the water; she strokes his face and makes a comment about his skin color: “Du bist schon voll braun” (*TfA* 54:25). The fetishizing of skin cites both Fassbinder’s *Whity* and *Angst essen Seele auf*. In the Western farce *Whity*, the eponymous figure, played by Günther Kaufmann, is whipped by his master. The master’s wife takes sexual pleasure in the flagellation and then tenderly rubs ointment onto Whity’s wounds. In *Angst essen Seele auf*, Ali is physically admired—or rather,

fondled—by his German wife’s previously xenophobic friends, as they caress his muscles and comment on his soft skin. In pop director Doris Dörrie’s *Nackt* (2002), a film starring Kurtuluş which was noted in the press as being the first German film “to feature a Turkish German actor without explicit references to his ethnic background,” there is also the fetishization of skin. As implied in the title, two couples must identify their respective nude lovers while blindfolded, solely through the sense of touch (Hake and Mennel 140). Lena’s may only be a passing comment in *TfA*, but one with precedence in German film history. In the “making of” featurette, Dagtekin remarks on the contractual obligation of the actors to constantly apply SPF 50 sunscreen, in order to maintain filmic continuity. He goes on to say that M’Barek otherwise changes “Nationalitäten” with increased sun exposure (Constantin Film 27:43). This comment both highlights one of the struggles of reproducing continuity when the medium of film is broken down into what Benjamin calls “eine Reihe montierbarer Episoden,” but it also hints at the artifice of ethnicity, by masking its performative function—natural sun exposure clearly affects the way M’Barek is perceived, so his skin color is maintained on film in an artificial manner. Finally, the comment also exposes the common slippage between overlapping, yet distinct constructs like ethnicity, race, and “nationality,” the term used by Dagtekin.

In *FjG*, there are also two major scenes which continue the tradition of exoticized masculinity. After his first day with class 10b, Zeki spends the night in the boiler room, hard at work, trying to burrow his way to his buried money. Drilling through the wall, M’Barek’s triceps, more noticeably toned since his performance in *TfA*, are emphasized by overhead lighting, which casts shadows on the underside of his arms and causes the muscles to almost glisten (see Figure 8). As the morning bell rings, Zeki walks over to the sink to rinse off before

class. He removes his shirt and the camera assumes a low-angle and medium framing. When he is putting his shirt back on, there is a quick close-up, in which his head is completely cropped from the frame, serving only to exhibit and fetishize his bare chest and six pack (see Figure 9). Since there is no diegetic figure that assumes the gaze over Zeki in this scene, viewers are certainly invited to enjoy the objectification of his body, with the low angle emphasizing a voyeuristic quality. Adorno and Horkheimer interpret every close-up as an advertisement of the performer (172). Interestingly, they gender the term by specifying that this is the case for the “Filmschauspielerin,” pointing to M’Barek’s “feminization” through this Mulveyan mode of representation. In a scene the next day, Elisabeth and Zeki have lifeguard duty at the school’s swimming pool. Elisabeth, dressed in black pants and a sky blue sport camisole is more covered up than almost anyone else at the pool (see Figure 10). As the lead actress in the film, this subverts what we have come to expect from the role of women, as characterized by Mulvey. Instead, it is Zeki who possesses the “erotic impact” and “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 837). As he approaches the pool, he is overcoded with “tough guy” markers of masculinity. Wearing only shorts, he exposes his chest and abs for all to see. This includes a sizable “tribal” tattoo that extends from his right pectoral onto his bicep. Finally, producing the most incongruous—and thus, comic—effect is the fact that he is smoking (see Figure 11). As he approaches Elisabeth, she has the same stunned gaze that Lena had while observing Cem by the waterfall. The difference is that Zeki is at least fully aware that he is being watched by Elisabeth and the high school girls around him, walking up to them with full confidence.

In the pool scene, which is Zeki’s most outward display of masculinity, it is also important to note a conflict, in which he tries to break up students Danger and Burak from

fighting over a girl. Danger briefly disarms Zeki by kneeing him in the testicles. After recovering, Zeki furiously tackles the student into the pool and forces his head underwater several times until he receives an apology. The defeated Danger pitifully crawls out of the pool and retreats to the locker room, sobbing. While this scene has the potential subtext to subliminally reinforce the white German's fear of the threatening ethnic masculinity, the few references to ethnicity within the film are so ambiguous that it would be difficult to draw such a concrete reading. One could just as easily associate Zeki's authority in this scene with his age, again pointing to Dagtekin's penchant for complicating hierarchies and depicting conflicts intersectionally.

One scene in *FjG* especially complicates Zeki's otherwise gruff portrayal of masculinity. After weeks of digging, Zeki finally reaches his plunder. The popular acoustic ballad "Let Her Go" plays softly in the background and Zeki breaks into hysterical laughter, a melodramatic catharsis. In an approximately 22 second close-up long take, which might as well be 22 minutes in mainstream film, Zeki begins to cry (*FjG* 1:21:08-1:21:30). In the last 3 seconds, the camera even zooms in slightly to emphasize the tear he sheds, presumably out of joy, but also conceivably out of sadness at the prospect of his time at the school drawing to a close. In a film with such a "Wahnsinnstempo" (Brenner), this relatively long take acts as a jarring respite from the film's otherwise relentless pacing. The camera is drawn to M'Barek's face and time is temporarily slowed. In addition to portraying the otherwise tough and stoic Zeki in an emotionally fragile state that recalls the sentimentality of German Enlightenment patriarchs such as Sir William in G. E. Lessing's *Miß Sara Sampson*, the voyeuristic zoom near the end of the long take foregrounds the perspective of the camera. Zeki is "feminized" in the formal Mulveyan

sense, but such a scene also tempers his otherwise hypermasculinity, destabilizing the gender hierarchy.

Zeki's feminization forges connections to two additional relevant lines of thought. First, it lends M'Barek's performances a campier edge. Babuscio identifies gender to be one of the contrasts ripest for incongruity; Valentino is even brought up as an example of gendered camp, due to the "feminine" roles he assumes in certain films (119). Beyond Zeki's crying scene, there is also the prank the 10b students pull, giving him a makeover while he is in a drunken stupor. They pierce his ears, paint his nails, apply lipstick and eyeliner, and stamp his forehead with "SCHLAMPE" (*FjG* 53:44). As covered in previous sections, gender is but one of many incongruities at work in Dagtekin's films. Second, the scene is potentially a brief retreat back to traditional Orientalist notions of the feminized ethnic male. According to Edward Said's groundbreaking analysis from 1978, the "West" has imagined itself as masculine and superior to the "exotic" world known as the "Orient." General regions belonging to the imagined "Orient" are North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia and their inhabitants are deemed both feminine and inferior from the Western perspective. For most of *FjG*, however, Zeki clearly defies the stereotypical Orientalist association of femininity. The crying scene and the drag scene are just a few that complicate the seemingly one-dimensional representation of Zeki's gender.

While M'Barek's role as the object of the viewer's gaze is apparent, his simultaneous role as our "screen surrogate," particularly in *FjG*, is remarkable (Mulvey 838). According to Mulvey's model, the (male) character with whom the viewer identifies is the one who controls the events in the narrative. While *TfA* follows Lena and the viewer often hears her perspective in voiceover, screen surrogacy absolutely applies for *FjG*'s Zeki, despite the fact that he is also

objectified. This queering of the gaze is yet another example of Dagtekin complicating hierarchies of gender, not allowing M'Barek to slip too far toward hypermasculinity, nor extreme femininity.

Remember, toxic masculinity is associated with Nazism and, in turn, has ensured the rise of many of the “weak” German male stars around now. However, M'Barek's “feminized” objectification also combines with scenes from each film that characterize Cem and Zeki as distinctly anti-Nazi. In an early scene in *TfA*, Cem's father disciplines him for getting into trouble at a *Fasching* celebration. Cem replies with the excuse, “Ich hab bloß Hitler verprügelt, Mann,” hinting that he likely got into an altercation with a neo-Nazi (*TfA* 6:56). His dismissive tone indicates that while getting into fights is unacceptable, fighting “Hitler” should ultimately be a reasonable excuse. In *FjG*, Zeki tells the students on his first day to bring DVDs of their favorite movies to class so they have something to watch—he won't be actually teaching them, after all. When one student asks if VHS is permissible, he snaps at her, scolding, “Ich hab keinen Bock auf alte Schinken aus der Schwarz-Weiß-Sammlung eurer Nazi-Großeltern” (*FjG* 20:14). These scenes collectively help to distance Cem and Zeki's hypermasculinity from any Fascist overtones.

If there is one instance that really shows a departure for M'Barek in the long tradition of exoticized masculinity in German film, it is Cem's awareness of his objectification by Lena. When she misinterprets one of their interactions as an invitation to sex, he reassures her that he only wants to share the rap song he wrote. The song is silly, with exaggerated references to Cem's genitals being too large for even the “Ozonloch” (*TfA* 1:13:51) or the fact that he is a “Gangsta” who sleeps with celebrities like Jessica Alba. The accompanying music video does

not take place directly within the film's diegesis, but rather in Cem's or possibly even Lena's imagination. It convincingly appropriates the conventions of MTV rap videos, in which Cem the "tough guy" roams the streets and women in bikinis are used as erotic props, more closely abiding by the traditional understanding of Mulvey's male gaze. Finally, while the rest of the film downplays ethnicity, Cem performs in ethnic drag in the music video by rapping in front of a large Turkish flag in many shots (see Figure 12) and comically referring to his "Dönerspieß." As a form of immanent critique, Dagtekin demonstrates his awareness of the limits of what is an acceptable expression of masculinity. As Lena is presumably the audience of the music video performance, the sequence could be seen as a projection of *her* exaggerated fears of ethnic masculinity. Dagtekin, thus, uses the campy exaggeration in the video to critique this paranoia, essentially proclaiming, "What you see in this music video is *not* the mode of masculinity that M'Barek embodies." It is a plea for the empathy that Babuscio references. Upon being subjected to the song, Lena harshly disparages Cem's pipe dream of becoming a successful rapper, insults his intelligence, and even corrects his grammar—her insistence on "book smarts" sets him off. Defeated, he concedes, "Okay, ich bin blöd. Ich bin der dumme Kanake, mit dem man sich nicht unterhalten kann. Aber weißt du, was mich ankotzt? Zum Ficken hätt's gereicht, oder was?" (1:15:07). Following the climax of camp in the video comes this moment of melancholy, in which Cem laments his "painfully incongruous situation" (Babuscio 127), namely, the gap between his ideal and his reality. His statement reflects a criticism of the hypocritical mentality that Lena can look down upon him as inferior, while still sexualizing him—devaluing his mind, while wanting to use his body. Though earlier in the film she expressed an anxiety of Cem's perceived promiscuity, the tables have turned. This fear was merely a projection and now,

it is *he* who is aware of “seine Angst, bloß temporäres Lustobjekt einer selbstgewissen, autonomen und intellektuell überlegenen Frau zu werden” (Nies 12). In fact, despite all of Cem’s chauvinism, he does not have sex with Lena after they have made up, because she is not sober. Zeki similarly avoids starting a relationship with the willing Elisabeth, because he knows that his time at the school is just temporary. These characters completely defy the expectation of the exoticized male “whose promiscuous sexuality is linked to betrayal and disloyalty,” like Kurtuluş’s character in *Nackt* or Ali in *Angst essen Seele auf*, who both yield to the temptation of affairs (Hake and Mennel 143).

VII. CONCLUSION

Bora Dagtekin may very well have ushered in a new era of German popular cinema. The nation consistently flocks to the movies to experience his films' clever writing and politically incorrect mischief. Still, as crass as his work may be, he does have a fairly keen sense of his limits. Achieving a profound balance between mainstream appeal and subversive humor, which jumbles hierarchies of art/popular, gender, class, and ethnicity, his films have catapulted him to an unprecedented series of triumphs at the box office. The "Kulturindustrie" philosophers would read his commercial success quite pessimistically. His mounting commercial success would just be evidence of the masses learning to perpetuate what is being fed to them, instilling more cultural sameness. But can his accomplishments really be sold so short? By demonstrating the various and multi-layered intersections of other identity conflicts such as age/authority, gender, and class/education, Dagtekin debunks the "single-issue" myth that "culture clash" is perceived to be. Simultaneously, he uses distancing techniques like protective irony and camp, ensuring that his work remains fun for all, even if it is peppered with more serious commentary about the state of German society.

With the country's role in the acceptance one million refugees this past year and following the nebulous wave of sexual assaults that transpired on New Year's Eve 2015 in Cologne, some wonder how the work of Dagtekin might somehow positively intervene in the "Flüchtlingskrise" (Peitz; Rodek). Christiane Peitz offers an interesting connection between refugees in Germany and a *FjG 2* subplot about helping Thai children orphaned by the tsunami. After the squeaky clean leader of the rival Schiller-Gymnasium is revealed to have exploited the

orphans for child labor in his secret cannabis operation, Zeki and his 10b students thwart his scheme, build a home for the children, and initiate an exchange program between Thailand and Germany. Peitz interprets the film as implicitly promoting a more direct grassroots approach to nurturing refugees: “Schnell, unbürokratisch, vor Ort.” More generally speaking, however, I argue that the sympathetic and stereotype-defying portrayals of Cem Öztürk and Zeki Müller can contribute during this “Krise.” Zeki *was* indeed an uneducated criminal—a racist projection applied to many immigrants and refugees—and despite it all, he becomes the most beloved teacher at the school among the students. At the end of *FjG*, a young student holds Zeki’s hand and quite literally looks up to him. Even Principal Gerster jumps through hoops to legitimize his status through various forgeries in order to permit him to stay. Theorists like Jack Babuscio highlight the way that the camp aesthetic can be used not only to humorously work through oppression, but also as a means of fostering empathy. Perhaps the “Reklame” (Adorno and Horkheimer 172) of M’Barek’s bare chest in close-up is Dagtekin’s somewhat problematic way of selling tickets, but fortunately, his full films feature more substance.

In fact, although Dagtekin still succumbs to many of the same pitfalls of scopophilia that have marred depictions of men of color throughout German film history, he also displays some substantial progress, accomplished in the following ways. First, although M’Barek is visibly a person of color, Dagtekin eliminates the focus on ethnicity, by emphasizing its artifice and performativity in *TfA* and by not feeling compelled to explain Zeki’s heritage in *FjG*. Additionally, M’Barek’s characters are given the central roles, demonstrating the way Dagtekin has built on M’Barek’s star text throughout the years. By using various points in his filmography as a springboard, he shows that Cem and Zeki are neither the Fascist-prone Sinan (*Die Welle*)

nor an undeveloped sidekick such as Okke (*What a Man*). Finally, M'Barek's characters in Dagtekin's films exhibit the important qualities of agency (*FjG*), critical awareness of objectification (*TfA*), and a general subversion of the mythical threat of the "promiscuous" male of color. Though the post-World War II crisis of masculinity still characterizes the personae of many German actors, M'Barek signals a significant intervention of ethnicity, nation, and gender. During the promotion of his 2015 film *Traumfrauen*, M'Barek expressed delight during an interview in the fact that "nicht mehr alle nur wie Matthias Schweighöfer aussehen" (Kiss Tower). In a *Tagesspiegel* interview later that year, it was asserted, "[d]as Sexsymbol der Deutschen ist nicht mehr blass und blond," referring, of course, to M'Barek himself (Proisinger und Lippitz). Some of this is thanks to the actor's Tunisian background, which sets him apart from the typical German star, even if it means "passing" for an identity that is not his. However, Dagtekin reports that Turks generally approve of M'Barek, because "[d]er ausländische Pass zählt" (Mühling and Lippitz), revealing yet again the lack of diversity in the industry; intriguingly, German viewers tend to be the ones to complain that an "echte[r]" Turk should be playing the role. Ultimately, it is up to Dagtekin, the Turkish German, to decide how his identity is presented and, as I contend, with his privileged auteur status in these films, he is able to do so. Cem and Zeki may have dirty mouths, but they have surprisingly wholesome hearts, all things considered. Combining his rugged handsome looks, charm, and confidence with a vulnerable soft-side and anti-Nazi leanings in his characters, M'Barek may just be one of the most positively represented males in postwar German cinema and overall, one of the most empowering examples of ethnic masculinity, dispensing with "patronizing" (Göktürk 6) attitudes of even the most well-intentioned films promoting Turkish German multiculturalism. Dagtekin's

films demonstrate the ever expanding possibilities of representation in the current era of Turkish German cinema. With the recently released *Fack ju Göhte 2* (2015) topping the success of even the first film and with potential future projects, viewers should look forward to Dagtekin continuing to curate M'Barek's likable depictions of ethnic masculinity in Germany. The pragmatic understanding of the reproducibility of film means that this relatively positive image of ethnic masculinity can reach broad audiences in Germany. If there is any guarantee from the collaborations of these two, it is that another hilarious, but intricate musing on the many facets of German identity is likely already in the works. So far, Dagtekin has already done a commendable job of balancing the deemphasized role of ethnicity in his films without resorting to naïve "post-racial" whitewashing. The next landmark step in representation would be casting M'Barek completely against type, whether queer, academic, multiracial or another new kind of character. This could be the key to breaking the cycle of scopophilia and to facilitating a diversified career for M'Barek. While Mulvey writes about the visual "pleasure" inherent in filmic objectification (844), Dagtekin surely possesses the screenwriting savvy to compensate with a heaping of comic pleasure. In fact, by challenging M'Barek's typical roles, there is even more potential to destabilize and to create incongruous, campy humor. The German nation is surely waiting on the edge of its cushioned Cineplex seat.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1: *TjA, Tongo* (Günther Kaufmann)

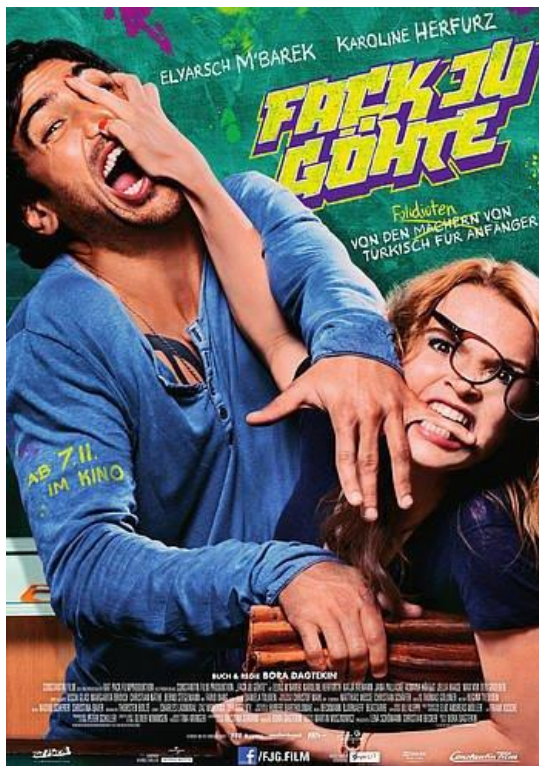


Figure 2: *Fack ju Göhte* poster



Figure 3: *TfA* title screen



Figure 4: *TfA*, color palette



Figure 5: *FjG*, color palette



Figure 6: #elyasschweighöfer



Figure 7: *TfA*, Cem under the waterfall



Figure 8: *FjG*, Zeki's muscle detail



Figure 9: *FjG*, Zeki's fetishized body



Figure 10: *FjG*, Elisabeth by the pool



Figure 11: *FjG*, Zeki by the pool



Figure 12: *TfA*, Cem's rap video

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