

6. Refiguring National Cinema in Films about Labour, Money, and Debt

Abstract

This chapter brings into sharper focus the theme of precarity by analyzing films about labour, money, and debt that train a lens on precarious, racialized bodies made disposable in and by global neoliberalism: Arslan's *Dealer* (1998); Maccarone's *Unveiled* (2005); Akin's *The Edge of Heaven* (2007); and Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008). Considering how these films find a form to depict labour, money, and debt, this chapter develops indebtedness as a trope that binds together their narrative and aesthetic language. These films contribute to the reconfiguration of German national cinema by centering migrant characters, reflecting on their perspectives and experiences, and making visible their subaltern status, while also developing their representation via an explicit engagement with German film history.

Keywords: Thomas Arslan, Angelina Maccarone, Fatih Akin, Christian Petzold, race, precarity

Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008) begins with a prologue that takes place at a funeral. The mother of Thomas (Benno Führmann), an unemployed veteran of the war in Afghanistan, has died, prompting his return to Jerichow, the eastern German town of the film's title, to move into and renovate his childhood home. Thomas's hopes for a fresh start in Jerichow are dashed when a pair of sinister-looking men show up at the funeral and escort him back to the house, insisting that he pay them back the money they have loaned him for a failed business attempt. Introduced in this opening sequence, debt dictates the course of Thomas's life as well as those of Ali (Hilmi Sözer), the Turkish German owner of a chain of snack bars in the exurban region of the Prignitz, and Laura (Nina Hoss), his white, ethnic German wife, whose marriage to Ali is shaped by a prenuptial contract stipulating his agreement to take over a substantial financial debt she has incurred that

previously led to a prison sentence. The love triangle narrated by *Jerichow* brings together Germany's internal others (racialized minorities, eastern Germans, women) in a circuit that is overdetermined by the mandate to service debt by performing labour in the pursuit of money, goods, or favour. Debt, and its central role in unbinding subjects from economic and intimate optimism, forms the nexus of *Jerichow's* mapping of the historical present. As in *Jerichow*, whose characters are encumbered by debts and contracts that obligate them to act and relate in specific ways, indebtedness forms a ubiquitous trope in recent German cinema.

Rising indebtedness is closely linked to and results from the dismantling of welfare systems and public services, the privatization of social risk, the precaritization of labour, and the ensuing surge in insecurity and inequality. In the neoliberal age, debt poses a particular threat for racialized minorities, especially migrants (including those of the second and third generation), who are increasingly held responsible and accountable for their own integration into German society. The politics of migration have transformed across the period of neoliberal intensification in response to economic and social change as well as global political developments. Whereas the labour migration treaties that first recruited so-called *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) to Germany in response to postwar shortages of working-age men guaranteed these migrants contract work, deindustrialization and the flexibilization of labour in post-Fordism have led to both exclusionary hiring practices and the relegation of workers 'with a migration background' to the unskilled labour force. Changes to once-liberal asylum laws in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and the ongoing racist attacks on asylum seekers in Germany also resulted in the increasing precaritization of migrants' lives. At the same time, neoliberal rhetoric promoting a 'postracial' society individualizes racism as a personal prejudice, evacuating conceptions of structural racism and co-opting and depoliticizing antiracist claims on behalf of diversity. In this context, the responsabilization of migrants for their own integration inevitably leads to the labelling of those who succeed as 'good' and those who fail as 'bad', with the latter group often criminalized for their failure.

The films discussed in this chapter make structures of racial capitalism visible through their imaging of labour, money, and debt. In Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* (1998), small-time street dealer Can (Tamer Yigit) is trapped within the hierarchy of credits and debts that drive the illegal drug trade; his attempt to escape this circuit of indebtedness and parlay his labour as a dealer into a less risky line of work that will allow him to support his family with legitimate earnings culminates in his entrapment and confinement by the carceral state. In Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* (Foreign Skin,

2005; released in English as *Unveiled*), Fariba (Jasmin Tabatabai), an Iranian refugee, assumes the identity of her dead acquaintance Siamak in order to stay in Germany after she is denied temporary resident status as an asylum seeker. Living precariously—as a queer migrant woman passing as a (dead) man and largely confined to a home for asylum seekers, banned from labour and travel—Fariba/Siamak's sheer survival relies on debts incurred in the quest to procure illegal work to earn enough money to purchase a counterfeit passport. Fatih Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* (On the Other Side, 2007; released in English as *The Edge of Heaven*) traces the interlocking stories of a series of characters whose relationships to one another are affected by symbolic debts they incur, debts that are shaped by familial, romantic, and/or political bonds, and that compel the characters to cross national and linguistic borders in the quest to repay them. In each of the films addressed in this chapter, class, gender, sexuality, and especially race and ethnicity figure prominently in the cycle of indebtedness, demonstrating the imbrication of these categories with forms of liability. Ultimately, these films reflect the way indebtedness compounds the dispossession and inequality of racialized minorities, foregrounding the uneven and variable effects of neoliberalism.

Labour, money, and debt have long posed difficult subjects for cinematic representation, a problem exacerbated by the era of immaterial labour and financialization. The four films considered here develop new formal and narrative means for depicting indebtedness by training a lens on precarious, racialized bodies made disposable in and by global neoliberalism. In their depiction of indebtedness, these films demonstrate a central operation of neoliberal governmentalities, which hold Europe's racial others culpable not only for the social and economic risk they are forced to assume by virtue of the dismantling of the welfare state, but also, more crucially and perversely, for the end of the welfare state itself. This operation is characteristic of the paradoxes of the neoliberal repertoire. On the one hand, the intertwining of discourses of privatization and entrepreneurship with a postracial rhetoric of colour-blindness culminates in a cruelly optimistic vision of multicultural individuals ostensibly empowered to succeed (or fail) unhindered by racism. On the other hand, as Fatima El-Tayeb has incisively argued, Europe's shift away from state responsibility for minimizing inequality has led to very specific consequences for racialized minorities: 'This shift meant a sharp rise in temporary employment, cuts in social programmes, unemployment benefits, and health care plans, and a new emphasis on individual responsibility and on the looming destruction of the welfare state by irresponsible and undeserving groups. [T]he latter were first identified as migrants in general and then more specifically as

the nation's Muslim community.¹ As El-Tayeb goes on to argue, the crisis caused by neoliberalization's emptying out of concepts that had been closely linked to western Europe's identity (social responsibility, shared risk, a commitment to human rights)

was solved by a discursive scapegoating of the continent's Muslim population onto which a reactionary identity was projected that reaffirmed Western liberal ideals in crisis and at the same time justified their rejection by posing excessive liberalism, multiculturalism, and state support of minorities as having enabled reactionary, antidemocratic, misogynist, homophobic, nonwhite, non-Western Muslim groups threatening the liberal West much more than economic neoliberalism ever could.²

As a consequence, in El-Tayeb's formulation, European minorities ultimately 'function as the glue that holds Europe together precisely by being excluded'.³

By making visible the operations of this exclusionary discourse—which underpins European identity as part and parcel of a simultaneous embrace and disavowal of neoliberalism—the films discussed in this chapter all contribute to the reconfiguration of German national cinema. All four films centre migrant characters, reflect on their perspectives and experiences, and make visible their subaltern status, while also configuring the terms of their representation via an explicit engagement with German film history. On the diegetic level, they form deliberate intertextual relationships with specific films (especially the oeuvre of Rainer Werner Fassbinder), genres (including the Berlin film and the *Heimatfilm*), and traditions (particularly the New German Cinema), often disorganizing the tropes and forms associated with these. However, unlike the global blockbusters discussed in Chapter 2, which co-opt and neutralize the legacy of German cinema while affirming neoliberal agendas, the films discussed here seek to resignify this legacy for resistant aesthetic and political projects. As Gozde Naiboglu has argued, 'Turkish German Cinema has provided a sustained critique of the changing forms of work and life in Germany, as the films have expressed the need to reformulate issues of ethics, subjectivity, labour and reproduction in the passage to global capitalism'.⁴ Building on her expansive analysis, I consider how this legacy of Turkish German cinema (broadly construed to

1 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 97.

2 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 98.

3 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 159.

4 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 4.

encompass the cinema of migration in Germany focused on asylum seekers as well as migrants) also extends to a critique of racial capitalism. While they develop this critique in varied ways, all of the films analysed in this chapter engage the viewer in a representation of neoliberal subjectivities that envisions contemporary life as a dilemma rather than affirming it.

Crucial to this engagement, I contend, is the mode of production developed by the filmmakers whose work I consider here. As we have seen, the era of neoliberal media regimes is characterized by the concentration of film production—in Germany and across the globe—in the hands of a few media conglomerates. Downsizing of staff and streamlining of content have led to the side-lining of minorities and women, with the effect of limiting the diversity of perspectives and styles available in audiovisual media. At the same time, the strategies of experimental culture and art cinema, including defamiliarization techniques, distanciation, contemplative aesthetics, self-referentiality, and subversion, among others, have been thoroughly recuperated for the mainstream, draining these forms of their oppositional valence.

In this context, not only representational choices but also production modalities significantly underpin the way films make images of the present.⁵ The films discussed in this chapter were all independently produced, drawing on a combination of funding through regional film boards, international co-production deals, private investment, distribution deals, and/or television financing. Debuts at international film festivals played a crucial role in garnering publicity and international attention for these mostly low-budget films; though they did not draw huge audiences to theatres (several of them played only in limited theatrical release), they have all enjoyed significant and widespread audience attention via television, home video, and digital platforms, especially streaming services, both domestically and abroad. Thus, these films reflect a transnational, postcinematic, and intermedial mode of production and reception, and they are firmly embedded within the same commercial, mainstream platforms whose hegemony they also challenge.

As we have seen, it has become a critical commonplace to categorize the films of the Berlin School as a new form of countercinema. Critics have viewed Berlin School films as a revitalization of the New German Cinema's revolutionary experiments with aesthetic form and collective approach to filmmaking, considering these films emblematic of what Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager refer to as the 'collapse of the conventional' in millennial

5 See Seeßlen, 'Die Anti-Erzählmaschine.'

German cinema.⁶ However, following the countercinema paradigm not only overlooks the successful production model of Berlin School films, but it can also lead to neglect of a central quality of these films, namely the way that they straddle binaries (high/low, cinema/media, art/commerce, intellectual/popular, international/national, oppositional/hegemonic) to exhibit seemingly opposed qualities simultaneously. This blurring of received categories is a central facet of the films' ability to assert themselves within the neoliberal mediascape while also critically intervening in it. As I have argued throughout this book, the central trope of disorganization helps to conceptualize the way that these films resignify cinematic legacies in the postcinematic age to map contemporary reality.

Extending the discussion of Berlin School cinema begun in Chapter 5, this chapter examines this disorganized cinematic practice by considering two key Berlin School films by 'first-generation' directors, *Dealer* and *Jerichow*, together with two films that do not fall within the parameters of the Berlin School but that arguably exhibit similar formal-aesthetic strategies, *Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. My analysis specifically draws out the way all four films engage the legacies of feminist and queer cinema in their ongoing quest to make us see, feel, and think differently, even in the impasse of the present. While attention has constellated around the Berlin School's reanimation of cinema as an aesthetic and political project for the 21st century, reading these films together helps to demonstrate how this project extends beyond the boundaries of that constellation, offering a vision for refiguring German cinema in the neoliberal age.

Mobility and the Impasse in *Dealer*

Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* narrates the break-up between Can (the eponymous dealer) and his wife Jale (Idil Üner), both second-generation Turkish Germans living in Berlin-Schöneberg.⁷ When Can fails to transition from the shadow economy of small-time drug dealing to more legitimate employment, Jale leaves him, taking their young daughter Meral (Lea Stefanel) with her and moving in with a friend. Can works for Hakan (Hussi Kutlucan), a mid-level

6 Fisher and Prager, eds., *The Collapse of the Conventional*.

7 Critics have often mistakenly located the setting of *Dealer* in Berlin-Kreuzberg. However, the recognizable shooting locations in Berlin-Schöneberg appear significant for Arslan's project to depict the interactions of Turkish Germans in different spaces of the city across the 'Berlin Trilogy'.

dealer who is looking for investment opportunities in lawful businesses that can operate as fronts for his illegal activities. Hoping to get off the streets, where he is constantly pursued by the police officer Erdal (Birol Ünel), who tries to turn him as an informant, Can petitions Hakan for a different assignment, and Hakan promises him a job running a bar. However, when Hakan is murdered before Can's eyes for failing to repay a debt to his Turkish creditors, Can's capital (accrued through his loyalty to Hakan), and with it his sole option for upward mobility, is lost. Hoping to win back Jale, Can briefly goes to work as a dishwasher at a restaurant owned by the uncle of his school friend Metin (Erhan Emre)—the only job he can find—but the low wages he is offered do not provide adequate compensation for the gruelling labour he is required to perform. Seeking to escape his precarious employment status once and for all, Can decides to procure a nest egg by selling off the remaining supply of drugs in his possession and keeping the full profit from the sale. Instead, he is busted by Erdal. In the final scene of *Dealer*, Jale visits Can in prison, where they discuss the likelihood that he will be deported to Turkey upon his release. The poetic ending of *Dealer* presents a series of six static shots depicting spaces we have seen throughout the film, all now empty, devoid of the characters who had previously inhabited and occupied them.

This synopsis of the film's narrative demonstrates how *Dealer* engages with familiar tropes of the cinema of migration, including genre markers of the crime film and images of the 'ghetto', along with elements of social realism, such as the focus on a protagonist who seeks and fails to transcend the petty criminal milieu, as well as the thematization of gender and labour. However, this familiar story is told via a minimalist 'aesthetic of reduction', a laconic and detached cinematic language that is characterized by slow narrative exposition, minimal editing, observational cinematography, and an affectless acting style, a formal language that links Arslan's work to other films of the Berlin School.⁸ A mash-up of art cinema and genre film, social realist migrant drama and gangster movie, Arslan's disorganized filmic language in *Dealer* figures the precarity of the world he depicts; it also disrupts conventional forms of viewing in ways that open up modes of interpretation.

Arslan's mix of genre conventions and austere aesthetics proved crucial to the success of *Dealer* upon its debut in the Forum section of the Berlin Film Festival, where it won several prizes, and to its widespread critical acclaim. *Dealer* is the second instalment in Arslan's 'Berlin Trilogy', which

8 On Thomas Arslan's 'aesthetic of reduction', see Schick, 'Stillstand in Bewegung.'

also includes *Geschwister/Kardeşler* (Siblings, 1996) and *Der schöne Tag* (A Fine Day, 2001), films that all emphasize the trope of mobility as both possibility and limit for Turkish Germans.⁹ In their ambiguous deployment of this trope, Arslan's films resignify the 'topics of exclusion, alienation, discrimination, and identity politics'¹⁰ that have continued to overdetermine both depictions of migration and discussions of cinema's presumed duty to represent minority culture authentically, or what Kobena Mercer has termed the 'burden of representation'.¹¹ Their open, ambiguous quality allows Arslan's films to resist this burden, while also avoiding co-optation and instrumentalization within the affirmative context of an ostensibly postracial culture that expects 'the cultural product to solve the very problem that it represents'.¹² The ambiguous way in which the films of the 'Berlin Trilogy' both engage and defy the representation of Turkish Germans also helps to account for the rather divergent critical takes they have engendered.

For instance, in a series of influential essays, Deniz Göktürk has identified Arslan's films as exemplary of a 'new mode of depicting immigrants and their hybrid offspring' which departs from the essentialized images of migrants as victims that had characterized the 'cinema of duty'.¹³ Göktürk emphasizes not only the ways in which the films offer more complex depictions of Turkish Germans, but also the sense in which they defy conventional codes of gender and space that characterized an earlier era of substate filmmaking. If such earlier films typically took an ethnographic stance toward documenting and explaining Turkish Germans as a social group and often depicted migrants (especially women) 'trapped in claustrophobic spaces and scenarios of imprisonment', then Arslan's protagonists (including his female characters) freely traverse the urban landscape.¹⁴

However, Jessica Gallagher finds that, despite their notable relocation of characters out of the domestic sphere and into urban space, 'the protagonists in at least the first two films of Arslan's trilogy continue to struggle with the same or similar problems as their predecessors in the *Gastarbeiterkino*

9 On Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, see also Baer, 'Affectless Economies.'

10 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 28.

11 See Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation.'

12 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 3.

13 Göktürk, 'Turkish Women on German Streets', 65. See also Göktürk, 'Turkish Delight – German Fright' and 'Beyond Paternalism.' The term 'cinema of duty' comes from Malik, 'Beyond the "Cinema of Duty"?'.

14 Göktürk, 'Turkish Women on German Streets', 64.

[guest-worker cinema], in terms of spaces available to them'.¹⁵ For Gallagher, *Dealer* depicts the streets of Berlin as a prison for Can, which limits his mobility and his possibilities nearly as much as the overt incarceration he faces at the end of the film. Likewise, the urban spaces available to Jale 'are not so far removed from the restrictive and claustrophobic spaces' of earlier Turkish German cinema.¹⁶

As these two approaches suggest, Arslan's films are sometimes read as breaking free of confining images of Turkish Germans and at other times as reproducing them; in fact, they do both simultaneously. This simultaneity is reflected in Arslan's attention—shared with other Berlin School filmmakers—to the ambiguous *Zwischenräume* or liminal spaces characteristic of contemporary society, including subways, trains, taxis, airports, parks and other public non-places, which seem to foster mobility and transition.¹⁷ His attention to in-between spaces coincides with an exploration of in-between times—adolescence, vacation, the break-up of a long-term relationship—when characters find themselves on the brink of a transition. Indeed, the formal and aesthetic focus on such transitional non-places and times coincides with Arslan's narrative focus on the search for new identities and modes of living in the 'new world order' of neoliberalism. However, while the films focus precisely on the search as process, reflected in repeated shots of characters moving through space as well as regular images of crossroads, they most often end at an impasse.

Dealer begins with an image of family intimacy, as the camera pans down from a bright blue curtain across yellow wallpaper past Can to the sleeping bodies of Jale and Meral, before panning back again to Can, who sits up in bed and looks out the window. A cut reveals what he sees: a cityscape of tall apartment buildings surrounded by leafy trees. The bright colours of this scene set the palette for the film, which is awash in blues, yellows, reds, and greens, the latter often associated with Can, who wears a green sweater and often gazes meditatively at the trees in the parks around his neighbourhood. This green signals a hopefulness that is reflected in Can's expression as he faces the day at the outset of *Dealer*, but this first shot is also the last one to portray his family together in one frame.

Dealer is punctuated by Can's voiceover, brief statements that—in contrast to conventional use of first-person narration—do not provide a great deal of

15 Gallagher, 'The Limitation of Urban Space in Thomas Arslan's *Berlin Trilogy*', 339.

16 Gallagher, 'The Limitation of Urban Space in Thomas Arslan's *Berlin Trilogy*', 348.

17 See Augé, *Non-Places*.

insight into either the protagonist's subjective perspective or the valence of the images we see on screen. Nonetheless, these statements are significant for the film's critical project, functioning almost like captions or mottos to underscore key themes, while also disorganizing both the ostensible objectivity of the visual track's social realism and the conventional assumption of interiority attendant to subjective narration. Though the film begins with the image of a bed, *Dealer* swiftly shifts away from images of intimacy. Can's first line, 'My work day begins around noon', instead introduces the film's depiction of the ordinary, daily routine he and his fellow dealers follow, while also underscoring the film's main narrative focus: work. As Naiboglu aptly puts it, '*Dealer* is about work and the complexities of performing labour in an advanced, capitalist society, the multiple dilemmas of transforming one's subjectivity, position in society, identity and class, while searching to establish agency and authority amidst slippery and overwhelming patterns of capitalist exploitation.'¹⁸ While Can attempts to find this agency through the codes of behaviour that organize the illicit drug trade—'I had a rule: never to take any of the drugs that I was selling'—the pressure he experiences at the hands of the police (as a Turkish passport holder engaged in illegal activities), from Hakan (to deflect the attention of the police), and from Jale (to find a less risky line of work) conspire to undo the limited authority he possesses.

Dealer is structured around a series of transactions in which money changes hands: Can receives money in exchange for drugs; he passes the money he and the other street dealers earn to Hakan; he pays Eva for providing care for Meral; and when he goes to work in the restaurant, he is paid in cash, receiving a stack of bills at the end of the shift in return for his labour. When Jale asks Can what he did the previous day, he tells her, 'I earned money for us', but ultimately their relationship falters because they lack a legitimate and reliable source of money, demonstrating, like the other films in this chapter, the cruel optimism of pursuing love for those who are disenfranchised. Though *Dealer* focuses on Can's financial dealings with Hakan as he attempts to parlay his work as a dealer into a safer and more lucrative position running a bar, the film ultimately demonstrates that Can's true debt is not to Hakan but to the system of racial capitalism that holds him accountable for his own precarity.

Portrayed in unsensational terms, Hakan's murder nonetheless functions as the turning point of *Dealer*, since the terms of Can's debt shift in the face of his boss's death. No longer operating within a hierarchy

18 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 43.

that will reward him for assuming the risk of placing his hands in the service of illegal transactions, Can faces the possibility of performing manual labour of a different sort, since the only jobs he appears qualified for are menial ones. Here, *Dealer* makes visible the precarity that is the heritage of Turkish German labour migration in the context of post-Fordist flexibilization. While an older generation of Turkish German characters have established themselves in traditional professions, presumably having saved to launch themselves as entrepreneurs while performing industrial contract labour as *Gastarbeiter*—such as the friend's uncle whose restaurant Can goes to work in or the man (apparently his father) who owns the fabric store Can visits—Can himself explains in voiceover, 'I wanted to change my life, but I did not know how.' This remark, which can be understood as a motto for the film, registers the responsabilization of the migrant embodied by Can.

In *Dealer*, both Can and Jale have internalized the neoliberal promise of entitlement to social mobility, personal freedom, and choice, expressed in Can's aversion to wage labour and Jale's decision to leave her husband and craft a different life for herself and her child. However, in the course of the film, both characters run up against the limits of this promise, in ways that speak to the intersecting politics of race and gender in advanced capitalism. As a racialized minority, Can is policed and regulated in the public non-places of the housing projects where he deals drugs; forming a testament to his economic marginalization and racial exclusion, this surveillance extends more and more into the private sphere of his apartment over the course of the film. (Notably, the key representative of the surveillance state, the cop Erdal, is a childhood schoolmate of Can who is also Turkish German, a choice that defies the stereotype of the migrant as criminal while also attesting to the implication of racialized minorities in structures of violence along multiple vectors.) By contrast, Jale, who works as a cashier in a department store, succeeds at balancing parenthood and employment, but only at the cost of leaving Can and becoming a single mother, severing her ties with the milieu of racialized masculinity epitomized by her husband to found an alternative household with Eva, a white woman (notably played by Berlin School director Angela Schanelec) who cares for Meral.

Arslan's films have often been read as developing a correlation, at the levels of both form and content, between freedom of movement and freedom of choice in the construction of identities for a new, empowered generation of Turkish German characters. Joanne Leal and Klaus-Dieter Rossade have argued that the films of the 'Berlin Trilogy' contrast a passive male character

with an 'active female counterpart' who appears 'successful in determining her own existence with the help and support of other women'.¹⁹ Rob Burns likewise finds that Arslan complicates stereotypes about the 'immigrant criminal' in *Dealer* by trying 'to show what part is played in Can's fate by social factors and how much is his own responsibility. [...] long before he ends up in prison, it is apparent that Can is partly "the prisoner of his own indecisiveness"'.²⁰ It is certainly true that Arslan's films depict a world in which discourses of personal responsibility have replaced traditional structures of extended family, religion, and social welfare, as Burns suggests. Far from blaming his characters for indecision or failure to transcend the false binary of otherness/assimilation by making the right choices, however, *Dealer* and the other films in the 'Berlin Trilogy' rather make visible how these characters are forced to choose between irreconcilable alternatives.

In the neoliberal social order on display in *Dealer*, the only evidence of the state are the police and carceral regimes that promote Can's imprisonment; measures that might have assisted Can and Jale in securing better employment or a stable living situation are wholly absent. Like Arslan's other films, *Dealer* portrays the privatization of social risk and the concomitant retrenchment of gender roles in the present, where 'having a well-planned life emerges as a social norm of femininity' that determines a woman's ability to achieve equality in domestic affairs and childcare.²¹ Jale seeks to achieve the goal of a well-planned life, but she never gets there in the narrative trajectory of the film: she flatly refuses Can's suggestion to wait for his release from prison and reunite their family in Turkey, but her tender caress of his face in the subsequent shot attests to her continued affection for him. Ultimately unmasking the promise of mobility as a farce, *Dealer* traces, to recall Lauren Berlant's formulation, the unbinding of both Can and Jale from economic and intimate optimism.

This unbinding is registered throughout via Can's voiceover, which concludes following Jale's departure from the prison with the laconic statement, 'Strange how everything changes.' The final shots of the film, which lead to and follow upon this voiceover, are both formally assertive and poetic, disorganizing cinematic conventions and opening up a space of interpretation similar to the 'aesthetics of irresolution' that also mark

19 Leal and Rossade, 'Negotiating Gender, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Fatih Akin's and Thomas Arslan's Urban Spaces', 77.

20 Burns, 'The Politics of Cultural Representation', 373.

21 McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 77.



15 & 16. Mobility as farce in racial capitalism: Two consecutive shots of Jale (İdil Üner) and Can (Tamer Yigit) in the prison visiting room demonstrate the disorganization of cinematic conventions in Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* (1998).

Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*, discussed in Chapter 5.²² As Can and Jale converse in the prison about Can's likely deportation, a long take shows them in medium shot, with Can seated on the left at the end of a table and Jale next to him in the centre of the screen (see Illustration 15). As Jale prepares to leave, the subsequent shot reverses this spatial orientation completely, violating the 180-degree rule to show Can, now seated on the right, with Jale standing

22 Prager, 'Endings', 112.

behind him as she caresses his face (see Illustration 16). The door slams behind Jale with a loud clicking sound; a strain of piano music begins, and the camera cuts to a static shot of a park, panning across a field of leafy, green trees as Can's voice utters the final words of the film.

Subsequently, we see a series of five further shots, all of which depict spaces familiar from the narrative we have just watched, now thoroughly depopulated and made uncanny by their emptiness. We see a door with peeling paint outside the apartment block where Can and his fellow dealers sold drugs; a shot from inside the entryway, looking out toward the street, where a young mother had castigated Can for bringing criminal activity into the building; the kitchen of the restaurant where Can worked; the inside of his now vacant apartment; and a shot of the night city from the bedroom window, a reprise of Can's view in the opening scene of the film, now at dusk instead of dawn and unmoored from his perspective. These shots mark the absence not only of the film's specific characters from the spaces they had previously inhabited, but also, in a more general sense, of Europe's others, registering the disposability and expulsion of racialized subjects from the cosmopolitan centre of Berlin. The uncanniness of these final shots thus serves as a suggestive figure of the debts that shape the narrative of *Dealer* and the trajectory of Can, debt itself comprising a spectre of past borrowing that haunts the financial present.

In their depiction of migrant lives in Europe, Arslan's films overlap along various lines with the independent transnational film genre identified by Hamid Naficy, a genre characterized by its mobilization of the intersections between transnational subjectivity in general and specific migrant (auto)biographies in particular. Naficy highlights the production context of independent transnational films by diasporic filmmakers who, like Arslan, 'not only inhabit interstitial spaces of the host society but also work on the margins of the mainstream film industry'.²³ Arslan is himself bicultural and bilingual, having grown up in both Germany and Turkey before studying directing at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb), where he cooperated with fellow students Petzold and Schanelec. As we have seen, under the pioneering influence of these three directors, filmmakers associated with the Berlin School have pursued an independent production model that has been remarkably successful in allowing them to develop an aesthetically rigorous and politically engaged form of cinema in an era defined by media conglomeration. *Dealer* is emblematic of early Berlin School productions: this low-budget film was financed by a combination of

23 Naficy, 'Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics', 125.

funding through the Filmboard Berlin-Brandenburg and the long-running television sponsor of German cinema, ZDF's *Das kleine Fernsehspiel*, which has played a crucial role, since its debut in 1963, in bringing independent and experimental films to audiences, not least through its own production wing. Shot on 35mm, *Dealer* played in international cinematic release before running successfully on television, and it has enjoyed a wide viewership via home video formats.

In terms of form, Naficy's discussion of the independent transnational genre shares commonalities with the feminist film project as described by Teresa de Lauretis and other feminist film theorists who argued in the 1970s and 1980s that in order to achieve a new space of representation, feminist film production must mobilize precisely the contradictions between woman as image or sign and women as historical subjects.²⁴ Drawing on the legacy of both independent transnational and feminist filmmaking, Arslan employs a similar strategy to mobilize the intersections or contradictions between his characters as signs and images, on the one hand, and as historical subjects, on the other.

Arslan has specifically described his oeuvre as an attempt to find ways of reworking received images, clichés, and stereotypes. One way in which he does this is by creating deliberate connections across his films so that they can be viewed in cyclical relation to one another, as in a cycle of poems. Specific themes and shots (such as static images of trees) reappear across his films, allowing viewers to reinterpret similar ideas in new ways. In the case of *Dealer*, he explains that 'My task was not to abandon the clichés altogether—because then you can't narrate anything at all—but rather to dissolve them in the course of the film, in order to make another reality visible'.²⁵ Significant here are Arslan's casting choices, which in addition to nonprofessional actors who bring their own experiences as first- or second-generation migrants to their roles, also include prominent musicians and filmmakers, especially but not exclusively those with Turkish German backgrounds (such as filmmakers Neco Çelik and Schanelec, who appear in *Dealer*). Repeatedly casting the same actors in different roles across his films (such as Tamer Yigit, who plays Erol in *Geschwister/Kardeşler* and Can in *Dealer*), Arslan creates characters whom he describes as 'empty pages—projection screens for the spectator'.²⁶ This description echoes what de Lauretis has called the 'aesthetic of reception' developed

24 See de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*.

25 Holz, 'Kein Zugang zum Glück', n.p.

26 Interview with Thomas Arslan.

by feminist filmmakers like Helke Sander and Chantal Akerman (cited by Arslan as a direct influence on his work), 'where the spectator is the film's primary concern—primary in the sense that it is there from the beginning, inscribed in the filmmaker's project and even in the making of the film'.²⁷ The result is an open-ended, polysemic cinema that demands the spectator's participation.

This polysemic quality is produced not least by the films' affectless aesthetic, which drains emotion both from the filmic text itself (through the affectless line delivery of the actors, fragmentary narrative, refusal of closure, and so on) and from the address to the viewer (by foreclosing on identification and resisting emotionalization). Describing the choice to restrict his characters' affect in order to open up spaces of reception, Arslan explains: 'Making a film always poses the question of how to produce vitality aesthetically. This artistic process does not work for me by setting up life in all its intensity in front of the camera, but rather by activating something comparable in the audience. You have to leave the viewer some leeway to participate [*Spielraum*: literally, room to play]. That doesn't happen if the actors perform every emotion.'²⁸ As in Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*, this affectless aesthetic is a central vector not only of the representation of everyday life and ambiguous appeal to the viewer in Arslan's films, but also of their mode of production, since using nonprofessional actors and a minimalist style reduces costs.

Arslan's strategies—deploying and then dissolving clichés, and avoiding overtly emotionalized presentations of contemporary life—disorganize conventional modes of viewing, including those predicated on identification, voyeurism, or hermeneutics. Like other Berlin School directors, Arslan does not describe the viewer's participation as a process of making meaning from his films. Rather, he leaves open to the viewer possibilities for sensing the scenarios of contemporary life they display. As Marco Abel describes it, 'The effect is that Arslan's films do not merely represent the ordinari-ness of his protagonists' lives but render it sensible for the viewer'.²⁹ Abel persuasively argues that critical approaches to Arslan's films have tended toward reductionism, understanding their political valence only in terms of identitarian forms of representation; rather, Abel insists, 'The political quality of Arslan's films is [...] less defined by what they are about, by what they depict, than by how they work and what, as a result, they are capable of

27 de Lauretis, 'Rethinking Women's Cinema', 141.

28 Hanich, 'Ein Recht auf Liebe gibt es nicht', n.p.

29 Abel, 'The Minor Cinema of Thomas Arslan', 47.

doing.³⁰ Abel rightly suggests that Arslan's films demand that we suspend conventional metaphorical and representational approaches in favour of a novel analytical lens to considering their materialist depiction of bodies in space. At the same time, however, Abel's turn away from 'accounting for these bodies in terms of ethnicity or nationality' risks dovetailing with a postracial rhetoric that papers over the specific ways that race operates as a system for designating the other in capitalism, something that the films of Arslan's 'Berlin Trilogy', and especially *Dealer*, also make visible.³¹

Drawing on Abel's work, Naiboglu demonstrates that a materialist approach to Arslan's films is not incompatible with attention to racialized bodies, and she specifically emphasizes how film is uniquely suited to express 'situated yet transversal experiences of work, labour, social reproduction and precarity in relation to migration and displacement'.³² In the case of *Dealer*, she points out that, 'Ethnic difference and the questions of identity are among the molar crux of the film [...]. Most of the cast members are Turkish German actors, yet, other than their names, there is little direct reference to their diegetic ethnic identities', a quality that contributes to the film's resistance of representationalism.³³ In this way, Arslan's films disorganize not only formal-aesthetic cinematic conventions but also normative expectations of depictions of race and ethnicity on screen.

With reference to queer of colour critique, El-Tayeb argues that Europeans of colour are 'impossible' and therefore queer subjects within heteronormative discourses of migration and nation: 'In response, without necessarily reflecting it theoretically, minority subjects use queer performance strategies in continuously rearranging the components of the supposedly stable but incompatible identities assigned to them [...], creating cracks in the circular logic of normative European identities.'³⁴ Not least in the way he both deploys and empties out diegetic ethnic identities, Arslan's disorganized cinematic practice shares something in common with this strategic rearrangement of identity components, 'queering' ethnicity in El-Tayeb's sense in order to make visible the impasse of identity in Europe today. As we shall see, while on the surface they are very different sorts of films, *Dealer* shares in common with *Fremde Haut* a strategic deployment of 'queer' ethnicity to expose the othering logic of racial capitalism.

30 Abel, 'The Minor Cinema of Thomas Arslan', 55.

31 Abel, 'The Minor Cinema of Thomas Arslan', 54.

32 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 2.

33 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 43.

34 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxv.

Precarious Identities in *Fremde Haut*

Like *Dealer*, Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* addresses the promises and limitations of mobility for Europe's others, engaging an analogy between the mobility of migration and gender/sexual mobility that quite literally queers ethnicity. The film follows the story of Fariba Tabrizi, a lesbian who is persecuted in Iran for having an affair with a married woman, and who subsequently assumes the identity of a man in order to stay in Germany. Foregrounding both mobility and liminality, *Fremde Haut* begins in transit. The film's opening shot shows the exterior of an airplane accompanied by the optimistic strains of a peppy soundtrack; a cut to the interior space of the plane reveals Fariba and other women on board removing their hijabs upon the pilot's announcement that the aircraft has just left Iranian airspace. Arriving at the Frankfurt airport, Fariba requests temporary resident status, but she is eventually denied entry as a refugee when she is unable to provide proof of political persecution in Iran (she does not out herself as a lesbian to the authorities).

In an airport bathroom, Fariba meets Siamak Mostafai (Navid Akhavan), a fellow Iranian who is granted the right to seek asylum in Germany because of his political work as a student activist. Distraught over the consequences of his actions for his family in Iran, which have led to his brother's imprisonment and subsequent death, Siamak commits suicide. When Fariba discovers his dead body, she decides to adopt Siamak's identity, cutting her hair, donning his clothing and glasses, and making use of his immigration documents. As Siamak, Fariba is assigned to a hostel for asylum seekers in the Swabian village of Sielmingen; having hidden Siamak's body in a suitcase, Fariba repays her debt to Siamak by burying him, reciting prayers over his grave, and writing letters to his parents in Siamak's voice, which we hear in voiceover narration during the course of the film.

In Sielmingen, Fariba/Siamak is officially banned from either holding a job or travelling outside the town limits, demonstrating the im/mobility of the asylum seeker. In order to obtain a counterfeit passport, s/he incurs debts to a range of individuals who help him/her find illegal work and navigate his/her precarious status. Working at a sauerkraut factory, where s/he passes as a man, Fariba/Siamak meets Anne (Anneke Kim Sarnau), a fellow factory worker and single mother. As part of a wager with another co-worker to procure a bicycle she can't afford for her son's birthday, Anne agrees to go on a date with Fariba/Siamak, and after spending time together, the two fall in love.

Although Anne at first believes Fariba/Siamak to be a man, the film portrays, in unsensational terms, her slow process of understanding Fariba/Siamak's gender. Anne's acceptance of Fariba/Siamak is contrasted with the hostility exhibited by her friends Sabine (Nina Vorbrodt), Andi (Jens Münchow), and Uwe (Hinnerk Schönemann), also workers at the factory, who subject Fariba/Siamak to racist hazing and Islamophobic slurs. When Andi and Uwe enter Anne's house unannounced, discovering the relationship between Anne and Fariba and seeing Fariba dressed only in a tank top and underwear, this hostility culminates in a violent homophobic and xenophobic attack, which leads to Fariba's arrest and deportation. The film's ambiguous ending, which mirrors the opening scene, shows Fariba in transit. This time, when the pilot announces that the aircraft has crossed into Iranian airspace, we watch as Fariba enters the plane's restroom, flushes her own identity papers down the toilet, retrieves Siamak's passport from a hiding place in her boot, and transforms herself into the dead man once more. This circuitous ending, which attests to the impasse faced by Fariba—whose existence as a lesbian Muslim is disallowed in both Germany and Iran—leaves open whether her decision to enter Iran as Siamak will culminate in her ability to achieve sovereignty by living as a man or in her intensified persecution as a recognized opponent of the regime (or, indeed, in her arrest as a cross-dressing woman, a crime in Iran). While operating somewhat differently than the ending of *Dealer*, with its austere cinematic language and disruption of identification, *Fremde Haut* nonetheless insists on a similar aesthetics of irresolution in its depiction of migrant lives.

Like other films discussed throughout this book, *Fremde Haut* notably blurs genre conventions and expectations in its search for a cinematic language to depict the precarity of the present. Maccarone, an experienced director of genre pieces including the film comedy *Alles wird gut* (Everything Will Be Fine, 1998)—co-written with the theorist Fatima El-Tayeb, who was her partner at the time—and multiple episodes of the long-playing television crime serial *Tatort*, draws on the affective and visual vocabulary of these and other genres in *Fremde Haut*. As with the other films discussed here and in Chapter 5, this engagement of genre underpins the amphibic form of *Fremde Haut*, which, like *Dealer*, was co-financed by German television, and which played very successfully at international film festivals, beginning with its debut in competition at Karlovy Vary. Acquired by Wolfe, the largest exclusive distributor of LGBTQ films for home video in North America, *Fremde Haut* has circulated widely under its English title *Unveiled*, which notably markets the film via a doubled cliché of exposure, emphasizing

how the neoliberal mediascape facilitates the market-oriented success of queer cinema for an affluent international audience.

In the blurred generic language of *Fremde Haut*, Fariba's passing as Siamak is rendered via sight gags and misunderstandings that are often played for laughs, but that also generate suspense and fear. The film's dark comedy is signalled by an early scene when a border patrol officer heaves Fariba's suitcase into a van and jokingly asks if she's hiding her husband inside, a comment that reveals his heteronormative and misogynist mindset, but that also foreshadows Fariba's actual use of the same suitcase to transport Siamak's corpse later on. The budding relationship between Fariba/Siamak and Anne is conveyed through conventions of the romantic comedy: they are both attractive and sympathetic characters, whose potential relationship faces a series of obstacles, including linguistic and cultural difference, the objections of Anne's friends, and Fariba/Siamak's economic problems, which they eventually surmount in order to consummate their relationship. However, this romance does not culminate in a rom-com-style happy ending, but rather in the climactic scene of violence that results in Fariba's forced deportation. As these examples demonstrate, genre blurring in *Fremde Haut* leads to a disorganized viewing experience for audiences, whose expectations are regularly deferred.

In the queer narrative world of *Fremde Haut*, the deferral of genre expectations figures the destabilization of identity categories, foiling assumptions about gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and language, and refusing normative binaries of sameness/difference. This point is foregrounded in a striking shot at the outset of the credit sequence, in which Fariba's face, reflected in the glass of the passport control booth, is superimposed onto and blurs together with the face of the border guard who sits behind the glass pane, visually undoing binaries of man/woman and European/other, while also emphasizing the material effects deriving from the (here very literal) policing of these borders. When Fariba meets with immigration authorities to present her asylum case, she is automatically provided with an interpreter, but she subverts assumptions about Muslim women by speaking fluent German; as a translator, she is conversant not only with the German language, but also with cultural and literary traditions, as demonstrated when she provides a border guard the solution to his crossword clue: Romantic poet = Novalis.

Like *Dealer*, *Fremde Haut* draws on formal-aesthetic strategies of feminist and queer filmmaking to encourage an open-ended and polysemic form of viewing and in its critical engagement with dominant cinematic codes, especially codes that underpin the representation of Fariba/Siamak. As

Faye Stewart puts it, 'Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* is a rich and complex visual text that ultimately asks more questions than it answers, leaving matters of identity unresolved and open for viewers to decode.'³⁵ Emily Jeremiah specifically examines the way the film draws on feminist and lesbian cinematic practices that unsettle codes of looking in dominant cinema, arguing that *Fremde Haut* participates in such queer challenges to notions of the gaze as (necessarily) masculine and objectifying; and to gender and desire as simply or casually connected to sex.³⁶ While both Stewart and Jeremiah are careful to point out that Fariba pursues crossdressing as a strategy of survival and not because she identifies as a man or experiences gender dysphoria, Jack Halberstam reads Fariba/Siamak as a decidedly 'trans*' character (trans* being his term for highlighting the provisional quality of gender variability). As Halberstam argues:

Balanced as s/he is between nations, identities, and legibility, the asylum seeker traces a trans* orbit as s/he [...] passes back and forth between legal and illegal, man and woman, citizen and foreigner. By naming this space inbetween as trans*, we begin to see the importance of mutual articulations of race, nation, migration, and sexuality. [...] The trans* embodiment that Fariba/Siamak represents in *Fremde Haut* is a reminder that identities and modes of embodiment shift in meaning and form as people cross boundaries and find themselves subject to new and different kinds of regulation.³⁷

For Halberstam, reading Fariba/Siamak as trans* helps to conceptualize how identity is by definition provisional and contingent for all refugees, who are made responsible to perform in certain ways (i.e. assimilate, integrate, conform). This is especially so for racialized Muslims in Germany, interpellated as they are by contradictory discourses of, on the one hand, European openness and tolerance (in contrast to 'intolerant' Islamic societies like Iran) and, on the other, ethnonationalism (which scapegoats Muslim migrants and holds them accountable for the processes of neoliberalization). Through the trans* figure of Fariba/Siamak, *Fremde Haut* makes visible the constitutive and intersecting forces of homophobia, transphobia, racism, and xenophobia in constructing European identity, troubling the alignment

35 Stewart, 'Filming Faith and Desire', 176.

36 Jeremiah, 'Gender, Germanness, and the Gaze in Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* (2005)', 598.

37 Halberstam, *Trans**, 40; 42.

of emancipatory politics, including feminism, pro-LGBTQ attitudes, and antiracism, with European values.

Key to the film's imaging of these intersections, debt underpins virtually every relationship in *Fremde Haut*, demonstrating how those living precariously cannot survive without becoming liable. Debts large and small structure Fariba's quest to remain in Germany. When she first meets him in the airport bathroom, she gives the troubled Siamak her last cigarette, initiating a relationship of exchange that lays the groundwork for her subsequent decision to assume his identity. Fariba/Siamak is likewise indebted to Maxim (Yevgeni Sitokhin), her/his roommate at the refugee hostel, who recommends her/him for a job at the sauerkraut factory in exchange for warm meals. Fariba/Siamak also incurs debts to Anne, who hides her/him from immigration officials who raid the sauerkraut factory and later assists her/him in obtaining money to procure a false passport, debts that Fariba/Siamak can only repay affectively, with gestures of kindness and tenderness.

Debt in *Fremde Haut* highlights the shared precarity that determines the living conditions of most of the film's characters, including Anne, who is indebted to her co-worker Waltraud, who gives her the bicycle for her son Melvin's birthday that she can't afford as a factory worker, and to Andi, Sabine, and especially Uwe, who help her to raise and care for Melvin in his father's absence. All of these characters are portrayed performing the hard manual labour required by their employment at the sauerkraut factory, picking cabbages in the field, processing them on the assembly line, and fermenting the cabbage in large batches, a detailed depiction of factory work reminiscent of DEFA films like *Alle meine Mädchen* (see Chapter 1). This labour is portrayed as back breaking (and stinky), but not as especially exploitative: the factory is a family-run enterprise, and its reliance on the low-wage labour of illegal migrants is depicted as a fact of life for a German-owned business that still produces inexpensive consumer goods in the era of globalization and outsourcing. In this regard, it is no accident that the factory, a relic of Fordism, makes sauerkraut, that traditional emblem of Germanness. The irony of the fact that the production of this symbolic food requires the labour of illegal migrant workers highlights the longstanding (but often hidden and disavowed) centrality of migrants to labour and production in Germany while also destabilizing claims to the 'purity' of German identity, instead exposing its hybridity. In a pivotal scene for the film's blurring of affects, which combines slapstick humour and visual jokes with fear and suspense over the fate of Fariba/Siamak and the other migrant workers, the factory is raided by immigration police. Anne hides Fariba/Siamak in a huge vat of fermenting cabbage, literally



17. Precarious labour and contingent identities: Fariba/Siamak (Jasmin Tabatabai) hides in a vat of fermenting cabbage in Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* (*Unveiled*, 2005).

mixing her/him into the kraut, a potent signifier for this hybridity (see Illustration 17).

Debt in *Fremde Haut* serves as an important figure for the film's intersectional critique of neoliberalism, demonstrating the impact of changing structures of labour and money on everyone, but emphasizing their particular effects for racialized subjects and migrants. These uneven relations are figured through a series of three shots in which Fariba/Siamak exchanges looks with a white man in the rearview mirror of a car, shots that form a motif in the film linking the exchange of the gaze to relations of indebtedness. Central to the film's critical intervention, these scenes are notable for the way they draw on strategies of feminist and queer cinema to problematize dominant looking relations in mainstream cinema. *Fremde Haut* was co-written by director Maccarone and cinematographer Judith Kaufmann, one of the few active women cinematographers in contemporary German film, who brought a cinematographer's view to the script that is especially evident in these three pivotal scenes in which the rearview mirror mediates structures of looking.

The first of these takes place upon Fariba's arrival in Germany, when a border patrol agent drives her to the refugee hostel where she meets Siamak. As she rides in the back seat of his van, Fariba notices the agent adjusting his rearview mirror so that he can get a better look at her. Framed in close-up via an over-the-shoulder shot, the rearview mirror reflects Fariba as she returns his objectifying gaze, looking directly at him in the mirror before donning sunglasses that block his ability to see her eyes and face.

In a parallel scene later in the film, Anne snuggles up to Fariba/Siamak and begins to kiss her/him while riding in the back seat of Uwe's car. Watching them in the rearview mirror, Uwe disrupts their kiss by slamming on the brakes, jostling everyone in the car. This gesture, which foreshadows this character's violent attack on Anne and Fariba later in the film, is part of a pattern that eventually causes the police to pull Uwe over for driving erratically. Though his aggression and alcohol consumption have led to his poor driving, it is not Uwe but Fariba/Siamak who ultimately receives a citation in the amount of €40 for having travelled outside the district to which s/he is confined as a temporary resident.

During this scene, a conversation takes place between Anne and Sabine that underscores how debt defines the racialized minority subject. The pregnant Sabine tells Anne that her budding relationship with Fariba/Siamak has 'no future'. When Anne resists the futural orientation imposed by Sabine on this nascent relationship, asking, 'But what about the present?', Sabine retorts that in the present, Fariba/Siamak is a seasonal contract worker whom her father pays €4/hour to work in the sauerkraut factory, a wage that is not even sufficient for the present (this insufficiency is subsequently confirmed by the equation we are required to make between Fariba/Siamak's hourly wage and the ticket s/he will have to pay, representing 10 hours of labour). Here, Sabine defines Fariba/Siamak exclusively through her/his labour and (meagre) earning capacity, emphasizing how s/he is already in debt to the future. Nonetheless Anne insists that she wants 'to get to know someone who is different, who comes from somewhere different, who thinks differently', a statement that destabilizes the firm links between economic potential and reproductive futurity articulated by Sabine in favour of a queer desire for difference and presence.

While the film therefore expresses a hopeful vision of an alternative imaginary regarding sexuality and cultural difference, it also demonstrates how this vision is undermined by the realities of racial capitalism for refugees like Fariba. This is confirmed in a final scene featuring the exchange of gazes in a rearview mirror. Here, a cut takes us from an exterior shot of a car to a close-up of the rearview mirror in its interior, framing a reflection of Fariba/Siamak, who once again sits in the back seat. As s/he looks intently in the mirror, the film cuts to another extreme close-up, also of the rearview mirror, now reflecting the white man she is looking at, the forger from whom s/he seeks to buy a passport in Fariba's name. Having learned that Siamak's asylum request has been denied because of the changing political landscape in Iran, where his student activist group is no longer banned, Fariba must now find a way to stay in Germany without Siamak's borrowed

identity. However, her/his attempts to earn sufficient funds by working at the sauerkraut factory during the day and washing windows at a car rental agency at night have not provided enough wages to pay off the forger. Lacking contact to anyone who could afford to lend her money and devoid of resources other than her/his own labouring body, Fariba/Siamak appeals to the human decency of the counterfeiter to extend credit to her/him. Looking back at her/him in the rearview mirror, the forger emphasizes the irony of the request s/he has just made to him: 'You want *me* to lend *you* money, so *you* can pay *me*.' His flat refusal to help and Fariba/Siamak's lack of recourse to other options demonstrate, as in *Dealer*, the responsabilization of the migrant/refugee character in the context of racial capitalism. When her/his last hope for financial assistance is rebuffed, Fariba/Siamak proceeds to ask the forger if he knows anyone who buys cars, indicating her/his turn, having exhausted all other options, to criminal activity.

It is no accident that these three critical scenes take place in cars, and that Fariba/Siamak steals a car from the rental agency where s/he works as a last-ditch effort to raise the funds to buy the passport. As Lutz Koepnick has pointed out, cars have been crucial to the development of both modern capitalism and narrative cinema, serving as key signifiers of social mobility throughout film history. Still omnipresent in the Berlin School films that Koepnick discusses, automobiles may continue to 'index dormant desires for unfettered movement and individual transformation, for breaking out of the mould of given spaces and positions, for questioning conventional regimes of representation. [...] [H]owever, Berlin School automobilism has little patience for successful narratives of progress and change, of individual autonomy and forward movement'. Instead, these films image a world where 'capitalism reigns triumphant' and the promise of cars appears as a form of cruel optimism, since nobody is actually going anywhere.³⁸ In *Fremde Haut*, we see shots that index mobility again and again, including numerous images of airplanes, a strikingly beautiful shot of birds circling in flight, several sequences in which Anne and Fariba/Siamak ride together on Anne's motorbike, and various characters riding on bicycles and in cars. However, as the circular logic of the opening and closing scenes of transit emphasizes, vehicles in *Fremde Haut*, like those in Berlin School films, ultimately suggest the impasse of mobility in the neoliberal age.

Taken together, the three rearview mirror scenes figure the critical intervention of *Fremde Haut* by making visible the way Fariba/Siamak is held accountable for her/his own precarity, while being interpellated by,

38 Koepnick, 'Cars...', 76.

respectively, the sexist/objectifying gaze of the border guard, the racist/xenophobic gaze of Uwe, and the responsabilizing gaze of the counterfeiter. Though in each scene Fariba looks back, exchanging gazes with these men, this visual reciprocity does not lead to empathy or identification. In this way, the film explicitly problematizes the alignment of Europe with support for queer rights and with feminism, demonstrating racism, homophobia, and misogyny as internal problems in Germany. Via its emphasis on labour, money, and debt, *Fremde Haut* further demonstrates the intersections of these internal problems with post-Fordist capitalism, exposing how the latter co-opts queer rights and feminism for a supposedly liberal and tolerant European identity.

The Incommensurability of Exchange in *Auf der anderen Seite*

The limits of European tolerance also form the explicit subject of Fatih Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite*, one that is explored, as in *Fremde Haut*, via a queer intercultural relationship that stands at the heart of the film's interconnected storylines. An ensemble film with a non-linear narrative structure, *Auf der anderen Seite* is organized into three chapters that follow three parent-child pairs (two sets of mothers and daughters and one father and son) whose lives become irrevocably intertwined through a series of fateful events. These events, which revise German (film) history in light of the profound effects of Turkish labour migration, repeatedly place the characters in relations of symbolic indebtedness, figured through the trajectories of exchange that dominate the narrative, linguistic, and formal-aesthetic registers of the film. These trajectories of exchange are signalled already by the film's German title, literally 'on the other side' but also meaning 'on the other hand', which suggests notions of deferral and displacement as well as the holding together of incommensurable perspectives.

The six main characters of *Auf der anderen Seite* repeatedly cross paths and exchange places with one another (sometimes unknowingly), while passing across the borders of countries, regions, and languages but also across the threshold of life and death, in what Barbara Mennel has referred to as 'criss-crossing in global space and time.'³⁹ This emphasis on crossing and exchange is evident on a visual level in the film's repetition, across its three chapters, of the same individual shots but with a slight difference—for instance, they track movement in different directions, crossing from left

39 See Mennel, 'Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time.'

to right or vice versa, or they reveal new information through a small shift in focus. Thus, the film makes visible the multidirectional movement of bodies and things in the global age, but its use of repetition with a difference also foregrounds the sense in which this movement is overdetermined by asymmetrical relations of exchange.

The second instalment of Akin's 'Love, Death, and the Devil Trilogy', *Auf der anderen Seite* joins *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-On*, 2004) and *The Cut* (2014) in addressing these universal themes in the context of the specific intertwined histories of Germany and Turkey, with each film zooming in on one particular theme as its organizing principle. While *Gegen die Wand* tackles romantic and familial love through the story of the doomed pair Cahit (Birol Ünel) and Sibel (Sibel Kikelli), and *The Cut* focuses on evil in narrating the history of the Armenian genocide, *Auf der anderen Seite* takes on death, portraying the sudden and shocking deaths of two of its protagonists and dwelling on the aftermath of these deaths for those who remain. However, the central role played by the romance between the German-born Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) and the Turkish-born Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay), which forms the nodal point connecting all the film's characters, establishes love and intimacy as equally significant to death in *Auf der anderen Seite*. This romance also serves to queer ethnicity, in El-Tayeb's sense, since it makes visible precisely how Europeans of colour are produced as impossible subjects in a context where 'the unifying Europe [...] seems less open and pluralist than shaped by ethnonationalist structures excluding racial and religious minorities by assigning them a permanently transitory migrant status', a description that strongly resonates with the depiction not only of asylum-seeker Ayten but also of other migrant characters in the film.⁴⁰

Moreover, on a formal-aesthetic level, *Auf der anderen Seite* reflects 'The constant mixing of genres and styles' that El-Tayeb notes as a key characteristic of the emphasis placed by minority cultural production on identity as a process, a disorganized mixing that 'reflects a resistance to notions of purity and uncomplicated belonging based on the positionality of racialized Europeans, but resonating with larger questions facing minority communities and activists worldwide'.⁴¹ A film that thematizes minority activism in its diegetic narrative, *Auf der anderen Seite* was shot in both Germany and Turkey, with an international cast of actors from both countries speaking in multiple languages and dialects. Through his casting choices and through narrative conventions, Akin—who was born in

40 El-Tayeb, 'European Others', xxxiii.

41 El-Tayeb, 'European Others', xxx-xxxi.

Hamburg in 1973 as the son of Turkish labour migrants—notably resignifies the histories of both German and Turkish cinema while also mixing in aspects of the cinema of migration and global queer cinema. For instance, Hanna Schygulla, a major star of the New German Cinema, came out of retirement to play the German mother, Susanne Staub, in *Auf der anderen Seite*, and her presence in the film emphasizes the resonance in Akin's work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's films, such as *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, 1979), in which Schygulla played the eponymous role. This resonance also extends to the positioning of the 'Love, Death, and the Devil Trilogy' as a reprise of Fassbinder's 'FRG Trilogy' (as well as Akin's own self-styling as an auteur in the mould of Fassbinder), and to references to Fassbinder's well-known film addressing labour migration, *Ali – Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali – Fear Eats the Soul*, 1974) in *Auf der anderen Seite*.⁴² Likewise, Tuncel Kurtiz, who plays the central character Ali, represents another resonant casting choice, having starred in more than 70 Turkish film and television productions.

These multivalent qualities of *Auf der anderen Seite* underpin not only its critical approach to the nation and national cinema, but also its international success, at the Cannes Film Festival, where it debuted in competition and won the Best Screenplay prize; in both Turkey and Germany, where it won significant directing prizes; and with audiences around the world as one of the most successful German-produced films of the 21st century. The significant scholarship on the film is a further testament to its success, with ample critical attention to its transnational aesthetics, multilingualism, and critique of globalization, among others.⁴³ While *Auf der anderen Seite* has sometimes been criticized as an affirmative film that advocates for a politics of reconciliation through a universalizing narrative and widely appealing cinematic style, my reading of money and debt attends to the intersections of Akin's film with other resistant cinematic projects in the present, including that of the Berlin School.

Auf der anderen Seite begins with a prologue that takes place at a gas station, a generic nonplace that is however firmly located in time and space via dialogue and mise-en-scène when the characters wish each other Happy Byram and converse inside the convenience store about the diegetic music,

42 Fassbinder's 'FRG Trilogy' consists of three films that focus on postwar West German history and trace the intersections of gender, nation, and economy: *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*; *Lola* (1981); and *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss* (*Veronika Voss*, 1982).

43 See for example Breger, 'Configuring Affect'; Elsaesser, 'Ethical Calculus'; Gramling, 'On the Other Side of Monolingualism'; Isenberg, 'Fatih Akin's Cinema of Intersections'; and Mennel, 'Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time.'

recorded by the artist Kazım Koyuncu, who is locally popular in Turkey's Black Sea Coast region. Here, a man whom we will subsequently encounter as Nejat (Baki Davrak) pays for gas and food before driving on into the countryside, establishing the centrality of transactional exchanges in the plot of *Auf der anderen Seite*. Introduced by an intertitle, 'Yeter's Death', the first chapter of the film commences with several establishing shots that displace the action to the northern German town of Bremen on May Day, where a worker's rights protest is taking place. Here we meet Ali, a labour migrant of Turkish heritage, who pays for sex with the prostitute Jessy (Nursel Köse), a woman who subsequently reveals that her real name is Yeter and she is also of Turkish heritage. Ali lives alone as a pensioner and is regularly visited by his son Nejat, a professor of German literature at the university in Hamburg. In an early sequence, the two attend a horse race, where Ali wins money on a bet. Spurred on by his windfall, he proposes that Yeter give up sex work to move in and sleep exclusively with him; in return he will pay her the same wage she earns in the brothel. Though the €700 he won at the track is hardly sufficient to cover Yeter's wages (she tells Ali that she nets €3000 per month), Ali promises that his pension and earnings on some properties he owns in Turkey provide enough to finance their contract, and that if all else fails, he can rely on Nejat for money too. Yeter, in turn, agrees to Ali's proposal not least because she has been threatened by two men who, having heard her speaking Turkish on the street in the red-light district where she works, follow her onto the tram and insist that she repent of her immoral ways. Soon after Yeter moves in with Ali, he suffers a debilitating heart attack, and later (accidentally) kills Yeter in a violent outburst. As a result, Ali is jailed in Germany and eventually deported to Turkey. Meanwhile Nejat has learned that Yeter has a daughter in Turkey, a student whom she supports financially. Deeply ashamed by his father's violent act and seeking to atone for Yeter's death, Nejat travels to Istanbul for her funeral and searches for her daughter, whose education he hopes to finance. Although he fails to find Ayten, Nejat decides to stay in Istanbul, where he purchases a German-language bookstore from an ex-pat who has decided to return to Germany.

As Claudia Breger points out, this opening chapter is replete with numerous clichés familiar from German cultural representations of labour migration (e.g. the character named Ali; the framing of Ali and Yeter in tight, claustrophobic spaces; the depiction of gendered violence) as well as Islamophobic stereotypes endemic to dominant media representations of Muslims in Europe, 'but the potentially clichéd plot opening and the potentially clichéd character portrait are, as the film continues, subtly displaced

through their development in(to) a configuration that makes room for the complexities of fictional experience in a world of overdetermined events and multidimensional actors, connected by an artful play of differences and similarities'.⁴⁴ Akın's employment and subtle displacement of clichés recalls Arslan's strategy of deploying and dissolving clichés in his 'Berlin Trilogy'; as Breger also suggests, although it integrates documentary-style aesthetics with 'a form of storytelling that unabashedly foregrounds its status as an act of narrative composition', *Auf der anderen Seite* nonetheless shares something in common with the cinema of the Berlin School, in particular via its mode of depicting space and movement.⁴⁵

Like its first chapter, the film's second chapter 'Lotte's Death' begins on May Day, but this time in Istanbul, where a workers' protest is also taking place. This protest, however, takes on more violent dimensions than the one we have seen in Bremen, as gunshots ring out and the police chase masked demonstrators through the city. Ayten, a political activist belonging to a revolutionary cell of the Kurdish resistance movement, manages to avoid being caught and hides the smoking gun, but, having lost her cell phone during the chase, she flees to Germany to escape arrest. Arriving in Hamburg, Ayten is greeted by a network of Kurdish activists in exile and their supporters, one of whom owns a restaurant. He asks Ayten if she has any money, and suggests that she work for him, telling her, 'You look like a waitress'. Infuriated by his gender stereotyping and lack of solidarity, Ayten borrows €100 from the man, which she plans to pay back once she finds her mother, whom she believes to be working in a shoe store in Bremen. However, when her search for her mother—whom we know to be Yeter—proves fruitless, Ayten is unable to repay this debt. Living precariously in Hamburg, she relies on the facilities at the university; we see her, in a shot that is repeated from the first chapter but now with a focus on Ayten, asleep in Nejat's lecture hall, both characters unaware of the connection they share to Yeter. Outside the cafeteria, Ayten asks Lotte, a student of English and Spanish, for money to buy food, which Lotte freely gives her; when Ayten promises to pay her back, Lotte declines, telling Ayten that she can return the favour the next time they eat together. Lotte offers hospitality to Ayten, giving her money and clothes to wear, and inviting her to stay in her mother's home. With Ayten wearing Lotte's clothes, the two women go out dancing together, and in an erotically charged scene they dance and kiss before ending up together in Lotte's bed. The next

44 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 74.

45 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 71.

morning, the outspoken Ayten vocally spars with Lotte's mother Susanne about the colonialist politics of globalization and the false promises of the European Union, with Susanne repeatedly insisting that Ayten's political resistance is futile, since things will get better as soon as Turkey becomes part of the EU. Susanne, pitting cherries for a pie at the kitchen table, here epitomizes the cliché of white western privilege as much as Ali in the previous chapter represented the stereotypical Turkish labour migrant. Channelling Maria Braun, the emblem of the German nation's postwar reconstruction, Susanne Staub (whose surname, meaning dust, aptly registers her outmoded attitudes) serves as a mouthpiece here for the fantasy of Europe as an inclusive space, even a panacea for entrenched political conflicts. When Ayten responds, 'Fuck the European Union!', Susanne—who has already made clear that she resents Lotte's choice to extend hospitality to Ayten—responds, 'I don't want you to talk like that in my house. You can talk like that in your house, ok?' Susanne's comment registers the incommensurable power relations that inhere in hospitality, with the host (whether in the home or the nation at large) dictating the conditions under which the guest has the right to remain.

Later, Lotte returns to find Ayten crying on the front stoop: made to feel unwelcome by Susanne, she enlists Lotte's help in the search for Yeter. Though an extended shot depicts Lotte and Ayten driving in a car right next to the tram in which Nejat and Yeter are riding, Ayten never succeeds in finding her mother. Instead, in a scene reminiscent of *Fremde Haut*, a routine traffic stop puts an abrupt end to Ayten's covert status in Germany when Lotte is pulled over by the police, who ask to see Ayten's identity papers. Ayten requests political asylum, but after a protracted legal battle that, we later learn, was financed by Susanne, this request is denied on the grounds that, due to Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU, Ayten is unlikely to be subjected to political persecution or violence in her country of origin, a decision that clearly exposes the limits of the European promise defended by Susanne, particularly given the fact that the position of the Kurdish population for whom Ayten is fighting formed a point of contention in the Turkish government's negotiations for entry into the EU.

Like the film's first chapter, 'Lotte's death' also depicts a deportation and its consequences: Ayten is deported to Turkey, where she is jailed, and Lotte follows her to Istanbul. Speaking on the telephone with her daughter, Susanne pleads with Lotte to come home, but when Lotte refuses, Susanne cuts off her financial support with the rhetorical question, 'Do you know how much your girlfriend has already cost me?' Still hoping to help Ayten, Lotte consults texts she finds at Nejat's bookstore; although she ends up

renting a room from him, Nejat never discovers that Lotte's lover is Yeter's daughter, the same woman he has been searching for. When Lotte is finally allowed to visit Ayten and offers to help her in any way possible, Ayten asks Lotte to retrieve the hidden gun so that it can be passed on to other activists. Having located the gun, Lotte is tragically shot with it, in another accidental but overdetermined act of violence, when she chases down the young boys who have stolen her purse and they turn the weapon they find inside it on her. This chapter ends with an image of Lotte's coffin moving across the screen on a conveyor belt as it is loaded onto an airplane, exactly repeating, with only a change in direction, a previous shot of Yeter's coffin being unloaded from the airplane.

In the final chapter of *Auf der anderen Seite*, also titled 'On the other side', Susanne travels to Turkey to collect Lotte's belongings from Nejat and to visit Ayten. In the airport, Susanne unknowingly crosses paths with Ali, whose deportation from Germany coincides with her own arrival in Istanbul. In a striking sequence that is marked by a strong formal-aesthetic divergence from the other scenes of the film, Susanne experiences inconsolable grief for the loss of her daughter while staying in a hotel room. Her grief is conveyed through a series of static takes, linked together through dissolves, that track the passing of time in a sequence reminiscent of time-lapse photography. Shot from one awkward camera angle, with the camera positioned high on the wall like a surveillance device, revealing a fish-eye view of the hotel room, the scene is noteworthy for both Susanne's highly expressive outpouring of sadness (unique even within a film about death that is riddled with tragic events) and for the unusually distanced way in which this sadness is represented, through the single, skewed camera angle that draws attention to the cinematic apparatus. With its use of observational cinematography that recalls the formal rigor of the Berlin School, this scene depicts emotions without emotionalizing, eschewing strategies of the cinema of identification and opening up an ambiguous space of representation through the tension between form and content. Susanne's protracted mourning for Lotte contrasts sharply with the notable absence of such expressions of grief over Yeter's death—since the one person who would mourn her loss, Ayten, never learns of her death—highlighting the asymmetrical relations that determine the grievability of life.⁴⁶ Through this scene, the white child Lotte appears to function as a cipher for the grief that is not expressed over racialized bodies like Yeter's that have been made disposable by the precariousness of life in global capitalism.

46 See Butler, *Frames of War*.

The whiteness of Susanne and Lotte is further marked by a subsequent scene taking place in Nejat's apartment, where Susanne spends the night in the room Lotte had rented. Clearly riddled with guilt for arguing with Lotte and withdrawing financial support from her during their last conversation, Susanne now reads Lotte's diary and discovers her daughter's recognition of their similarities and empathy for Susanne's position. Waking up in Lotte's room in the morning, Susanne conjures the image of her white, blonde-haired daughter positioned against the whitewashed walls of the sunlit room. The apparition of Lotte, returned from the dead, appears not so much to haunt Susanne as to dissolve her trauma and unbind her from grief, opening up a pathway forward. Ultimately, Susanne's undoing in these scenes conveys the dissolution of the cliché of the white German mother that she has embodied so far in the film. The marked change in her demeanour and the film's final narrative events suggest that Susanne's original standpoint as a white European is displaced by her experience of loss and the connections she makes in Istanbul.

After a convivial dinner with Nejat, Susanne asks him how much rent her daughter paid, and proposes that she take over Lotte's contract as Nejat's tenant. Having previously defended the values (and boundaries) of Europe, Susanne now decides to stay in Istanbul, stepping into her daughter's shoes—in another instance of repetition with a difference—and aiming to repay the debts incurred throughout the narrative of *Auf der anderen Seite* by facilitating reconciliation along multiple registers. When Susanne visits Ayten in jail, she uses the same words that Lotte had spoken, 'I want to help you', offering Ayten whatever she needs: money, lawyers, food. In a striking shot, Ayten's reflection in the glass pane of the prison visiting booth is superimposed on Susanne, who sits behind it, so that the two women's faces overlap but never merge (see Illustration 18). Reminiscent of a similar shot at the outset of *Fremde Haut* that aligns Fariba's face with the border patrol officer as she enters Germany, this shot also strongly recalls a well-known image from Margarete von Trotta's classic feminist film *Die bleierne Zeit* (The Leaden Years, released in English as *Marianne and Juliane*, 1981) about domestic terrorism in Germany in the 1970s. That shot, taking place when Juliane (Jutta Lampe) visits Marianne (Barbara Sukowa) in jail, superimposes at a similarly skewed angle the faces of the two sisters, stand-ins for Christiane Ensslin and her sister, founding member of the Red Army Faction Gudrun Ensslin. In *Die bleierne Zeit* this shot notably highlights the sisters' similarities across political difference, with Christiane representing liberal feminism and her sister an advocate of violent resistance against the state, but it also indexes the incommensurability of their positions on opposite sides of the prison's walls.



18. The incommensurable positionalities of Susanne (Hanna Schygulla) and Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay) in Fatih Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*, 2007).

In *Auf der anderen Seite*, the superimposed faces of Ayten and Susanne similarly register incommensurable positionalities (in terms of political affiliation, generation, class, race, religion, and citizenship, as well as incarceration) but also similarity across difference, not least in terms of their shared grief for Lotte, vocally expressed by the weeping Ayten in this scene. Subsequently, her meeting with Susanne animates Ayten's decision to follow up on a previous offer to recant her radical political stance in order to secure release from jail. Thus, Susanne's rejection of Ayten's assumption of responsibility for Lotte's death and her reiteration of Lotte's attempts to help Ayten ultimately lead to redemption, and this is one reason underlying critiques of the film's affirmative politics. However, whereas Susanne had originally reproached Lotte for offering Ayten hospitality and bristled at Ayten's presence in her home, now Susanne helps Ayten, eventually offering her a place to sleep, emphasizing that Susanne's change of attitude actually vindicates Ayten's political critique of the hypocrisy of European values.

Susanne also facilitates Nejat's reconciliation with his father, whom he had previously cut off contact from, not wanting to be associated with a murderer. But once again this reconciliation is also contingent. Nejat and Susanne watch from the apartment window as men stream through the streets to visit the mosque in the early morning of Bayram, the Festival of Sacrifice celebrating the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son to demonstrate his loyalty to Allah. As Nejat relates the story, Susanne notes that the same story is also part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, emphasizing

once more the trope of similarity across difference. Nejat recalls that as a child, the story scared him, but his father had insisted that he would protect his son even at the cost of making an enemy of God. When Susanne asks him about his father, Nejat's childhood recollection causes him to reconsider his choice to renounce Ali, and he decides to travel to the family's ancestral home of Trabzon on the Black Sea Coast to find him.

Conjoining religious with familial reconciliation, this scene is a prelude to the film's final sequence, which returns us to the prologue of *Auf der anderen Seite*, repeating (now with a difference in our comprehension of its significance) Nejat's stop at the convenience store where he hears the music of Kazım Koyuncu, but this time following him as he travels on to Trabzon. However, in line with the missed connections that abound in *Auf der anderen Seite*, Nejat never finds his father. Instead, in an extended long take, Nejat sits on the beach waiting for Ali to return from a fishing trip. Though Nejat has learned that the sea is becoming choppy and Ali should be returning soon, he never does; as Nejat waits on the beach, the credits roll, and we watch him waiting until the screen fades to black.

Like the other films discussed in this chapter, *Auf der anderen Seite* thus concludes with an open ending that registers an absence, and one that does not provide closure. As Breger argues, Akin's polysemic film 'invites audiences to consider the presented configurations with critical curiosity rather than submitting to the force of naturalized evidence produced by "classical" form', but unlike postmodern fictions, Akin's film does not indulge in resignation, nor does it employ a Brechtian form of narration that should result in a clear critical analysis.⁴⁷ Rather, as Breger argues: 'The film's procedure through doublings and repetitions with a difference, which actively unfolds narrative's potential for engaging specificity and contrast along with relation and similarity, thus attains significance as a means of breaking the hold of, while not forgetting, the legacies of hatred and inequality that stand in the way of good feelings.'⁴⁸ Breger highlights how *Auf der anderen Seite* holds together ostensibly incommensurable political commitments 'to both critiquing the weight of socio-symbolic regimes of difference and affirming a horizon of transnational, transfaith interconnection', figured through its disorganized engagement of multivalent forms (an emphasis on narrative and storytelling that also strives for critical distance and eschews conventional forms of identification).⁴⁹ Mennel also emphasizes

47 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 86.

48 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 87.

49 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 86.

how *Auf der anderen Seite* 'exceeds the different academic categories of national, European, or minority cinema. With its multilingual dialogues, actors and actresses, and its multinational locations and relationships, the film questions the category of national cinema'.⁵⁰ In this regard, it is noteworthy that all the film's characters end up in Turkey, including and especially Susanne, the German mother and resignified Maria Braun, whose character literally deterritorializes German cinema, while also in El-Tayeb's sense, creating cracks in the circular logic of normative European identities. Ultimately, while the film gestures at reconciliation, the debts accrued throughout *Auf der anderen Seite* are left unpaid—indeed, the film demonstrates how the language of debt is ultimately insufficient for doing justice to the incommensurability of exchange in a world defined by unequal and asymmetrical relations of race, class, and nation.

Resignifying Genre in *Jerichow*

Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* tracks the love triangle between the Turkish German owner of a chain of snack bars in the Prignitz, a rural region of northeastern Germany, who, like the character from *Auf der anderen Seite*, bears the overburdened name Ali; his white, ethnic German wife Laura, whose marriage to Ali is shaped by contracts and debts; and Thomas, an unemployed veteran of the war in Afghanistan, also a white ethnic German, who has come to the Prignitz to occupy and renovate the home he has inherited. A film in which money plays a prominent role in nearly every scene, *Jerichow* makes visible the economization of everything in the age of neoliberalism. *Jerichow* also attends to the othering logic of racial capitalism via similar strategies to those deployed in the three films discussed here thus far, including the deployment and dissolution of clichés, repetition with a difference, the resignification of familiar tropes from film history, and a narrative emphasis on labour and debt.

A loose adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Jerichow* engages along multiple vectors with the influential story first introduced in James M. Cain's 1934 crime novel and later reworked for the screen numerous times from the 1930s onward.⁵¹ Drawing on *Postman*, Petzold pursues in *Jerichow*

50 Mennel, 'Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time', 5.

51 *The Postman Always Rings Twice* has provided generative material for multiple adaptations across national cinemas and in both popular and art film contexts. The most well-known adaptations include Pierre Chenal's *Le Dernier Tournant* (The Last Turn, France, 1939); Luchino

a number of themes that have long characterized his cinema, including new corporealities, the shifting terrain of material and immaterial labour, and the intertwining of erotic and economic desires. *Jerichow* also develops a new emphasis within Petzold's *oeuvre*—one suggested by the *Postman* material, especially Cain's novel—on race and ethnicity, as they intersect with class, gender, and sexuality.

In *Jerichow*, the generic iconography of *Postman*, and of Hollywood noir more broadly, overlaps with other genre precursors, including popular German *Heimatfilme* of the 1950s, as well as several Fassbinder films. In fact, Petzold's *oeuvre*—what Jaimey Fisher calls his 'art-house genre cinema'—is defined by engagement with a wide range of genre precursors, which Petzold notably cites, adapts, and remixes in his films, another example of how genre has been crucial to the development of the Berlin School's aesthetics.⁵² In his early features, this took the shape of Hitchcock citations, particularly from *Vertigo* (1958), as well as references to noir films, especially those with a connection to German film history, such as Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (1945). In his intermediate work, including the acclaimed 'Ghost Trilogy', Petzold began a much more explicit and concerted reworking of genre precursors, paraphrasing Kathryn Bigelow's vampire Western *Near Dark* (1987) in the breakthrough *Die innere Sicherheit* (*The State I Am In*, 2000); engaging with Weimar classics, including Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) in *Gespenster* (*Ghosts*, 2005); and reworking Herk Harvey's cult horror classic *Carnival of Souls* (1962) in *Yella* (2007). In each case, the narrative arc, motifs, and bodily gestures of the precursor film forms the staging ground for Petzold's central preoccupation as a filmmaker: exploring the economic and political underpinnings of the neoliberal present.

Coming on the heels of the 'Ghost Trilogy', *Jerichow* further develops Petzold's emphasis on both the phantomlike aftereffects of German national history and the workings of post-Fordist capitalism in the present. The context of the Berlin School has largely determined Petzold's critical reception, and *Jerichow*, the most recent in a series of prestigious European films to rework *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, would seem to confirm his place within the pantheon of European arthouse directors. However, Petzold's reworking of the *Postman* material differs substantially from that of Visconti, just as his engagement with Hollywood genre cinema functions differently from

Visconti's *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, Italy, 1943); Tay Garnett's Hollywood adaptation *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) and a later Hollywood remake, adapted for the screen by David Mamet and directed by Bob Rafelson, also called *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981).

52 See Fisher, *Christian Petzold*.

the deconstructive aims of his new wave antecedents, including Fassbinder. Petzold's much-cited description of his relation to genre—'I have the feeling that I make films in the cemetery of genre cinema, from the remainders that are still there for the taking'—underscores the spectral quality of his films, which archive the aesthetic and political remnants of the past in the present.⁵³ But this 'archaeology of genre' is also crucial to Petzold's larger project of finding suitable images to describe the transformations that mark the contemporary world.⁵⁴ Indeed, Petzold's films aim to redo genre, mining film history for usable remnants that can be recombined and resignified into images of the present. The disorganized formal language that emerges in *Jerichow* is crucial to the film's exposure of neoliberalism and to its mapping of the present, making *Jerichow* an exemplary film for the tendencies discussed in this chapter and throughout this book.

In *Jerichow*, Petzold uses the *Postman* template to resignify the German *Heimatfilm*, emphasizing the deindustrialized landscape of the former East Germany and the individualization and privatization of conceptions of home and identity in the Berlin Republic. In its focus on the intertwining of economic and intimate forms of subjugation in advanced capitalism, *Jerichow* also builds on the representation of entrepreneurship and marriage in Fassbinder's critique of the West German Economic Miracle, *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* (*Merchant of the Four Seasons*, 1971). Finally, like *Auf der anderen Seite*, *Jerichow* highlights the transformation of labour and the changing status of migrants in Germany by reworking aspects of Fassbinder's *Ali – Angst essen Seele auf*. Underpinning Petzold's approach to this material in *Jerichow* is a sustained focus on the way economic transactions shape and are shaped by changing formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the neoliberal age.

In contrast to the other *Postman* films—most of which repress the ethnicity of the Nick Papadakis character—*Jerichow* desublimates the novel's attention to everyday racism and its imbrication with economic and erotic desires. In fact, *Jerichow* suggests that a key reason for the persistence of *Postman* derives not least from the way that it offers a generic template for investigating the intersectionality of these categories at moments of historical and socioeconomic transition. Generic traits of the *Postman* films taken up in *Jerichow* include its low-key lighting scheme and night-time scenes, its tripartite narrative structure echoing the theme of the love triangle, its story focusing on intertwined forms of deception, its images of the body

53 Abel, 'The Cinema of Identification Gets on My Nerves.'

54 Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 14.

at work, and its emphasis on both the ocean and motor vehicles as spaces of mobility, desire, and death. As in the *Postman* precursors, a returning veteran comes to the aid of a small business owner, who employs him in a relationship with both economic and homoerotic resonances. When the veteran and the business owner's attractive wife meet, they begin an affair which culminates in their plot to murder her husband.

However, here the plot similarities end. Instead of echoing the narrative development of *Postman*, *Jerichow* intervenes in it at every turn, responding to our generic expectations with plot swerves and inversions, and remixing *Postman*'s iconography in ways that aim to heighten our awareness of the historical present. As Michael Sicinski has suggested, 'genre reinscription or repetition-with-difference' functions as a form of affective mapping in Petzold's cinema, allowing us to grasp and consider aspects of the present that remain otherwise imperceptible.⁵⁵ In this way, Petzold's redoing of *Postman* can be described as a resignification of the novel and its various filmic incarnations that inflects the material with gestures and motifs of the present; this repetition with difference specifically draws our attention to the shifting landscapes and the changing corporealities of today.

Jerichow begins with a prologue of sorts that inverts the plot of *Postman* to situate a mother's funeral at the outset of the film. It is Thomas's mother who has died, and the army veteran has returned to the Prignitz to live in his dilapidated childhood home, which he plans to remodel. However, when Leon (André M. Hennicke), Thomas's former business partner, turns up at the funeral demanding repayment of a debt he owes on a failed café they opened together, which subsequently went bankrupt, Thomas is forced to turn over his meagre savings, voiding his hopes for a new beginning in *Jerichow*. From the outset, then, *Jerichow* makes visible the centrality of debt to the experience of the present.

The role of place is established as intrinsic to *Jerichow*'s presentation of labour, money, and debt. In contrast to heritage-style films that engage in nostalgia for the GDR past through painstakingly authentic mise-en-scène (see Chapter 2), however, *Jerichow* presents the historical space of the former GDR more elliptically. Denuded of any explicit visual signifiers of the East German past, *Jerichow* is marked as eastern first by inference, since the film's title refers to an actual, biblical-sounding town in eastern Germany whose name carries with it the valence of resurrection, and then by reference, when Leon refers to Thomas's childhood in the GDR. His casual mention of the discrete frames of reference that continue to mark

55 Sicinski, 'Once the Wall Has Tumbled', 9.

the mindsets of eastern vs. western Germans establishes the asymmetrical power relationship that pertains between (eastern) debtors and (western) creditors, a key aspect of the film's assertion of how remnants of the past continue to haunt the present.

As in *Postman*, the *rural* setting of an uncharted area newly accessible by motor vehicle is especially crucial to the way the hopes and dreams of the disenfranchised take shape and are (quite literally) dashed in *Jerichow*. Petzold has emphasized that he views Tay Garnett's 1946 *Postman* as one of the only Hollywood movies to explicitly engage with class struggle; as critics have argued, a key innovation of *Postman* was its removal of the film noir out of the city and into the deindustrialized countryside where class dynamics appear in sharp relief.⁵⁶

The first half of *Jerichow*, focalized through the perspective of Thomas, follows his developing relationship with Ali, an alcoholic prone to drunk driving, who hires Thomas to serve as his driver after he loses his license. It is through Thomas's perspective—and thus through the eyes of the disoriented East German—that we learn about Ali's business practices and come to see the economization of the landscape. Like *Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, *Jerichow* abounds with vehicular scenes, which capture the driver and the passenger from behind, in an over-the-shoulder perspective; throughout Petzold's cinema, cars serve as liminal spaces that emphasize the breakdown of the public/private divide.⁵⁷ Thus, *Jerichow* disperses *Postman*'s mid-century dream of a gas station, a stable place in a mobile landscape, onto the neoliberal non-places—intersections, parking lots, discount retailers, and strip malls—that proliferate in the former GDR.

On the one hand, the space of eastern Germany represents the possibility of building something new. As Petzold has described it, Thomas and Ali are united in *Jerichow* by the common project of 'Heimat-Building', of the attempt to forge an identity and a sense of home in this rural landscape, albeit one that is individualized and privatized, thoroughly uncoupled from any collective notion of regional identity formerly suggested by the term *Heimat*.⁵⁸ On the other hand, *Jerichow* unmask the landscape as one haunted by the failed utopias of the past and the present—of both East

56 See Uehling, 'Wiederauferstehung in der Prignitz.' In this interview, Petzold credits his mentor Harun Farocki with pointing him to Garnett's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as a Hollywood film addressing class struggle.

57 On the significance of automobiles in Petzold's films, see also Koepnick, 'Cars...'

58 Kothenschulte, 'Die blaue Stunde der einsamen Heimat'; see also King, 'The Province Always Rings Twice' and Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, 69–110.

Bloc socialism and finance capitalism—since Ali's business and private life are both marked by forms of exploitation and deception that constellate around money and debt.

Unlike the drifter Frank in the other versions of *Postman*, the veteran Thomas is explicitly positioned as a man returning to his own native region, and indeed his own house, in *Jerichow*. Nonetheless, in crucial ways he is a stranger in his own *Heimat*, which has changed radically in the years while Thomas was away. Not only does Thomas lack money, employment, and a car, but he is also thoroughly disoriented by the conventions that shape social and economic life in contemporary Germany. When Thomas visits the employment office in search of a job, a close up shows his hand crushing a waiting room ticket bearing the number 89, a rather overt reference to the cruel optimism retrospectively signified by 1989 and to the precarity characteristic of life in the 'new German states' today. The agent at the employment office castigates Thomas for his style of dress, his demeanour, and his lack of marketable skills; when he tries to use food stamps at the grocery store, the cashier admonishes him for failing to do so properly. Rather ironically, the only kind of work Thomas can find is day labour as a vegetable harvester, and we see him performing the backbreaking work of picking cucumbers on a huge combine—the kind of labour that in the GDR provided a solid form of employment and in West Germany was often the province of migrant workers. In *Jerichow*, this precarious labour is performed by the leagues of unemployed white ethnic Germans who populate the Prignitz, whereas the Turkish-born migrant Ali has found success as an entrepreneur, seizing on the opportunity of German unification to build up his franchise.

The inversion of status marked by the ethnic German Thomas's disenfranchisement and the racial other Ali's financial success suggests the eclipse of traditional class- and race-based socioeconomic categories, and the triumph of neoliberal conceptions of the entrepreneurial self. But *Jerichow* offers neither a celebratory vision of a postracial Germany, nor an image of the migrant as victim of discrimination; rather its depiction of race and ethnicity is shifting, inconsistent, and fluid, failing to add up to a coherent whole. Like *Dealer*, *Jerichow* disorganizes normative representations, suggesting how race and class no longer form the basis for an identity-based oppositional politics in the contemporary context and yet continue to inform the subjective lives of individuals and their ways of inhabiting the world.

In the second half of *Jerichow*, the narrative perspective shifts from Thomas to Laura, though this subtle shift from male to female perspective is not explicitly marked through formal or stylistic means in the film. In



19. Resisting traditional conventions of marking gender: Laura (Nina Hoss) works off her debt in Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008).

contrast to some of the *Postman* precursors which foreground the character of the femme fatale, such conventions do not mark Laura's representation in *Jerichow*. When she does become the object of the camera, this is virtually always attended by an amplified structure of looking, as we watch Ali watch Thomas watch Laura. More often, it is not Laura whom we look at but Thomas, whose sculpted torso is repeatedly bared and whose attractive profile the camera lingers on. If Thomas occupies a feminized position, Laura is largely pictured in long shot, in postures of work that deemphasize her specularity, or in chiaroscuro images that obscure her face and body (see Illustration 19). While the narrative shift to Laura's perspective does not change this inverted specularity, it does shift attention to the ongoing economization of gender relations, sexual politics, and family life and to the specific status of women in neoliberalism.

Laura is encumbered by a mountain of debt that she is desperate to pay off in order to free herself from dependency on Ali. As in the other *Postman* iterations, Laura married Ali because of his financial stability and his promise to liberate her from a work environment marked by sexual harassment. When they married, Ali took over Laura's debt, but a prenuptial contract ensures that the debt will revert to her in the case of divorce. Laura's financial deception—she has a deal with the beverage wholesaler to overcharge Ali and split the surplus—is motivated by her desire to escape both her indebtedness to Ali and his beatings. Unmoored from any social structures or communities of solidarity that could help or protect her, Laura is literally the only woman in *Jerichow*. Through its narrative of sexual violence, *Jerichow* foregrounds the asymmetry of gender relations

and female disempowerment, even as it resists traditional conventions of marking gender on a formal level. This disorganized presentation of gender and sexuality makes visible the paradoxical destabilizing and strengthening of heteronormativity in neoliberalism, where the flexibilization of gender roles and family structures ostensibly offers 'choices', but where economic precarity limits the availability of these options to individuals. As Laura tells Thomas in the film's pivotal scene, 'You can't be in love if you don't have any money.'

Jerichow demonstrates, in Berlant's sense, the collapse of good-life fantasies of gainful employment, job security, and enduring intimacy, as well as the ongoing attachment of Thomas, Laura, and Ali to normativities that do them harm. Offered the opportunity to participate in Ali's business, Thomas pursues an intimate attachment to Laura, which undermines his relationship to Ali. Despite the fact that he beats her, Laura remains bound to Ali and the hope that he will pay off her debts. But it is the cruel optimism of Ali that the film demonstrates most relentlessly. Ali is brutally aware of his status in Germany—as he says at one point, 'I live in a land that doesn't want me with a wife I bought', emphasizing the double-edged responsabilization of the migrant, whose success in business is ultimately no guarantee of integration. Indeed, *Jerichow* is at pains to demonstrate at what cost Ali's success comes. Like Fassbinder's Ali, Petzold's Ali attaches to racial, sexual, familial, and economic normativities that quite literally break his heart. Predicated on a franchise system that allows him to profit doubly by avoiding social contributions for his employees while also requiring them to purchase wholesale products exclusively through his supply chain, Ali's business model exploits recent immigrants to Germany who are more economically vulnerable than himself. His employees are constantly scheming new ways of gaming Ali's system to circumvent his exploitative monopoly and pocket the profit, whether selling drinks purchased elsewhere or simply neglecting to enter expensive purchases into the cash register. *Jerichow's* detailed representation of the deception and exploitation that pervade all levels of business dealing capture in microcosm the corruption at the heart of capitalist enterprise. As in Fassbinder's films, the pressure Ali experiences by participating in this system of exploitation erupts both externally, in racist mistreatment of his employees and sexual violence against his wife, and internally, in his alcoholism and, ultimately, his heart failure.

Throughout the film, Ali's interpellation into systems of white privilege, heteronormativity, and misogyny is manifested in ways that make his otherwise sympathetic character anathema to the viewer, paving the way

for the murder plot. *Jerichow*'s ultimate inversion of *Postman*—a narrative secret withheld from Thomas and Laura, as well as from the viewer, until the film's penultimate scene—is the fact that, long before this murder plot emerges, Ali is already a dead man. With the knowledge that he is dying of a heart ailment, Ali has actually been grooming Thomas to be his wife's next business and sexual partner, cultivating his knowledge of the snack bar chain and encouraging his attraction to Laura. While apparently motivated by his desire to maintain a structure of caregiving for Laura after his death, without knowledge of his illness, Ali's orchestration of a relationship between Thomas and Laura plays upon normative assumptions about who belongs to and with whom, disorganizing generic conventions in order to make visible and palpable the normativities that underpin our apprehension of the present. As Sincinski has argued, 'Petzold is aligning genre with Western bigotry, in order to demonstrate how neatly they line up [...] *Jerichow* becomes an occasion for coaxing us into old, harmful habits of seeing in order to shift those habits in surprising, productive new directions.'⁵⁹ In this way, the film's ending, in which the harmfulness of unconscious racism is unmasked, resignifies the formal language of *Jerichow*'s various precursor films.

After Ali reveals his illness to Laura, as well as his plans to pay off her debts and provide for her after he is gone, she tries to call off the murder plot, but not before Ali gets wind of it. Furious, he drives off the cliff, taking his death into his own hands and undoing the possibility of economic or intimate resolution. *Jerichow* echoes the conventional *Heimatfilm* ending, in which an outsider is expunged from the community in order to ensure the union of ethnically and regionally compatible characters. But the *Postman* antecedents, which guarantee the unhappiness of such a union, intercede against this problematic closure. Unlike *Postman*, in which the femme fatale is generally punished with death after successfully killing off her husband, in *Jerichow* Thomas and Laura are both left standing, mute witnesses to their unbinding from optimism. Ali's suicide calls attention to the self-harm caused by attachment to normativities, but as in Fassbinder's films, this temporary insight changes nothing; in fact, when Ali's Range Rover goes over the cliff, we don't even see it explode. Thus, like the other films discussed here, *Jerichow* concludes with an open ending marking an absence, and one that makes patently visible how, by virtue of their exclusion, Europeans of colour are the glue that holds Europe together.

In 2006, while he was developing *Jerichow*, Petzold engaged in a public email exchange on the topic of the Berlin School with two other prominent

59 Sincinski, 'Once the Wall Has Tumbled', 8–9.

German filmmakers, Dominik Graf and Christoph Hochhäusler. The email exchange, which was later published in the Berlin School's film journal, *Revolver*, played a prominent role in the public discussions taking place at the time about whether the Berlin School should be considered a legitimate and representative form of German national cinema for the 21st century (see also Chapter 5). In the email exchange, Graf articulates a vision of genre as the path forward for the perpetually vexed German film industry, arguing that genre provides a horizon for uniting the disparate agendas of art and entertainment that German cinema has rarely succeeded in bringing together. Graf specifically highlights the one uniquely German contribution to the history of genre: 'We dreamt up the *Heimatfilm*—who knows what it might still be capable of.'⁶⁰ Petzold proves highly receptive to Graf's plea for genre, responding that 'German genre films would definitely interest me', and suggesting that for his own work the Berlin School itself has functioned as something like a genre, 'for genre means neighborhood, series, differences, and similarities'.⁶¹ The email exchange proved particularly formative for Petzold's approach to creating 'a German genre film' in *Jerichow*, an approach that has also characterized his subsequent films, including his retort to the German heritage film, the thriller *Barbara* (2012) and his reboot of the rubble film, *Phoenix* (2014). Petzold's engagement with genre is, as I have suggested, a cornerstone of his, and the Berlin School's, transnational appeal and successful postcinematic mode of production and reception.

As a concerted attempt to create a cinematic neighbourhood, the aesthetic and political project of *Jerichow* overlaps not only with Berlin School films like *Dealer*, but also with other contemporary films that make visible how racialized minorities are simultaneously held responsible for and made disposable by global neoliberalism, including *Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. Their common strategy of 'repetition with a difference' in the presentation of clichés and stereotypes, the depiction of debt and exchange, and the citation of generic conventions, extends to the way all of these films draw on the formal strategies of German cinema, especially those inspired by feminist and queer cinema and the enduring influence of Fassbinder. Repetition with a difference helps to capture how all four films discussed here offer a vision for refiguring German cinema in and for the neoliberal age, as an unfixed, polysemic, multilingual, and transnational entity rife with paradoxes but also with legacies worthy of resignification.

60 Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, 'Mailwechsel.'

61 Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, 'Mailwechsel.'

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