

Multiculturalism in Transition.

Representation of migrants in Fatih Akin's contemporary cinema.

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Abstract

Migration, in its various shapes, is a central issue of modern and contemporary (maybe global) society. Changes involve its models and structures, and highlight questions about the relationship between multiculturalism and inter-ethnicity, putting attention on issues about identity, ethnic consciousness and hybridity. We think it's important to work upon these changes and we chose to explore cinematic representation (especially in European "dominant" cinema) of these "new ethnicities" (Stuart Hall), of the "subaltern" (Gayatri Ch. Spivak) and of "natives" (Rey Chow).

Therefore, our paper will focus on recent movies by Turkish-German director Fatih Akin, beginning with *Head On (Gegen die Wand, 2003)* and *Edge of Heaven (Auf der anderen Seite, 2007)*. Fatih Akin's cinema, in fact, reflects upon Turkish familiar relations in Germany and on relations between Turkish and German cultures, dealing with identity roots and creolization. In this sense, it's possible to read these films as cultural emanation of recent developments of the encounter between Continental European and Mediterranean cultures and their rhetorics of representation.

We think it's important to work upon these issues, through founding researches of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies, to understand how representation of interethnicity in Akin's cinematographic language can be considered highly problematic, reflecting the work of imaginary of multiculturalism in contemporary Europe. Our analysis on cinematic representation will be then directed upon dynamics between race, gender and class as key factors to explain changes of migratory processes, in particular between modern and contemporary migration, and between first and second generation migrants.

Introduction: moving to a complexity in theory of "Alterity"

Narrative cinema, like many wrote using Lévi-Strauss formulation, proposes an "'imaginary resolution of real contradictions' and therefore help human beings make[s] sense of their lives"¹,

¹ Analysis model of Thomas Elsaesser is linked with the Structural Anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, in Thomas Elsaesser e Warren Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American Film. A Guide to Movie Analysis*, London and New York, Arnold and Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 30-31.

and so it's important to understand how contemporary films have worked with recent life's changes.

Especially global migration phenomena have brought modifications in the relationship between identities and cultural positions; and we think that cinema too has approached those modifications, in particular in the configurations of subjectivity through ethnic, cultural and gender positioning. In our analysis we will use theoretic approaches given by Cultural, Postcolonial and Gender Studies, through the thoughts of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Ch. Spivak, and also Rey Chow, Édouard Glissant and Gloria Anzaldúa.

What is important in their works is the way they have re-shaped the conception of identity and subjectivity, and to understand how this new vision is linked with cinematic rhetoric and filmic forms. In fact, we think that the filmic text become a force field, a point of negotiation between imaginary, identity and cultural systems². We decided to analyse in this sense two contemporary film of Fatih Akin (*Head-On – Gegen die Wand*, 2004, and *The Edge of Heaven – Auf der Anderen Seite*, 2007), which reflect upon changes between first and second generation of migrants and between male and female positions in contemporary family.

One point is essential to understand the reference to identity and subjectivity: they are not something to which people belong, they are not a static representation of the self, and especially they are not something “essential” or “natural”; on the contrary, we think that to understand cultural identity and ethnicity representation in contemporary cinema is important to work through reflections of Stuart Hall around notion of “positionality”. According to Hall³, personal identity is something determined by a cultural position of the subject in the real world; everybody is an agent who position him/herself in relation with (cultural) others. For Hall is important to untie links constructed by years of imperialism and colonization between ethnic, national and identity issues. This is not to say that Hall is near to positions of liberal multiculturalism, that propose to “respect” (or “tolerate”) the other positions without mingling, or mingling too much so that everybody become “the same”. Identity becomes instead a perpetual negotiation between different positions, a construction inflected by contingency and contest but also an expression of the agency of subjects. In this sense, contemporary life becomes a “war” between different positions, not just opposing one another, but working on the border between them to change parameters of mutual comprehension and relation. In this vision, subjects of confrontation are not the nomadic subjects of postmodern thought, but become the “diasporic” subject of postcolonial world, a subject “settled” (but never “settled down”) by his changing position, ever decentred and articulated through representation.

According to Hall's ideas, Homi Bhabha worked on the concept of “cultural difference” in

² See Teresa De Lauretis, “Desire in Narrative”, in *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984.

³ We have worked especially with two Italian collections of Hall's essays: Stuart Hall, *Il soggetto e la differenza. Per un'archeologia degli studi culturali e postcoloniali*, Rome, Meltemi, 2006 and *Politiche del quotidiano. Culture, identità e senso comune*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 2006.

opposition with that of “cultural diversity”⁴. In fact, diversity is an oppositional identity based on belonging to a solid cultural group (often considered “natural”), while “difference” is related to the post-structural thought of Jacques Derrida. The *différance* between signifier and meaning informs communication process, the subject of sentence is “insaturable” with the subject of enunciation; in this way, culture is a product of discourse and not of something “natural” or fixed. Subject therefore has no authority to give a “true” meaning or a “natural” expression of cultural belonging; on the contrary, everybody become an expression of this cultural difference. Here again it’s a problem of positionality, this time a problem of occupying a position in the liminal space between culture and meaning, giving way to a contradictory and changing identity. In this sense, Bhabha talks of “hybridity” as the central focus of this new conception of identity, not as a dominant identity which occupies the colonized one, but as capacity to consider different ways of subject construction and mingling that goes over borders without annihilating them.

Theoretical thoughts work with heterogeneous but even complementary ways on the analysis of formation and dissolution of the “essentialist” concept of identity, coming to the idea of “planetary relativism” or planetary regionalism of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Imperialism, colonizer, Orientalism, exotic, folklore can be considered as what she named “epistemic violence”⁵. Representation is possible just because enunciation is always into colloquial formations and codes with history and position in a determined space-time. Displacement of West’s “central” talks implies discussions about its (West) universalistic nature and its transcendental demand to speak for all, while it’s everywhere and nowhere.

Spivak’s work is very important in relation between representation and Otherness studies sphere. She takes theoretical and critic work of Hall and combines postcolonial thoughts on Difference and Otherness with Derrida’s Decostructionism (she’s the English translator of his works). She proposes to “Re-invent the Other”, so to think about Ideology, the Other and Nationalism with a non transcendental approach. In her volume *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* she suggests to work in this direction exactly studying language and representation⁶.

Idiom is always something evidently constructed (invented and re-invented) and is important to observe it by comparison with other Otherness’ representations, subjectivity constructions and practices of exclusion. It’s important to show these representation, construction and exclusion mechanisms and work on a meta-structural level. “Learn to test the Other” becomes an imperative and an essential lesson for imagination that leaves the identity as referent.

⁴ We make reference on two fundamental works of Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *Location of Culture* (1994), through Italian translations published by Meltemi (Rome) respectively in 1997 and 2001.

⁵ We would like to remember main work of Edward Said on Literature Critic and Postcolonial Studies and his important book *Orientalism*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2001.

⁶ To approach to Gayatri Spivak studies we suggest Davide Zolletto, ed., *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Tre esercizi per immaginare l’altro*, «aut/aut», n. 329, January-March 2006, Milan, il Saggiatore.

Her vivid and continue trade with Derrida involves all her methodological approach and her way to analyze subject. Deconstructing means taking out pieces and introducing margins, fractures into one's own tradition. In this way we can notice how tradition forclosed and displaced subject lives when he/she named the difference game. Spivak is talking about the "Other" meaning the "subaltern" and she's wondering herself about ways of representation. In our imagination we have to try to represent the Other as "agent" endowed with imagination too and this is how political solutions (and military too) can remove the hegemonic track (or dualism). Spivak promotes the cultural literacy and imagination exercise and the imperative according that "subaltern is my teacher". Imagining means learning to test the opposite and so imagination leaves identity as referent, singularity and contingency are never complete, but always imperfect.

This analysis escapes insidious risks of homologating spread and returns an Otherness as performance, changeable and erratic. Spivak wants to dismiss any idea about a possible general Otherness theory and proposes a really problematic and complex concept of identity.

Another "turn of the screw" is given by Rey Chow, who reflects upon Postcolonialism through Gender theory, working also with psychoanalytic concepts. In this sense, it's fundamental her interpretation of a film, *M. Butterfly* by David Cronenberg (1993)⁷, in which she observes representation of fantasmatic colonial desire. In this film identity and desire depend on possibility to assume changing positions in the colonial scenario; colonizer can be the white man or the chinese maoist, and so the "native" become "just" a representation for the protagonist's pleasure. At the same time gender is not something given either, so that there can be a man who play a woman or vice versa; gender is instead a performance, a reiteration of the relationship between personal agency and cultural contest, like Judith Butler said in her fundamental *Gender Trouble*⁸. Body is a field of contradictory positions, in which the fantasmatic and the cultural are far more important than what can be considered "material".

Again, what is really interesting in this reflections is the conception of identity like a construction, a contradictory relation between different possibilities and different conception of meaning. Our analysis will not focus on "real" situation of Turkish migrant in Germany, or on their material possibility of mingling with "German" population. In studying European position, in fact, it's also important to understand that changes can be "native" and "ethnic" position. In this case, Hall's "New Ethnicities", or Chow's "natives" are referred to a context of inverse migration: from a colonized space to a colonizer's space. Colonized subject is seen from the European point of view too often as a colonizer, someone who wants to impose his/her cultural and especially religious

⁷ Rey Chow, "The Dream of a Butterfly" (1996), It. tr. in *id.*, *Il sogno di Butterfly. Costellazioni postcoloniali*, Rome, Meltemi, 2004.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Troubles. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990); see also *Bodies that Matters. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993).

beliefs, and this shifting position is often linked with opposition between “cultural diversities” which Bhabha opposed.

Akin's cinema makes identity really problematic, because he can “speak” about its complex positioning through filmic language. His reflection upon culture and gender positioning is important because cannot be seen as a patronizing position of the “white man”. Returns of his protagonists to Turkey are not simple researches of a *Heimat*; he poses questions about cultural belonging and de-rooting of contemporary migrant. This is very close to Hall's diasporic subject and Glissant's ryzhomatic identity studies, as we will see.

Head On: limits and risks of ryzhomatic identity

Ilaria A. De Pascalis

From the prologue, *Head On* proposes itself as a film with a multiple identity. The first shot is that of an orchestra with Istanbul's skyline on the background. The orchestra will be a punctuation element through all the film (divided in this way in five “chapters”), an intradiegetic narrator who will use songs to tell a story already written, a destiny already fulfilled. But the first song exceeds the linearity of narrative links: it speaks from a female point of view and tells about a not-returning love. This prologue is so contradictory with the first sequence of the film – a sort of second prologue, coming after a lap dissolve – that show the story of a man, Cahit (Birol Ünel), who tries to kill himself in Hamburg while listening a post-punk song (*I Feel You* by Depeche Mode).

With this double prologue, the film proposes some interesting elements, especially the hypothetical conflict between Turkey and Germany, apparently brought through a binary dialectic: the feminine, sentiment, immobility (of camera, orchestra and singer), light, open landscape and traditional popular music are opposite to the masculine, emotive closure, violence, darkness, interiors and contemporary music (especially post-punk music). But the orchestra of the first shot is not Turkish nor traditional: it is a famous Romany orchestra conducted by Selim Sesler⁹; and Cahit's meetings with Seref (Güven Kiraç) and Maren (Catrin Striebeck) highlights that this man has been able to create friendships with someone before.

This duality is indeed part of the film's structure, creating a perpetual swinging from coreographic long takes without movement, and the fast editing of close-ups with the use of jump cuts and eventually freeze frames, with characters moving frenetically; besides, this second type of editing is linked with emotional peaks that are the irrational engine of the story. In the almost casual swinging from one type of editing to the other, film's visual and emotive dynamics reflect

⁹ For the dualism in musical choices in *Head On* and ambiguity against opposition of two musical genres for a growing hybridity, see Polona Petek, “Enabling Collisions: Re-Thinking Multiculturalism Through Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand/Head On*”, «Studies in European Cinema», vol. 4, n. 3, 2007, pp. 182-183.

consciously the chaos that feature Sibel's identity movements, turning the protagonist in a rhizome dispersed in a root's world, constricted, martyred, stopped by the root's movement that tries to bring her back to grow just in one direction, that of depth.

In my opinion this film tries to stay on the “surface” of the problem of cultural encounter, so to say to show the surface of daily performances of its characters, not giving just one meaning to the manifestations of these performances. The constant movement desired by the protagonist Sibel (Sibel Kekilli), in fact, materialize itself also in most static shots. We can think in this sense at the first encounter between Sibel and Cahit: after some interior detail of the Psychiatric Division where the two characters are, shot with hand camera, we see the detail of Sibel's bandaged hands; then the camera rise to her face, in a frontal large close-up. In this way, Sibel is shown through her embodied duality: on one side, suffering for her cut wrists, on the other confidence and hope in her smile and her mobile gaze. This duality is not an opposition, but a movement through this woman's different emotions and postitions into the world; the camera strictly links two portion of her body, different but both present: two aspects of the same woman, articulated in further branches of her personality. Death becomes part of life itself, not its absence, and the attempt to die is performed so to be posposed, to become a form of vital rebellion against cages imposed by social structure.

We will find that Sibel have attempted suicide to free herself from restrictions imposed by her father and brother, traditionalist Muslims not accepting that she can frequent men. For the representation of Sibel's family, Akin has been accused to repropose “Occidental” stereotypes about Turkish families in Europe, proposing again the opposition Turkish-Muslim-archaic-repressed versus German-secular-modern-free. But, in showing Sibel's family in the hospital refectory, we can see all members in just one shot: Sibel, the mother Birsen (Aysel Iscan), the father Yunus (Demir Gököl) and the brother Ylmaz (Cem Akin). All the father's and the brother's reprimends against Sibel are not showed with a shot/countershot, but we have medium or long shots with all characters together, sometimes even with the presence of Cahit who looks at the family from the frame's margins. Although Sibel wants to exit from her family's structure, she knows she is part of this family, and she is almost always framed with them in most of the sequences; only when Ylmaz wants to kill her, and then decides to repudiate her, an evident shot/countershot will point out the expulsion of the girl out of the family.

Accordingly, Sibel is not constructed from a simple opposition between a “belonging culture”, archaic, traditionalist, codified, against which she has to go, using the “naturalization culture”, occidental, modern, free, open. Rather, the film proposes Sibel's behaviour as an attempt to free herself from the opposition itself, and to make different aspects of different cultures coexist in her body and her performances, like her links with the family (often a traditional value), the attempt to form a new type of heterosexual couple, the desire to open to the world (through promiscuity or

drug assumption, but also through tasting new type of food, or through beauty and friendship, and so forth), and consciousness of not being alone.

Sibel's dream is to unhinge traditionalist positions, annihilating the authority of every “norm” and refusing every arranged scale of values (also that in which sexual betrayal is a “sin”, or at least a guilt). For this refusal of just one scale of values, I think that Sibel's identity can be associated to the ryzhomatic identity proposed by Édouard Glissant. The concept of “Ryzhome” has been elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹⁰, to set a new mode of philosophical thinking against transcendental verticality of depth, for a ramification of thinking in surface's “absolute immanence”, in a continuous circular movement against every structure or institutionalization¹¹.

Glissant uses this concept to work on identity in complex contemporary realities, especially that of Francophone Caribbean Islands. He thinks about multiplicity of cultures in post-colonial subjects, cultures that are not opposing each other but are, according to Glissant, a “relational co-presence”. In this sense, he proposes the idea of identity as a ryzhome, a root that encounters other roots, in which heterogeneous cultural elements, in some circumstances, can be put in relation with unpredictable results¹². Entire world could be marked by relational identities networks, open to the other but not annihilating themselves in an acritical adjustment to other positions¹³; harmonic co-presence of differences is guaranteed by the fact that various positions are never privileged, are not considered the only position to be legitimated in a transcendental perspective by a unique founding myth (a divine Genesis).

Individuals and their cultures are never completely dominating or dominated: this is also Sibel's dream in *Head-On*, but not that of Cahit, who was born in Turkey and is divided in a cultural and sexual duplicity; consequently, he puts a stop to their marriage and its dream of freedom. But Akin's text poses itself as a relational, ryzhomatic text: in one side, in fact, the structure, divided in chapters from the orchestra sequences, allows a systematization of the narration, which is developed through chronological succession of events; on the other side, ellipses and weakness of causal links¹⁴ and co-presence of different types of editing inside the same sequence do not allow to analyse all aspects of the text and to systematize the analysis in a coherent comprehension. Then, *Head-On* is one of the narrative product by Glissant's “creolized” society¹⁵, a society that refuses

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze e Felix Guattari, “Ryzhome”, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (1980).

¹¹ For an explanation of Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of ryzhome, see the Italian dictionary of cultural studies: Salvo Vaccaro, “Rizomatica”, in Michele Cometa, ed., *Dizionario degli studi culturali* (2004), pp. 351-356.

¹² Édouard Glissant, *Poetica del diverso*, Rome, Meltemi, 1998, p. 19.

¹³ Relation is also defined as opening and relativity, see *ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁴ We don't know how much time passes between Cahit's and Sibel's meeting and marriage, or how much time Cahit spent in prison; neither we know why Cahit accept to marry Sibel, or who is Sibel's partner in Istanbul; and so forth.

¹⁵ Glissant talks about Creole societies born in Francophone Caribbeans, and considers them the only “creolized” societies; so, Anglophone realities, for Glissant, are dominated by an oppositive dialectic between colonizer (English) and colonized (other “native” languages) without any possibility of creative mingling. I think that Glissant underestimates Anglophone languages, thinking just to what is called “World English” and not about thousand of

every link with a transcendental Genesis for a co-presence of different but “equal” narratives. In “creolized” societies, without a single and “original” founding myth, we have a relational network that constructs identities through a process of decentralizing of narrations. So, in oral and written narrations we will have an absence of “centre”; the scale of values will be multiplied in all the possibilities of narratives, the only possible structure will be a chaotic one, and every narrative will have the same “original” authority, even if they are in contradiction with each other¹⁶.

In this sense, Glissant speaks about contemporary world as the “Chaos-World”¹⁷, because the multiplication of variables and especially the introduction of time's variability have brought to the predominance of law of unpredictability. So the “ambiguity thinking” would allow everybody to adjust “poetically” to unpredictability of relationships, giving way to an imaginary in which everybody can be in relation with all world's differences everywhere. Relationships and reality itself cannot be organized in a transcendental and hierarchical system, more valid than others; in a imaginary based on Relation, on the interconnection between differences, values systems float consciously, bringing to a fertile and moving co-presence of different realities.

The Chaos-World is “the shock, the interweave, repulsions, attractions, connivances, oppositions, conflicts between cultures, (...) the cultural mingling that is not a melting-pot (...) and that expresses itself without a singular system of values”¹⁸. Also *Head-On*, through Sibel's position, doesn't put a hierarchy of values, doesn't talk about a Turkish tradition or an Occidental progress better than other positions, but every cultural approach is problematic and can be vital or can bring death in the same way. Every time one position proposes itself like the only possible and authoritative, it brings Sibel to self-destruction. Languages as well are multiple and balanced with one another, and so filmic rhetoric: narration is developed through emotional and irrational dynamics, even contradictory at the times; so, we can speak for *Head-On* of a “Relational Poetic”, expression of a “creolized society”.

Just think about three sequences, aesthetically very close, but opposite for the emotion they show: when Sibel dances with Cahit in their apartment, showing him her new piercing; when Sibel is in the Istanbul pub where she dances and drinks till she becomes unconscious, being then raped by the bartender; and the editing sequence that shows Cahit in Istanbul, waiting for Sibel to call. All these sequences are constructed by short takes, often close-ups, edited with jump cuts, or by total shot edited by lap dissolves. In the first, the protagonists' close-ups presents also some freeze frames on Cahit's face when he screams “Punk is not dead”, showing the uncontainable joy for the chaotic

variations that come from the mingling of languages and cultures also in presence of “English culture”. But, because for Glissant “creolization” means essentially a society dominated by ryzhomatic and multiple identities, I continue to use his term, without the specific reference to Creole languages or realities.

¹⁶ Édouard Glissant, *Poetica del diverso*, p. 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40; see also pp. 70-72.

freedom of their marriage. The second sequence is divided in two halves: the first with Sibel's close-ups while she drinks and dances frenetically, alone and desperate¹⁹; the second is constructed by short medium shots of the empty pub, edited with lap dissolves, while Sibel's unconscious body is raped by the bartender, showing her degradation and the squalor of her life. Third sequence is constructed through Cahit's whole-length shots during his ordinary Istanbul life, edited with lap dissolves that are almost double exposures, rendering Cahit's sense of waiting²⁰.

So, background music is fundamental to give emotional meaning to different sequences edited in the same (or similar) way. Filmic rhetoric, like verbal languages, needs something else to assume a specific logical and emotional meaning. Every filmic choice doesn't refer to a single scale of value or to a coherent ethic position, but language is influenced by cultures, contexts and narrations like any other human expression. We can say that in this way *Head-On* tries to configure diegetically and formally the Relational realities of Chaos-World, becoming a ryzhomatic text and bringing multiple and chaotic meanings made comprehensible by the existing narrative structure.

The same creative mingling is that of verbal languages; all the characters (except maybe Maren, who just speaks German), are bilingual, and they speak either German or Turkish. In just three sequences we will hear someone speaking English: when Cahit's psychiatrist quotes a song's verse ("If you can't change the world, change your world"²¹); when Cahit and then Sibel cry out the slogan "Punk is not dead"; and when Cahit, in Istanbul, speaks with Selma, telling her about his emotions for Sibel. These are very keen sequences, marked by the characters' emotional progression; but English is used in two cases to quote pre-existing texts, so that this sense of quotation will remain also when Cahit uses English to open his soul. Besides, chronological linking make us think that Cahit decides to marry Sibel because of the psychiatrist's quotation; then, the slogan about punk becomes a mark for the protagonists' freedom but also for their distance from one another, because of Sibel's conception of desire as "innocent" amusement. So, English is the vehicle for very different positions and meanings.

This separation between signifier and meaning, the absence of correspondence between form and emotion, underlines the text shows how far a language (cinematic or verbal) can be from "reality", like we can see from the first "false" shot of the orchestra. The orchestra becomes a frame for the narration, making explicit the construction of narration using formal codes, but telling us also about multiplicity of possible codes, and differences between various imaginaries of reference, all equally valid. So, aesthetic difference between Hamburg and Istanbul is not an opposition of

¹⁹ Background music is *I Feel You* by Depeche Mode, the same song we listened during Cahit attempted suicide; we listen again its incipit during Cahit's nightmare just before the editing sequence.

²⁰ During the editing sequence background music is incipit of Zinoba's *Life's What You Make It*, played by Cahit himself.

²¹ Interestingly, the original verse from *Lonely Planet* by The The is "If you can't change the world, change yourself", showing in the psychiatrist's "error" (or sliding meaning) agency's problematicity.

imaginaries, but they are different settings for different characters' positions.

In Hamburg, Sibel dreams about the possibility to take together her multiple and ryzhomatic roots, mingling together the desire of freedom, of living all possible experiences (through sex, drugs, food, relationships and so on), but also the desire to belong to her “original” family. After Cahit murders Niko, her family refuses to take part of Sibel's life, and every root is cut. Sibel goes to Istanbul not to come back home, but to find a new balance for her life; before she can reconstruct her ryzhomatic roots, she has to forget every sense of belonging, to the original family, to her new “family” with Cahit, even to the conventional representation of female sex. She doesn't exhibit anymore her body for other's gaze and desire. And if in first and second “chapter” of the film Sibel is dressed with ordinary but feminine dress, and in the third she wears very sensual dresses that underline her body, when she arrives in Istanbul her hair are cut, and she wears shapeless trousers and a bomber jacket, underlining this way her refusal to show her body. Desire is not a game any more: her playful conception of gender relationship have brought murder, and the end of all possibilities of real freedom. In Istanbul Sibel is exiled from her femininity like from the triumph of ryzhomatic identity.

This doesn't mean that Sibel in Istanbul come “back” to her “original” culture, or to her “country”, refusing the possibilities of “Occidental” modernity. Instead, Sibel goes to Istanbul just because Selma lives there, her “maternal” cousin²², protective but also repressing. When Sibel discovers that Selma's life is dedicated just to work and social promotion, she tries to re-create her life of amusement in Hamburg with drugs and sex. But in Istanbul she doesn't find cocaine, like with Cahit, but opium; the drug reawakens all her nightmares, and brings her almost to physical and psychical destruction. Sibel's ryzhomatic choice doesn't defend her from the problems of cultural and gender differences, so that Istanbul men take advantage of her apparent freedom.

When Cahit arrives in Istanbul, they have to see each other because of an unstoppable desire, of the “dark passion” (*kara sevda*) of their intense and incurable love, a love that is typical of Turkish narrative tradition and is exorcized, according to Asuman Sune, when they can finally make love in Istanbul²³. But it seems that the representation of their lovemaking is linked with a precedent sequence: when they were in Hamburg, one night Sibel have stopped Cahit before sexual penetration because after that they would be “husband and wife”, and that would be an error (according to her). So, when they make love in Istanbul they finally become “husband and wife”, and we can think that the final meaning of the film is this formation of heterosexual couple. But, if they speak about leaving together during the love scenes, Sibel choices not to go with Cahit, and consequently not to belong to Cahit. Sibel still thinks “an error” to belong to someone or something;

²² Selma tells exactly the same words about Cahit that Birsene have told before; they both say that Sibel could make a better choice.

²³ Asuman Sune, “Dark Passion”, «Sight & Sound», vol. 15, n. 3, March 2005, pp. 18-21.

she doesn't leave with Cahit and her daughter, but neither she simply stay with her new partner: we cannot see her partner, we just listen to his playing with the baby. Sibel doesn't belong to Selma or to Istanbul neither, she can go away every time if she finds she is out of balance again.

In her new life, Sibel's dream is partially intact, but it doesn't comprehend any more the ludic hedonism experienced in Hamburg. Sibel can put together what has been with what will be, choosing not to belong to anything and anyone, not Hamburg nor Istanbul, not Cahit nor her partner, not Selma nor her daughter. She has developed a true ryzhomatic identity, not joyous but problematic, “forever in some form of transit between two cultures, unable ever to arrive in the static idyll as we know it from the *Heimatfilm*”²⁴. Sibel is now free, but she has to strike a balance between different cultures and positions she embodies. We cannot know how and if this balance is really possible for Sibel, because the film shows us just the continuous head-on collision against autocratic positions (that of some “Turkish tradition”, or of jealousy, or of degradation, and so on); what we know is that Sibel doesn't belong to anyone or anywhere any more, but she has find a way to create a network of relations between everybody is important to her. She doesn't exhibit her personality and her freedom, but she can however continue to open herself to every choice and position, being part of every possible world.

Cahit's journey to Istanbul is even more contradictory and problematic, because he is from the beginning divided between two belonging; he is broken between his “native” Turkish culture (he is born in Turkey, while Sibel is born in Hamburg) and that of “naturalization”. In the first sequence, for example, he speaks Turkish fluently with Seref, but his aspect (dressing, hair cut, and so forth) is completely “German”. And most of all, when he meets Sibel, we have sought she is represented with one camera movement between her cut wrists and her serene gaze; but Cahit is showed with one static half-figure shot that underlines his broken neck. His body is divided from his mind, his entire life is broken in two; and when he is in the hospital refectory, he is alternatively comprehended and excluded from Sibel's family shots, so that the formal structure inform his desire to belong and to run away from this traditional family.

So, Sibel cannot leave with Cahit when they meet in Istanbul because he is divided in two opposite positions, he has a dual identity, not a multiple one. So, he has to come back to Mersin, “where he is born”, alone; and maybe in “his country” he could find his balance, he could finally belong to a place. But until now the text privileges the problematic condition of impossible belonging for the diasporic contemporary subject. So, even if Cahit brings on his broken body the possibility to live the duality and the diversity of cultures, the film is neatly for Sibel's dream of multiplicity. Desire, as engine of narration, and language of its representation, are shapeless and

²⁴ Daniela Berghahn, “No Place Like Home? Or Impossible Homecomings in the Films of Fatih Akin”, «New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film», vol. 4, n. 3, 2006, p. 156.

contradictory like Sibel's body and life, multiple like the border between cultures and positions that Sibel embodies and makes incoherent and jagged, opening herself and the text to all possibilities of bewilderment and retrieval.

So, sequences' structure is less and less coded: orchestra just play music without word, (except the last, almost incomprehensible song); we have no more fades out to mark narrative segments like in the first part before the murder, but we see lap dissolves and double exposures that make sequences very short and indefinite; and so on. The film itself is multiple and ryzhomatic like Sibel's identity, bringing forth a narration less codified and marked by the absence of hierarchy between shots, and of a strong causal or even chronological linkage between events. Even if Sibel partially fails her dream of freedom, the text itself privileges multiple meanings and chaotic use of linguistic codes, embodying the cultural difference and the ryzhomatic identity against every "simple" binary opposition.

"Relation thinking" on the Edge. Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven*

Claudia Barucca

The international title of the movie, *The Edge of Heaven*, is the title of the third chapter, while in Turkish and German version is *Yasamin Kiyisinda* and *Auf anderen seite* (*On the other side*) that immediately gives idea of a movie about position and dynamics of relation. For my analysis I decided to focus on how this movie represents the development of connections among identity processes, the *poétique de la relation* (Glissant) and constant negotiations of positions of different characters: parents and sons/daughters, women and men, migrants of the first and second generation, Turkish and Germans. This movie tells about 6 characters (3 pairs) who cross their stories leaving and taking every time new positions.

Stuart Hall studies on links between hegemony, culture and "new ethnicities" examine important observations on the complexity of identity processes²⁵. The issue of the identity policy becomes absolutely urgent in contemporary context, and in Hall's opinion it works on what he calls "war of positions". For Hall human beings are agents, only when they are actively *in loco* through social and historical connections or disconnections. This "position thinking" is a cultural product and this adoption of position can actually be defined as identity. We can call "culture" this complex articulation of positions, relations, hegemony, narrative and symbolic representations.

Identity and ethnicity are included in the general issue of this "new representation policy".

²⁵ We would like to remember Paul Gilroy's studies about concepts of ethnicity, race and new identitarian and cultural policies. His most important volumes are: *The Black Atlantic*, London, Verso, 1999; *Against race. Imagining political culture beyond the color line*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000; *There ain't no black in the Union Jack*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002; *After the Empire*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004.

History, language and culture, with their contextualized codes and products, build subjectivity and identity. In *Introduction: Who needs Identity?*²⁶ Hall, according to Foucault, defines identity as temporary “suture” point between subjective positions (always socially set) and communication practices. Therefore identities build themselves as positions that the subject takes knowing that they are representations and living this “suture” as an articulation rather than an unilateral process. Hall says that there’s always a margin of freedom at subjects’ disposal in their identity building, given by articulations and performative strategies that don’t lead necessarily to a determined identity, but can offer new free spaces in processes of identification.

In this paper I would like to examine and focus *The Edge of Heaven* through Postcolonial studies that insert the issue of identity in a crossing field between theories on identity and ethnicity complexity and theories and practices of representation, intended as cinema in this case. Relations between ways of cinematographic representation and identities construction ways are presented in the text, these processes run through rhetoric and formal film devices, identification mechanisms and audience desire.

The six characters of the movie are Ali and Nejat (father and son), Yeter and Ayten (mother and daughter), Susanne and Lotte (mother and daughter), and during narration their ties assume different forms. Ali is an adult Turkish man, migrant of first generation (probably during the wave of the sixties) in Bremen – Germany, tied to his language and his hometown Trabzon. Nejat is his son, grew up only with him (his mother died when he was very young), he’s a migrant of second generation and he teaches German at the University of Hamburg, living between Hamburg and Bremen and probably feeling as a truly German citizen.

Yeter is the second character that we meet in Bremen and we leave her when her coffin moves from Germany to Istanbul. She’s a Turkish woman, probably Kurdish (she tells that her husband was dead in Maras, where in 1978 there was a terrible massacre of more than a thousand Kurdish people), working as prostitute in Bremen to send money to Turkey for her daughter Ayten’s education. We don’t cross Ayten until the second chapter, but her mother Yeter speaks about her with Nejat coming back from the hospital where Ali’s admitted. We see her in Istanbul and we will keep track of her travel to Hamburg (where she meets Lotte), then Bremen (looking for her mother) and Istanbul again.

Then we have Lotte (Charlotte) and Susanne (her mother), they cross lifes and journeys of Ayten and Nejat and they will both move from Hamburg to Istanbul in two different moments of the story: after their conflicting phase, they will discover each other again passing by same paths. Susanne goes back to Istanbul after her daughter’s death trying to help Ayten.

²⁶ *Introduction: Who needs Identity?*, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Question of Cultural Identity*, London, Sage, 1996.

Family connections loosen and tighten again in different forms, liaisons, new kind of ties and relationships born. During the whole movie characters cross and leave themselves while narration continue to develop. Akin describes us this “being in relation”, being next or being “on the other side”, staying on the edge and looking from the edge (both camera and characters, “objective” shots and point-of-view shots), staying at the same time not here nor there, living the edge and the encounter with the Other. This staying on the edge is chosen by Akin as formal solution to represent this “being in relation”. The edge is always a problematic aesthetic form and becomes a way to observe the issue of complexity of identity construction for our analysis.

In lots of moments the camera (director’s and audience eye) stays on the edge, just out of the *mise-en-scene*, shots are often framed by doors, windows or glasses. Even in diegesis of the gaze between characters we can notice that they often stay and observe each other through edges which keep them apart, divided; only when they decide to get closer we can see them framed side by side. For instance, during the first meeting between Ali and Yeter, camera lingers out of different edges and they approach staying basically on two sides. Yeter’s death happens on a sort of edge too: Ali is drunk and offends her, he wants to have sex against her will, she asserts that she’s not his property and she wants to leave, they get in the house from the garden, argue, Ali gives her a strong slap and she falls out of the frame. When we go back in a half-shot, camera is just out of the garden door, Ali is kneeled close to Yeter’s body; she lays down still having probably knocked her head against the bed headboard that divided the living room in two (another edge).

Lotte and Ayten instead are almost always framed “on the same side”. Even when they eat, or dance, or just sit one in front of the other, camera use to shot them together and then begin to use alternate editing. Susanne is instead “on the other side” of Lotte and Ayten (looking through the window or listening through the door). Only later, when she moves to Istanbul after her daughter’s death, she meets Ayten in prison, they speak intensely through the glass window (on the two sides), their faces overlap and then we can see them shot together hugging in Nejat’s German bookshop.

In Postcolonial studies field identity complexity of the Other is seen “in relation”, representation of encounter with the Otherness is inscribed in gaze dynamics but even in dialogic ones. According to Gayatri Spivak we can move from the narrative and discursive dimension to a political one just through studies on the subaltern silences. Her imperative of “imagining the Other” works on a complex interactive dimension between speaking and listening that could be showed by narrative representations. In her famous essay *Can the subaltern speak?*²⁷ Spivak describes this dialogical relation in its connection with representation of the Otherness. Can the subaltern speaks?

²⁷ G.C. Spivak., “*Can The Subaltern speak?*”, in C. Nelson, L. Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, London, Macmillan, 1988.

Is she²⁸ listened? Speaking and listening complete the linguistic act. If we deny the faculty of speaking, of communicating as representation, we can reduce the Other at a subaltern state. According to Spivak is important to start from these silences and from the impossible complicity between dominant and subaltern.

Rey Chow, in her studies, working on subaltern silences of Spivak, wonders (sounding out the position of Bhabha) how silence of “natives”, and even their allowance of speaking, are inserted in structure of imperialism and domination. The “native” is converted in an entity singed up as a visual form and her silence could become occasion for our speaking (Bhabha)²⁹.

Identity and relation processes are constructed through gaze dynamics, dialogical ones and even by linguistic games. In Fatih Akin’s movie we have three languages: Turkish, German and English. At the beginning when Ali discovers that Yeter is a Turkish woman starts to speak Turkish, and the two Turkish men (same two who host Ayten when she arrives in Germany) recognize her as a Turkish woman by her Turkish speaking and threaten her. Nejat teaches German and prefers to speak German (with Yeter too, who use Turkish to let him understand that she’s a prostitute); he will easily slides from German to Turkish and again in Istanbul (even if he’s always tied to his German identity and he will buy the German bookshop taking place of its past German owner). Lotte and Ayten speak English between themselves and Ayten wants to call her Charlotte, not Lotte that is a very German nickname. English becomes the language of possible communication and of their love, it will be language of reconciliation between Susanne and Ayten too at the end of the third chapter.

The movie is divided in three chapters: *Death of Yeter*, *Death of Lotte*, *The Edge of Heaven*, and Nejat’s prologue/epilogue travelling from Istanbul to Trabzon. Chapters are punctuated by fades out and then fades in to titles. Narration stops to starts again following an other character. This movie is well punctuated; sometimes stories and characters cross themselves and move narration (moving themselves), other times they just brush by even if they don’t see each other and they don’t have consciousness about their overlaps. Akin doesn’t ask us to resolve the plot, sometimes he blinks at possible solutions (when characters brush by the opportunity to meet each others) but then plot continues, as life.

Death, Life, Travel, Germany, Istanbul become other characters of the story. Even Death (Akin presents this movie as second episode of his trilogy about “Love, Death and Evil”, in which Love is embodied by *Head-On*) is presented as a life’s element. Two women dies, apparently both because of “accidents” (Yeter dies for a domestic quarrel and then Lotte is shot by a child) but loaded by strong relational implications. They are two women, both in a foreign country and they

²⁸ Spivak, like Chow, always speaks of subaltern (and native) as a female subject.

²⁹ Ann Kaplan in her 1997 volume *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and Imperial gaze* (New York and London, Routledge, 1997) chooses to use Spivak’s research in her proposal of analysis of film and their gaze dynamics.

are “different”, “Others”.

Yeter is a prostitute and even when Ali hosts her in his house is because he wants a Turkish woman at his disposal, he doesn't stop to treat her like this and he kills her during a strong argument. Lotte is a young German woman, she meets Ayten and they fall in love, she's a lesbian and she's always with Ayten thought trial to the prison in Istanbul, leaving her mother to hold onto her. She does what Ayten asks, and so she goes to take the gun, she takes Ayten's position (even on a visual level) when she meets the Turkish woman who opens for her roof's door. Children snatch her bag with the gun and then they shoot her in a waste closed clearing in old alleys of Istanbul, Akin decides to shot them at the beginning from both prospects (a sort of point of view shots) and then with a total shot where we can see children on a side and Lotte's body on the ground on the other (it seems a stage where Death and desolation are sets). Death is so a narrative elements, it causes movements and ties the plot: two coffins, one arrived in Turkey, the other leaves for Germany.

Third chapter is all sets in Turkey, two main characters are Nejat and Susanne who make their journey and their Oedipic routes, different for a “son” and a “mother”. For both Istanbul is the place for catharsis and for their “taking position” that could open to reconciliation. Susanne goes to Istanbul to look for Lotte's path and tracks (Nejat, her room, Ayten) and camera describes these movements. Susanne reads Lotte's diary where she describes her walking on same paths of her mother, and then we see her on the street in front of the house (where Lotte used to stay in Istanbul) and camera makes the same little pan while she passes and says hello to old men playing Backgammon on the street. She meets Ayten at the prison, their faces overlaps on the glass window that divides them (and joins them), camera will shot them together one in front of the other (in the same framing) when they meet in the bookshop of Nejat.

Narrative structure is not linear, Akin puts epilogue like a prologue and in this way he renders explicit his will of not stopping on causality of actions and of Oedipic routes of Nejat and the inverse one of Susanne. Epilogue is not a causal effect of action's chain that determine a reconciliation as pacification and conflicts resolution, but as consciousness of the conflict and possibility.

This movie opens with a sequence that will continue during narration and will finish just with the end. This “prologue” is an epilogue, is Nejat's travel from Istanbul to Trabzon to meet his father, it starts with the first shots but it can end just after the “story”. It's just with this consciousness of the story and his course that Nejat can conclude his movement, this first sequence is completely taken again at the end (camera movements and times are the same), just the song version changes (intra- and extra-diegetic). At the beginning the song is sung by a male voice, and characters (Nejat and the man at the counter of the fuel pump where he stops) talk about the song

Seni Sevdugumi and the singer (named Kazim Koyuncu). At the end of the movie Akin presents again the same whole sequence, the song is the same but it's sung by a female voice (she's Sevval Sam, while Kazim Koyuncu only performs the background voice), but characters' words are the same, and the male singer is named as nothing changed.

The fact that Akin shows the same sequence with two different version of the same song suggests a possible re-writing of the story through a gender switch (linked to the possibility of acquiring different positions out of strict tradition); these two epilogue's versions become two different moments of the story. Between them there's "the story", that is a story of growth, of confrontation with his roots, of passage from son to man; his catharsis is always composed.

Nejat speaks not too much, listens to others, his contacts and his actions don't determine others' lives. Nejat is probably close to spectator's position, it seems that other characters move around him. As a spectator he cannot change things but he can assume consciousness, even when he interacts with Lotte or Susanne. We can see him during his quite lesson or in the bookshop (his own Germany found again and cut in Turkey) and during his travel to Trabzon. He's a "German" man, he shifts placidly between the two languages, he's not struggling against his roots, his conflict is with his father. Nejat starts as a son (in conflict with his father), and after his meeting with Susanne (encounter with a motherly figure and the tale of the Sacrifice of Ismal) becomes an adult, and tries to find a reconciliation with Ali. The story of the Sacrifice is different between Arabic and Jewish-Christian tradition. All the three religions tells about this episode of the first book of Moses, but the identity of the victim changes: for Muslims is Ismael and not Isaac.

Ismael is the son that Abraham had from his wife's slave Hagar and Isaac is the "legitimate" one from his wife Sarah. Nejat tells the Arabic version, that Ali used to tell him when he was a child, which scared him. He says to Susanne how his father used to reassure him saying that at he would have made an enemy of God to avoid sacrificing him. Nejat explains himself Yeter's death as voluntary act of violence and nomination of Ali (the Tradition) and manage to think about a reconciliation with him only after having remembered that Ali would have betrayed God (Divine Tradition) for him.

Reconciliation (although not revealed) is only possible when the parent goes out of Father's Law (of tradition as hegemonic force). Catharsis takes place in Turkey and in Nejat's journey (he goes through Filyos, linked to Greek *filos*: affective bond), Turkey not as a recovery of traditional roots but place of the Other, Otherness compared to European tradition, place of possibility for human contact and acceptance of parents, not of tradition. Turkey is not the Exotic cause, it's not the Archaic. Trabzon seems a village, seems the Archaic but it's just another opportunity. We don't know if Nejat will ever reconcile with Ali, we don't know if he will go back to the Archaic. Ali identifies himself as the Archaic, but it's not the same for Nejat, he sees Ali only as a father.

Confrontation with Archaic or with Ali is not shown, Nejat stare at the sea and he waits for his father return staying on the shore (on a border).

Turkey is this way becomes an opportunity for “border thinking”, a place where this encounter and compare with Otherness is possible.