

Masochism, Marginality, and the Metropolis:

Kutlug Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid*

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Baltimore: "What you get is what you see"

While sitting at the window of "City Café," a gay café in Baltimore, I let my eyes wander to the other side of the street where a group of young gay black men were camping it up. Dancing to inaudible music, acting in an invisible play, they turned the local bus stop into a stage of gay make-believe. Still reveling in my admiration of gay men creating a spectacle out of nothing, I slowly realized that I was not watching an aimless play of cross-dressing but sex work in action. A steady stream of customers, all white, middle-aged, and seemingly middle-class men, exiting the café and driving up in cars, had read the scene quite differently than I. It was not a coincidence that the drama of the young black men was staged in front of the café, whose large window functioned like a reversed shop-window, behind which those on the inside could safely watch and choose those on the outside. I was witness to an intimate spectacle of disavowed race relations in America, seemingly invisible to those around, including the police repeatedly passing by.

I take my point of departure in this moment of simultaneous excessive visibility and invisibility of those cross-dressing, sex-working minority subjects, who work the streets in more ways than one. The scene in question encapsulates, in many ways, the topic of the film in question, Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid* (1999), and of this essay, namely the attempt to articulate the

pleasure in camp as a form of resistance without losing sight of the social and material conditions from which marginalized minority subjects create camp in the first place. Much of recent queer studies fetishizes those forms of resistance, such as camp, cross-dressing, and drag as subversive practices, isolating them from their context. In the same way that the scene relies on the cityscape that enables anonymous encounters of bodies and desiring gazes, Ataman's film *Lola and Billy the Kid* relies on the topography of the metropolis Berlin.

Germany's New Minority Cinema¹

Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid* shares the self-confident articulation of second-generation migrants in Germany that defines the new minority cinema in Germany. Beginning in the mid-1990s, several minority directors were responsible for a significant shift in the cinematic representation of migrants in Germany: Fatih Akin, Angeliki Antoniou, Thomas Arslan, Ayse Polat, Seyhan Derin, Fatima El-Tayeb, Wanjiru Kinyanjui, Angelina Maccarone, Branwen Okpako, and Yüksel Yavuz are only a few of those directors. Two basic thematic trends characterize their films. First, the narration of journeys accounts for migration and its after-effects as in Derin's *I Am My Mother's Daughter* (*Ich bin die Tochter meiner Mutter—Ben Annemin Kiziyim*, Germany, 1996) and Polat's *Tour Abroad* (*Auslandstournee*, Germany, 2000). Second, the depiction of ethnic bodies in motion in German urban spaces reflects the significance of the metropolis for ethnic minorities. Examples are Akin's *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und schmerzlos*, Germany, 1998), Arslan's *Brothers and Sisters* (*Geschwister—Kardesler*, Germany, 1995) and *Dealer* (Germany, 1998), Yavuz's *April Children* (*Aprilkinder*, Germany, 1998), Maccarone's and El-Tayeb's *Everything Will Be Fine* (*Alles wird gut*, Germany, 1997), Antoniou's *Nights, Gambled Away* (*Verspielte Nächte*, Germany, 1996/97) and Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid*. Werner Schiffauer argues that young migrants identify with individual cities instead of the nation because cities create their own complex and heterogeneous cultures that allow migrants to escape the reduction to their ethnicity (15). The anonymity of cities

also allows for the articulation of deviant sexualities, reflected in *Everything Will be Fine* and *Lola and Billy the Kid*.

Among the heterogeneous group of filmmakers who make up the trend of new minority cinema in Germany, Ataman is the only director who did not live in Germany for any period of his life prior to directing *Lola and Billy the Kid*. He grew up in Turkey and attended film school at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he conceived of *Lola and Billy the Kid*. Before *Lola and Billy the Kid*, he wrote, directed, and produced *Hansel and Gretel* (U.S., 1984), *La Fuga* (U.S., 1988), and *Karanlık Sular* (Turkey, 1993) and wrote two books, *Long Streams* (2002) and *A Rose Blooms in the Garden of Sorrows* (2002). Since *Lola and Billy the Kid* he has focused on multimedia and video installations that have been shown in Europe, South and North America, and in Turkey. They include the 465-minute video installation *Semih B Unplugged* (1997) about the life of Turkish opera star Semiha Berksoy and the video *Women Who Wear Wigs* (1999), which was shown at the 1999 Venice Biennale, as well as the video installations *Martin Is Asleep* (1999), *Never My Soul* (2001), *1 + 1 = 1* (2002), *99Names* (2002), *It's a Vicious Circle* (2002), and *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* (2002). According to Ataman's interview statements, the script to *Lola and Billy the Kid* integrates his interests in a gay coming of age story and German attacks on Turks, an idea he conceived in Los Angeles but followed up with research on gay Turkish-German subculture in Germany.

Lola and Billy the Kid narrates the love story of the two main male gay characters Lola (Gandi Mukli) and Bilidikid (Erdal Yildiz).² With the characters Shehrazade (Calal Perk) and Kalipso (Mesut Özdemir), Lola is part of a drag show, "*Die Gastarbeiterinnen*," which literally means "the female guestworkers," an ironic use of the term that was invented to refer to the Turkish migrant workers who were recruited to work in Germany in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.³ Bilidikid and the other main character Iskender (Murat Yilmaz) are hustlers. All of them, but primarily Lola, are harassed by three German neo-Nazis, Rudy (Willi Herren), Hendryk (Mario Irrek), and Walter (Jan Andres). Lola has two brothers, one older, Osman (Hasan Ali Mete), and one

younger, Murat (Baki Davrak). Lola does not know of Murat's existence because Lola was kicked out of his family before Murat was born. Murat and Lola meet when Lola returns home to ask for his inheritance in order to get a sex change. Murat, who is also gay, subsequently leaves his family. After a short encounter with Lola in the cabaret where Murat gives Lola a red wig he found at home, Murat ends up on the street. After Lola is found dead floating in the Spree River, Shehrazade and Kalipso tell Murat that when his brother Osman discovered that Lola was gay, he raped him. To keep Osman at bay, Lola appeared at the dinner table wearing the red wig and was kicked out of the family. Bilidikid and Murat assume that the three German neo-Nazis have killed Lola, and with Murat wearing Lola's wig they lure the neo-Nazis into an abandoned factory, where Bilidikid castrates Rudy, kills Hendryk, and is himself shot and killed. Murat ends up with the neo-Nazi Walter in the bathroom stalls and finds out that Osman killed Lola. Murat returns home, confronts Osman, and leaves the apartment with his mother. In a subplot Iskender falls in love with an older, rich German, Friedrich von Seeckt (Michael Gerber) who is close to his mother (Inge Keller). Lola, Bilidikid, Iskender, Murat, Shehrazade, and Kalipso are not marginal because they are gay but because their ethnic and economic marginality positions them in a gay subculture defined by violence, poverty, prostitution, and cross-dressing.

The act of representing Turkish-German gay identity works against multiple layers of exclusion and projection. Historically, the representation of middle-Eastern same-sex desire was overshadowed by orientalizing discourses on homosexuality in the works of Western writers, such as T.E. Lawrence, André Gide, Oscar Wilde, and Jean Genet in the same way that Turkish cinema was overshadowed by orientalized images produced in the West in such films as George Melford's *The Sheik* (1921), George Fitzmaurice's *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).⁴ Joseph Massad discusses the continuation of an orientalist approach to the Muslim world in the "universalization of 'gay rights'" and its negative effects in countries with same-sex encounters but no definitions of homosexu-

ality and heterosexuality as identity categories (361). He defines "the Gay International" as the "missionary tasks, the discourse that produces them, and the organizations that represent them," which are, according to him, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) (361-2). He claims that "the Gay International has reserved a special place for the Muslim world in both its discourse and its advocacy," which is based on an "orientalist impulse" (361). Massad suggests that the Gay International's missionary task has resulted in two kinds of interrelated literatures, academic literature that "purports to explain 'homosexuality' in the past and present of the Arab and Muslim worlds, written mostly by white male European or American gay scholars" and journalistic accounts of contemporary gays and lesbians, which "aims to inform white gay sex-tourists about the region" (361). Massad claims: "The larger mission . . . is to liberate Arab and Muslim 'gays and lesbians' from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay" (361). According to Massad the Gay International "produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology" (362).

Yiğithan Yencioğlu describes the shift of gay identity in Istanbul from the 1980s to 1990s from traditional formations of homosexuality associated with the passive "ibne" and the active "kulanpara."⁵ Yencioğlu suggests that gay men in Istanbul of the 1990s "do not copy traditional ibne or kulanpara types of homosexual relationships" but adopt "an urban male identity and western gay life style" (3). *Lola and Billy the Kid* works effectively both against the projection of timeless homosexuality onto Muslim culture and against the ideal of Westernized homosexuality that relies on the idea of liberated individuals and collapses sexual desire into a coherent identity. Instead, in *Lola and Billy the Kid* the characters struggle with and embody male-male desire and a resistance to a teleology of heterosexual and homosexual identities. The characters in *Lola and Billy the Kid* are not objects of

desire projected by Western eyes but subjects of their desire for each other. *Lola and Billy the Kid* not only represents subjectivities formerly denied representation but in that process also reconfigures the very categories through which we conceive of subjectivity.

In general, film reviews in the German and American press applaud the film for claiming a Turkish-German gay identity. Yet despite the fact that *Lola and Billy the Kid* is distributed internationally and lauded almost unanimously, it has received limited academic reception, primarily with a theoretical emphasis on performativity in regard to the drag shows and gender. Performativity has taken center stage in the theoretical negotiation of gender and sexuality since Judith Butler's groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble*. Butler emphasizes the performance of gender in order to question the primacy of biological determinants of sex. Consequently, she validates practices such as drag and cross-dressing as subversive. For example, Christopher Clark gives the same space to a discussion of the performances of the cabaret group "Salon Oriental" of the Berlin Turkish-German cross-dressing subculture, which inspired "*Die Gastarbeiterinnen*," as to the film itself. He carefully maps out the political dimensions of the group's performances, which respond to everyday political issues in the Berlin Republic while subverting dominant notions of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. Clark makes productive the term *Transe* (a German term encompassing cross-dressers and transsexuals) for a model of transculturation. Ultimately, he suggests that *Lola and Billy the Kid* points towards "a queer utopia of sexual and cultural freedom" because "seemingly incompatible and asynchronous identities exist side by side in the same temporal and cultural frame," which creates a "simultaneity that disrupts the teleology of a rarely-questioned sexual master narrative" (191).

Deniz Göktürk's evaluation of the film in her essay "Turkish Women on German Streets: Closure and Exposure in Transnational Cinema" is more ambivalent than Clark's. She ascribes the ambivalence to the fact that "the exploration of family relations and machismo seems exaggerated and does fall back into ethnic stereotyping at some points," while she locates the

productivity of *Lola and Billy the Kid* in the transgender performance, which, according to her, “succeeds in dissolving essentialist identities, quite in line with recent theoretical dismantlings of sexual identity in favor of performative qualities of gender” (74). The placement of the latter quote at the end of her essay on the cinematic representation of Turkish women positions *Lola and Billy the Kid*’s male performances of femininity as the ultimate deconstruction of essential gender, ethnic, and sexual identities. My essay takes as its starting point the two poles articulated by Göktürk— “dissolving of essentialist identities” and “machismo and stereotypes”—to propose that these contradictory trajectories emerge from the tension between camp and narrative.

In order to investigate that tension, I shift the emphasis away from the utopian moments of the film primarily associated with the drag performances of “*Die Gastarbeiterinnen*” and Shehrazade’s, Kalipso’s and Lola’s cross-dressing. Despite the subversion of stable and rigid categories of identity through drag, I suggest that the film reproduces the aesthetic conventions and traditions associated with femininity and masculinity: femininity is reproduced in a sacrificing aesthetic, even if embodied by a biological man, and masculinity is cast in a heroic narrative that culminates in a tragic showdown of the anti-aesthetic, even if embodied by a gay man. Ataman’s film attacks the machismo of dominant definitions of Turkishness and by extension definitions of Turkish homosexuality that rely on traditional gender roles mainly through the depiction of the characters Osman and Bilidikid. In doing so, however, the film runs the danger of reinscribing the stereotype of unenlightened minority subjects.

Is Work to Labor as Camp is to Narrative?

In his recent book *Working Like a Homosexual*, Matthew Tinkcom defines camp “as a philosophy in its own right, one that offers explanations of how the relation between labor and commodity is lived in the day-to-day by dissident sexual subjects who arrive at their own strategies for critique *and* pleasure” (4). Tinkcom connects camp to work as defined by Hannah Arendt, differentiating work from labor:

[L]abor is characterized as the ongoing, repetitive, dull task of scratching out a life from the world, but work appears in the acts by which humans create for themselves something recognizably outside of themselves by which they can know their relation to labor—in short, work seems something hidden from the forms of tacit and explicit compulsion to labor implied in the notion of subjectivity. (11)

Tinkcom situates camp in a special relation to the cinema, where it functions as “non-narrative components” in “film spectacle: the film image parsed, however momentarily, from its situation within a larger diegetic world of events, temporality, and causation” (27). Tinkcom maps the division between labor and work onto narrative and cinematic excess where camp takes place: “The production of narrative film bears scrutiny as the endeavors that Arendt considers to be labor, while the extra-added exertions, say, in the excessive forms of performance, lighting, mise-en-scene, more fruitfully inhabit her category of work-as-play” (28). Tinkcom’s definition can be applied to *Lola and Billy the Kid* on the level of the narrative if one views the cross-dressing performances of “*Die Gastarbeiterinnen*” as work and Iskender’s, Bilidikid’s and later Murat’s hustling as labor. These two modalities are reinforced by the film’s aesthetic choices: the dance performances that interrupt the narrative are excessive and long, and emphasize mise-en-scene such as setting, costume, lighting, and music. The hustling scenes in public toilets are sterile, repetitive, and bleak, emphasized by the structural repetition of the composition and the framing of the shot, which always consists of a medium long shot of the hustlers’ upper bodies centered in the restroom stall. Like all laborers, the hustlers are exchangeable.

Lola and Billy the Kid offers a parallel structure of work and labor depicted in cross-dressing drag and prostitution mapped onto the different spaces and character configurations of the film:

Work

Lola, Shehrazade, Kalipso
 Cross-dressing performance
 Feminine play

Labor

Iskender, Bilidikid
 Hustlers
 Masculinist discourse

Sacrifice	Violent aggression
Spectacle	Narrative
Stage, ruins, park, water	Factory, street
Private Cabaret	Public restrooms

The exposition in the opening sequence of *Lola and Billy the Kid* introduces us to the different themes, spheres, characters, and narrative strands through crosscutting of the drag show, Bilidikid's hustling, and Murat's foray into the Tiergarten. "Die Gastarbeiterinnen" perform in the cabaret, with an emphasis on the production of Shehrazade, Kalipso, and Lola as dancers whom we see putting on their make-up backstage before we witness the actual performance. Tinkcom claims that camp "coily gives up some secrets about its production" (9). Shehrazade, Kalipso, and Lola appear in Turkish women's dance costumes and perform a show in which they act as exaggerated seductive and submissive "guestworker" wives of Iskender, who reenacts a Turkish patriarch. The double-function of camp deconstructs the stereotype of submissive stereotypical Turkish femininity and mobilizes belly dance's seduction for a spectacle of homoeroticism. The opening sequence crosscuts shots of Murat entering the Tiergarten, which is dark and confusing to him, with "Die Gastarbeiterinnen" performing in the club and Bilidikid seemingly being seduced by a stranger with whom he has sex in a restroom. In contrast, Murat does not get involved in anonymous sex in the Tiergarten. Instead, he gets picked up by his brother Osman in his cab, whose whereabouts in the vicinity are a subtle hint at his own potential gayness.

It is only at the end of the opening sequence that the relationship between Lola and Bilidikid and their friends is revealed and narrative coherence begins. Lola, Shehrazade, Kalipso, Iskender and Bilidikid are kicked out of the cabaret because Bilidikid beats up the stranger who did not realize that Bilidikid worked as a hustler. The opening sequence establishes the gender characteristics of Lola and Bilidikid, the multiple possibilities of erotics and seduction, and foreshadows the violence that erupts as a consequence of misreadings. The exposition also introduces the spaces that structure the film's spatial politics: the cabaret, the restroom,

the street, and the park, none of them marked specifically as Berlin. Berlin, however, is announced and symbolized by the Siegestsäule in the very opening shot that includes the credits. The darkness of the opening shot from which the angel of the Siegestsäule emerges connotes a general darkness of the city whose signifier is decontextualized. It is in the shadow of that symbol that the different spaces, through which the characters move, are mapped out. Thus, the film claims that the subculture emerges from Berlin, while it shows the characters' displacement and alienation from the official signifiers of Berlin.

Berlin: "What you see is what you get"

Lola and Billy the Kid separates and puts in relationship to each other the categories of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity by mapping them onto different spaces of the city coded by different gay and ethnic histories of the metropolis. Queer performativity of gender and ethnicity takes place in the cabaret as drag performances whereas sex takes place in public restrooms as sex acts. In cabaret performances and in encounters with stereotypical Turkish female and male characters, the exaggerated, playful, erotic, and witty camp performances of Turkish femininity by Shehrazade, Kalipso, and Lola deconstruct essentialist notions of gender and ethnicity, but only through a performance of femininity and Turkishness. In contrast, the sexual encounters in public bathrooms function in a marketplace that reflects ethnic and class hierarchies, since the customers are all white, middle-aged, middle-class German men, most presumably "in the closet."⁶ The sexual exchange is portrayed with the gritty realism of early gay liberation films such as Frank Ripploh's *Taxi to the Toilet* (*Taxi zum Klo*, 1981), also a Berlin film. *Lola and Billy the Kid* shows neither sex acts, nor bodily tenderness, such as kissing, between Lola and Bilidikid. The main characters' homosexuality thus becomes an effect of the gender roles they take on, the love they declare, but not of the sex acts in which they engage with each other.

Since the hustlers are selling their sexuality and are sexually acted upon by their Johns, they perceive neither their heterosexuality, nor their masculinity to be questioned. Bilidikid tells Murat when he initiates him into the Turkish-German gay subculture: "A man is a man. A hole is a hole. . . . Don't be a hole. Listen to me."⁷ According to Bilidikid it is not the sex act with another man that defines a homosexual as abject but the position of femininity taken on in the sex act. The portrayal of the fetishization of Turkish masculinity vis-à-vis the playful deconstruction of Turkish femininity results from the film's criticism of Turkish patriarchy. The uneven treatment of masculinity and femininity and Turkishness and Germanness provokes, however, a larger question: why is the theoretically celebrated deconstruction of gender and ethnicity only and seemingly easily acted out via those identities that are always already at the bottom of gender and ethnic hierarchies?

It is Kreuzberg, Berlin's neighborhood with the largest Turkish-German population, that comes to represent patriarchal and heterosexist Turkishness in the film. The main characters leave Kreuzberg for spaces defined by anonymity, and when Lola visits her family in Kreuzberg it is the only time we see Lola not in drag. Lola's brother Osman asks him how he found them, and Lola answers, "I just asked. That's how it is in the ghetto. Your address is always the same, even if we move." The ghetto functions like a village with social control. Even though Hermannplatz, where the hustling takes place, is located in proximity to Kreuzberg, it provides anonymity because it is located at an intersection of several subway and bus lines allowing for what Pat Califia has labeled "the informal economy or 'hidden marketplace' of the sex zones" (85).

David Bell and Jon Binnie map gay identity onto the contemporary Western metropolis, emphasizing what Bell calls "the paradox of queer visibility in commercial urban space" (86). According to Binnie, "whereas cappuccino culture thrives, the more overtly sexual, threatening, and queer have been pushed out. Queers are associated with the discarded, the derelict—the ruins of the urban landscape" (104). Scenes in *Lola and Billy the Kid*

take place in ruins and parks not marked specifically as Berlin, as well as in places recognizable as Berlin: Kreuzberg, Hermannplatz, Tiergarten, the Siegessäule, and Olympiastadium. Hermannplatz of Neukölln borders on Kreuzberg and connects the two working class neighborhoods in the former West Berlin. Die Siegessäule ("the victory column") is located in the center of the Tiergarten, an extensive park in the Western part of Berlin. The Olympiastadium, in the far west of Berlin, is the stadium Hitler built for the 1936 Olympic games. Some of these sites, such as the Tiergarten and the Siegessäule, signify gayness: the Siegessäule has a long history as an ironic symbol appropriated by the gay movement in Berlin, whose newspaper is called *Die Siegessäule*, and the Tiergarten is known for anonymous gay male sex. Siegessäule, Tiergarten, and Olympic stadium are also tourist sites with overdetermined symbolic value.

Central to the narrative, however, is an old factory and a park that provide the mise-en-scene for important dialogues and turning points such as death and castration. In Binnie's reading, the ruins of the city are the material from which marginal homosexuals reconstruct community. In the film, action takes place in the streets to show the characters' movement around the metropolis. Yet ruins, unrecognizable as Berlin, are the site for symbolic events such as archetypal moments of rebirth, excess, castration, and death, as well as for narrative turning points in the relationship between Lola and Bilidikid. The park is the site of Lola's birthday celebration, at which Kalipso talks about his sex change, which would provide him with a new body and thus a new birthday. Later the site of factory ruins becomes the stage for Rudy's castration, and Hendryk's and Bilidikid's death.

Lola and Bilidikid

The narrative of the relationship between Lola and Bilidikid complicates the link between biological sex and performed gender differently than the playfully subversive deconstruction of gender roles through the drag performance of "*Die Gastarbeiterinnen*." The names taken on by Lola and Bilidikid represent for them ideal female and male icons. Lola's name references Marlene

Dietrich's character Lola Lola in Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930), a character who connotes feminine seduction and spectacle and the impossibility of a bourgeois life. Her persona in many ways escapes the definition of one sexual identity, since she was famous for roles that addressed multiple desires.

Bilidikid's choice of name references the legendary hero of the American West Billy the Kid, whose biography is elusive and contested, the material of myths and legends. The conscious misspelling of the name as Bilidikid points to the gap between the American legend and the Turkish-German reception. Billy the Kid, associated with the West of the United States, represents America in a transnational imaginary, yet in his day his figure embodied opposition to the expansion of law, and thus, the nation of the United States (Tuska, 243). The legendary accounts emphasize his all-male posse and not his romantic relationships to women. The film relies on the structural similarity of a historical conflict between larger imposed structures and individual resistance, rewriting the conflict in terms of sexuality. Several films of the new Turkish-German cinema refer to transnational mythical outlaw figures such as Bruce Lee and Scarface.⁸ Bilidikid rearticulates his marginality by mirroring it in the outlaw figure, and, thus, according to Claudia Breger, appropriates and queers masculinity.

Masculinity as Masquerade?

Breger's reading of masculinity in *Lola and Billy the Kid* derives from her intention to sever the assumed symbiotic relationship of camp and femininity, on the one hand, and insert a discussion on marginality into the German discourse on masculinity, on the other (125). Breger reads Bilidikid's performance of masculinity as masquerade and thereby separates the theoretical notion of masquerade from femininity to which it has been tied since Joan Riviere's influential essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade":

Bilidikid's machismo is a masquerade, which serves as a defense against stereotypes of non-masculinity, a strategy of the creation of status and power from the threatening "nothing" coded as feminine. *Lola and Billy the Kid* accentuates not only the

performativity but also the theatricality of this hypermasculinity, which is put together with a leather jacket, gel hair, mirrored sun glasses, and playfully exaggerated poses of possession of (public restroom and street) competence, space and money. (139)

According to Breger, the masquerade of Bilidikid is not a “relic of Islamic patriarchy” but a product of mimicry of western mass culture (141). The final scene in the factory analyzed by Breger as a “showdown” influenced by the Western genre, “doubles” the figure of the hero: “The mimicry of the subaltern man, who returns the violence of the whites excessively against them, sullies the hero-spectacle: Bilidikid’s white t-shirt is half red after the castration” (141). In addition to the doubling and deconstruction of the image of the hero, Breger argues that the character Bilidikid is staged as the erotic spectacle of the film: the camera concentrates mainly on Bilidikid, turning him into the object of desire. Breger concludes that “the Turkish macho” is staged “as a subject and object of queer desire characterized by ambivalence” (142).

Bilidikid’s masquerade allows him to pass as a Turkish macho, to use Breger’s terms, when he is in Kreuzberg, something that Lola is unable to do. Lola’s masquerade is staged as the cinematic spectacle in the drag shows and when Lola becomes a corpse. Notions of masculinity and femininity are also negotiated in the characters’ dialogues, in the narrative through Lola’s and Bilidikid’s relationship, and on the level of aesthetics. Lola and Bilidikid’s relationship determines the narrative in important ways, since it is their impossible relationship, a dominant trope in gay and lesbian cinema, which sets the stage for Lola’s death, which, in turn, motivates the deadly showdown. Two important scenes illustrate Lola and Bilidikid’s relationship, both marked by an emphasis on dialogue and scarcity of cinematic movement and *mise-en-scene* which contrasts to the cinematic excess during cross-dressing performances. The lack of other characters, setting, and movement emphasizes the intimacy in Lola and Bilidikid’s relationship, even when they articulate violent and sacrificial fantasies.

Early on in a scene of one long take on their bed, Lola and Bilidikid articulate the different fantasies of their relationship.

Lola is content to live in Germany and cross-dress because, he argues, Germans do not care about how they behave, while Bilidikid claims that his relatives and friends are concerned about his relationship to Lola. He therefore cannot meet his friends, since they know about Lola. Bilidikid wants to leave for Turkey and open a bar on the beach and celebrate a wedding to Lola. He says to Lola:

Listen to me, you're not going to be that great anymore in twenty years. I thought about this. We can't live together like those German faggots. We must live like totally normal people. Like man and woman. A totally normal family. I come home, and you are there. But there is another little problem.—Right. So, then guess who then?

Lola: So why not you for God's sake? You are so crazy for a family.

Bilikidid: Because I am a man, and you are not.

The condition for Lola and Bilidikid's life as a heterosexual couple would be Lola's castration, which Bilidikid implies here in an ellipsis, understood as an effect of the gendering of their relationship that is already in place. Should Lola not be willing to have a sex-change operation, Bilidikid would castrate him:

Lola: I have no problem wearing a wig for the rest of my life, but that's all I'll do.

Bilikidid: Don't joke around, Lola. I'd rather kill you and me too. I'll cut off your dick if need be.

The expressed violence is an extension of Bilidikid's masculinity, which he repeatedly asserts throughout the film. Bilidikid threatens to match the roles they have signified with their names—seductive femininity and hypermasculinity—through biology, in which Lola would not only be a biological woman but would also experience the wound and mutilation of becoming a woman at the hands of his lover. Bilidikid projects a role of sacrificial femininity onto Lola and a violently sadistic role for himself as constitutive of their ideal relationship.

Lola's later monologue illustrates his awareness of the impossibility of their love, since his love for Bilidikid makes resis-

tance to Bilidikid's fantasy impossible, yet Lola is also aware that the fantasy of living in Turkey as a heterosexual couple is impossible. On Lola's birthday, which they celebrate in the park at night, Lola tells his and Bilidikid's story in the third person cast as a fairy tale. His monologue and the act of telling are emphasized by the bareness of the *mise-en-scene* and the static shot of Lola's head as if to take away any distraction from his monologue.

Lola: Once upon a time, there was a man called Lola and a man named Bilidikid. In the beginning they were very happy. They were crazy in love. But because Bili was such a macho guy, soon he did not want to live as a gay man among gay men.

Bilidikid: Shut up!

Lola: So he asked Lola to have his dick cut off and to become a woman and to live like everybody else.

Bilidikid: Shut up, I said.

Lola: Lola did it because she loved him. There she stood with her apron and cleaned the apartment every day and baked cookies. But one day, Bilidikid did not come home. Lola was waiting, the whole night. And the night after that, and the night after that. But Bilidikid did not come. And she was waiting, like a heroine in a romance novel. She was waiting and starting to hate him. But Bilidikid did not come back. Why do you think Bilidikid left Lola? Because the woman whom he had married was not the man who he fell in love with.

Lola foresees his own doomed fate but he does not foresee his violent ending, which follows the monologue but is not represented. The narrative development mirrors the gendered roles taken on by Lola and Bilidikid: Lola is murdered, and Bilidikid castrates a neo-Nazi in a revenge gone awry. Their actions, being castrated and castrating, are displaced onto other characters. At the end of her monologue, which is also the end of the scene, Lola walks away from the camera into darkness—a couple of trees take up the motif of the fairy tale—wearing full drag and his red wig.

Femininity as Beautiful Corpse

Lola's aestheticized corpse floating in the Spree frames the character as feminine in his death. Lola is floating with his head above

the water, the face clearly visible, surrounded by the fake curls of the red wig untouched by the water. The shot, static, from above, emphasizes the unrealistic portrayal of a drowned body, giving it over entirely to the realm of the aesthetic. In her book *Over Her Dead Body* Elisabeth Bronfen identifies a tradition of portraying women as dead aestheticized objects. The scene arrests Lola's floating corpse in an unrealistic portrayal echoing Bronfen's description: "The feminine body appears as a perfect, immaculate form because it is a dead body, solidified into an object of art" (5). *Lola and Billy the Kid* emphasizes looking at the image of femininity by repeating a shot of a little girl who asks twice: "Are you a mermaid?"

Lola's red hair surrounding his face, his position in the frame with his head high on the left and the feet low on the right in the frame, create an explicit reference to the famous 1852 pre-Raphaelite painting "Ophelia" by Sir John Everett Millais for which Elizabeth Siddal Rossetti was the model. Like *Lola and Billy the Kid*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does not represent Ophelia's death. In *Hamlet*, Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark and mother of Hamlet, tells the story of Ophelia's death, rendering it visual in her speech. Martha Ronk claims that "[t]he representation of Ophelia has been almost entirely iconic; her wild hair depicts madness or the victim of rape . . ." (4). The similarity between Ophelia and Lola can only be read retroactively, after the shot of Lola dead in the water. This reflects the film's overall narrative structure, since we learn at the end what leads us to understand the motivations of earlier events. Only after Lola's death do we learn that her brother Osman raped her and as a consequence Lola "went mad," wearing the red wig to the dinner table—a structural similarity to Ophelia's story. Based on the logic of homophobia, Lola could assume that he could keep Osman at bay if he exaggerated his performance of queerness. Lola's wig accused Osman of gay desire by exaggerating Osman's object of desire. The scandal arises from the location of Lola's action, the dinner table, center of the patriarchal family. The revelation about Osman points to Lola's trauma, which is buried deep in the film, not only at the level of representation, since the trauma is neither shown

nor narrated extensively, but also at the level of narrative, since Bilidikid does not know; otherwise he would suspect Osman. The similarity between Lola and Ophelia extends to the relationship between the role taken on by the subject via drag, and biology. According to Ronk, "Hamlet draws attention to Ophelia as a false picture by referring to the use of cosmetics as painting: 'I have heard of your paintings, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another' (III.i.144 ff.)" (1-2).

The reference to the figure of the mermaid serves as another link between Lola and Ophelia in the address of the little girl to Lola's corpse and in the Queen's speech: "Her clothes spread wide, And Mermaid-like awhile they bore her up" (IV.vii.174). Ronk suggests that the reference to the figure of the mermaid positions Ophelia in a different realm: "She is, like the mermaids, a momentary inhabitant of two realms, air and water. . . . Even the reference to the mermaids seems to draw attention to the two sexes in one" (13 and 14). Lola's floating on the Spree positions her on the former border of divided Germany, transforming the formerly divided Berlin into a symbol for the two genders and sexualities. Only in death can Lola float, like a mermaid, like Ophelia, on the dividing line, transcending the binary divisions. In *Lola and Billy the Kid*, even though Shehrazade, Kalipso, and Lola share the same sites and cross-dress, Lola functions as a sacrificial character, while Kalipso and Shehrazade are employed for comic relief.

Lola's death connects the political critique of homophobic violence and the psychoanalytic tropes of femininity. According to Bronfen "[d]eath and femininity both involve the uncanny return of the repressed, the excess beyond the text, which the latter aims at stabilizing by having signs and images represent" (XI-XII). Osman's repressed same-sex desire returns in his homophobic violence. After Lola's death, camp is dissolved into the narrative: Instead of cross-dressing performances, we see Kalipso and Shehrazade at Lola's funeral and practicing for their drag performance, where they tell Murat the critical information about Osman and Lola. The loss that is created by death is assuaged by repetition and substitution, argues Bronfen. Murat becomes Lola's

substitute on several levels. He was conceived when the father kicked out Lola; thus he is Lola's substitute in the patriarchal family. Murat's story repeats Lola's because he leaves the control of his brother and becomes gay. After Lola's death he takes Lola's place by staying with Bilidikid, sleeping in his bed, and even putting on the red wig, although he says to Bilidikid: "I am not Lola." He dresses up as Lola with the red wig to lure the neo-Nazis to Bilidikid. The image of Murat running from the neo-Nazis evokes the last scene of Lola alive and the sight of Lola's corpse. The final repetition occurs when Murat returns home still in drag wearing the red wig and interrupts his mother's and Osman's meal at their kitchen table in order to confront Osman.

Osman, a representative of patriarchy, substitutes for the father who had originally attempted to repress homosexuality in the patriarchal family. The principle of substitution and repetition is another feature that *Lola and Billy the Kid* shares with *Hamlet*. Ronk points out the significance of Hamlet's father in a play that also structurally relies on substitution of characters, in which the ghost comes in the form of the King, the father, like the legacy of the father in *Lola and Billy the Kid*. Bilidikid's response to the murder of Lola parallels Hamlet's reaction to Ophelia's death: "The Ghost who is there and not there sets Hamlet on his quest for revenge and Ophelia, more powerful in death than in life, propels Hamlet to declare his love, his 'identity' ('This is I, Hamlet the Dane') and his willingness, finally, to fight" (Ronk 5). The portrayal of Lola's corpse aligns Lola with the coveted femininity and allows Bilidikid to become hypermasculine by castrating the neo-Nazi Rudy. *Lola and Billy the Kid* locates the origin of homophobic violence in Osman's disavowed same-sex desire, which cannot be articulated within the patriarchal Turkish family.

The narrative development, which reveals Osman as the murderer, reflects a radical understanding of homophobic violence that results from same-sex desire located and repressed in the patriarchal family, the institution that reproduces heterosexuality. However, this rigorous critique is applied only to the Turkish migrant family. The drama of homophobia in the Turkish family emerges from the family and is located in the domestic sphere,

whereas the drama of the neo-Nazis' homophobia emerges from male bonding and takes place in the Olympic stadium, a fascist public space. Associating Turkish homophobia with the private and German homophobia with the public sphere circumscribes the potential solutions to respective problems of homophobia: whereas homophobia in the Turkish family requires an individual response of personal tolerance, the German homophobia requires a political response.

The characters that inhabit the space of Kreuzberg, Murat's mother, Osman, Kalipso's neighbor, Bilidikid's friend, are all one-dimensional characters, intolerant, unreflective, and violent, a foil for the main characters' gender flexibility and wittiness. Murat's mother, represented solely in domestic scenes, represents a stereotypical subservient image of the Turkish woman not only through her costume but also as the authentic subject who articulates her own subservience to Turkish patriarchy.¹⁰ When she washes Murat in a bathtub in the kitchen, after he has been attacked by the neo-Nazis in the Olympic stadium, Murat insists on finding out the history of Lola. She explains to him:

But one night, he [Lola] suddenly went crazy. . . . When I saw him, I had to laugh. I saw the tears in his eyes. . . . Osman kicked him out. Your father ordered all his things thrown away. I said to myself, I am only an uneducated woman. So I kept quiet. That's all I know. Don't hate Osman for this. . . . He's the head of the family. . . . We live in this foreign land. We have to obey him. You understand.

The problematic role that the film accords the few female Turkish characters is highlighted by the contrast to those characters that perform Turkish femininity as camp.

An encounter between cross-dressing Kalipso and his traditional Turkish female neighbor emphasizes the contrast between performative femininity and femininity thus inscribed as authentic. Lola and Shehrazade pick up Kalipso in Kreuzberg; he is leaving his apartment for good. Dressed in drag, Kalipso encounters his female neighbor, stereotypically coded as a Turkish woman by her headscarf, long coat, and shopping bags in the hallway. Shot in medium long shot, the camera framing emphasizes the encoun-

ter between the two. The neighbor is confused, having always seen Kalipso as a man. She accuses Kalipso of looking “like a whore” and “pretending to be a man.” Kalipso counters by performing the role of an innocent woman who cross-dressed as a man to protect “her” “honor, virginity, and pride.” Just after he offers some kind words to his neighbor: “I will miss you, you were always nice to me,” he walks down the stairs and exclaims: “But your husband was always better.” Kalipso outdoes himself in the performance of a woman having cross-dressed as a man. Since the audience knows that he is a homosexual man, the reference to the neighbors’ “hungry husbands” carries a double meaning. However, the joke plays off the simple- and closed-mindedness of the neighbor, whose Turkish femininity is reinscribed as hateful social control of Kalipso’s flexible gender and sexuality. Thus, while the film portrays self-confident Turkish-German gay men, the cost for that representation is the reinscription of the immigrant community as violently homophobic and heterosexist.

As an effect of the narrative, which reveals Osman’s violence and guilt, the neo-Nazis are turned into victims of a misunderstanding and consequently into victims of Bilidikid’s violence. Thus, Osman’s violence ultimately breeds Bilidikid’s violence. The homophobia of the neo-Nazis emerges from their homosocial bond and, in the case of Walter, is a result of his disavowed sexual attraction to Murat. On an outing to the Olympic stadium, the fascist architecture serves as the site for Murat’s and Walter’s first tentative sexual encounter when they meet in the stadium’s restroom. Murat and Walter kiss, first shyly, then passionately, when Rudy and Henryk interrupt the scene. They bond with Walter, gather around Murat, and humiliate him by urinating on him. The contrast of complexity and ambivalence in the portrayal of the neo-Nazis and the drag queens makes the limitation and one-dimensionality of the rest of the characters of the migrant community more striking, not only with respect to sexuality and gender but also with respect to representations of nationality and transnationality. In order to emphasize the transnational dimension of the main characters, the Turkish-German community is reinscribed as Turkish, as for example when Bilidikid’s

friend in the street of Kreuzberg sees Lola and says to Bilidikid in Turkish: "It's gays like that who give us Turks a bad name. Don't hang out with him too much, okay."

The burgeoning desire between Murat and Walter is taken up at the end of the narrative in the final scene of the violent showdown, after Henryk, Rudi, and Bilidikid have killed each other, and Murat and Walter are again in the restroom—this time in the factory, crouching on the floor. The scene exudes the exhaustion after the fight but is also the only scene in a restroom stall in which two characters are positioned equally in the frame, in contrast to the illusionary reversal of hierarchy inscribed into all the other repeated restroom scenes in the film, in which the hustlers are always "on top." The utopian moment that is conjured up by the staging of equality in the space coded as sexuality is limited to the possibility of homosexual desire between a Turkish-German and a German neo-Nazi. Murat then returns home and confronts his brother Osman. When he informs his mother that Osman killed Lola, she slaps Osman and then leaves the apartment with Murat. The shot of Murat and his mother walking off with their back to the camera ends the narrative. The mother throws off her headscarf, and Murat picks it up. Breger wonders whether to read the scene as a "a gesture not of a decision about [the headscarf's] future use but of respect towards the 'piece of identity' that it represents?" (140) Yet the Turkish woman's headscarf is a symbol overdetermined with the representational weight of Turkish women's oppression by Turkish patriarchy and liberation in the West.

The visual vocabulary evoked in this scene, which concludes the narrative, positions *Lola and Billy the Kid* closer to Tevfik Başer's *40m² Germany*, part of the older generation of Turkish-German filmmaking, than to Thomas Arslan's *Brothers and Sisters*, representative of the new minority cinema in Germany. All three films end with shots of women, but their composition marks important differences: In *40m² Germany* (1984), the paradigmatic film about the liberation of the Turkish woman in Germany, the main female character is trapped in the domestic sphere and leaves after the death of her husband. The final shot shows the back of

her body leaving the door of their house to step onto the street. *Brothers and Sisters*, in contrast, ends with the female characters, independent young women, walking the streets of Kreuzberg facing the camera.¹¹

Yet, while the scene in *Lola and Billy the Kid* provides narrative closure, it is not the final scene of the film. *Lola and Billy the Kid* ends with a coda, a comedic scene of Kalipso and Shehrazade taking the cab with a friendly Turkish cabdriver and stopping to pick up the brooch that Friedrich's mother offered to Iskender as bait to break off his relationship with Friedrich, which Iskender threw away into the bushes. Again, Kalipso and Shehrazade make use of the discarded. The cab driver is a sympathetic and hopeful character that complements Kalipso and Shehrezade, who are in full drag passing successfully for Turkish women. The last two scenes parallel two mother figures and two figures of second-generation Turkish-German sons. While the Turkish mother drops her headscarf and Murat picks it up, the German mother drops a valuable brooch and two transvestites pick it up. The gay universe is populated by sons and mothers, marked by ethnic and class symbols. The comedic use of drag in the coda is reminiscent of the final scene of Billy Wilder's *Some Like it Hot* (1959), when riding a boat into the sunset, Jerry in drag as Daphne (Jack Lemmon) tries to convince his suitor Osgood Fielding III (Joe E. Brown) that s/he is really a man, to which Osgood answers "Nobody is perfect."

Whether this coda queers the narrative or whether the narrative closure contains the camp, I would like to keep as an open question. I insist, however, on the fact that a relationship exists between camp and narrative, often ignored by contemporary theory in favor of an overestimated subversive force of camp that supposedly necessarily exceeds all narrative closure. Tinkcom's approach to camp as work that interrupts narrative allows us to relate camp and narrative to one another. The excess in camp vis-à-vis the demands of containment in narrative creates a powerful queer voice. Yet, it is the characters who solely inhabit the narrative, such as Osman and Lola's mother, the violent patriarch and the subservient Turkish woman, who are coded with

stereotypically exaggerated gender traits, which foreclose any complexity. Their limitations are also mirrored in their limited relationship to the film's spatial politics. Whereas Murat's mother is framed by the domestic until she leaves the home with an overdetermined gesture, Osman's access to mobility, the taxi he drives, becomes a murderous and oppressive vehicle vis-à-vis his gay brothers. He picks up Murat from the Tiergarten in the opening scene, later drives him to a prostitute, and, finally, arrives in his taxi at the factory where he kills Lola. Thus, the coda offers an alternative view of the taxi as a vehicle of mobility and simultaneous interior space.

The image of Berlin that emerges from *Lola and Billy the Kid* is ambivalent and contradictory. Berlin becomes a site of projection where subjectivities and desires are acted out, mapped onto the different spaces of the cityscape. Thus, *Lola and Billy the Kid* relies on the recognition of Berlin, its neighborhoods, locations, and its history, while it also radically breaks with the traditional depiction of the city by alienating the viewer from the illusion of a coherent city space. The film emphasizes indeterminate places, makeshift interiors, and the crossing of invisible borders in contrast to its employment of well-known sites and symbols. In a minor scene, one of the few tender moments in the film, Friedrich and Iskender make love on an architectural model of Berlin. In a moment of excess, Friedrich simultaneously drinks alcohol and takes his medicine; they destroy the urban topography of the metropolis. This moment of undoing of Friedrich's own architectural models mirrors the film's careful construction of Berlin as the site of Turkish-German camp that resists spectatorial mastery over the image of the city and its cross-dressing inhabitants.

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Notes

1 For discussions of Germany's new minority cinema, see Fenner, Göktürk (1998, 1999, and 2000), and Mennel (2002 and 2002).

2 I use male pronouns for the cross-dressing characters, even though many cross-dressers identify as female and wish to be addressed and referred to with the female form. However, earlier experiences with a draft of the paper showed that female pronouns were confusing to readers who had not seen the film. In addition, the characters are not living cross-dressers but film characters and the use of the male pronouns also points to the gap between roles and actors. However, I find the use of the male pronoun dissatisfying and wish to acknowledge that the male pronoun is intended as a reader-friendly but not perfect linguistic referent to those who exceed the grammatical gender binary.

3 For an overview of an account of the socio-political history of Turks and other migrant workers in Germany, see Kolinsky and Kürsat-Ahlers.

4 For a discussion of orientalism and homosexuality in the works of these writers, see Dollimore.

5 For more information on Turkish-German gay groups in Germany, see TuerkGay.com <<http://www.tuerkgay.com/index.html>> and for gays and lesbians in Turkey, see the Turkish GLBT Sites' Directory at TR Gay International at <http://www.geocities.com/GLBTSiteler/en/turkish_glb_tgecici.htm>.

6 For an analysis of public restrooms in railway stations in apartheid South Africa as a site of interracial sexual encounters, see Leap.

7 All translations of *Lola and Billy the Kid* and Breger's essay are by me.

8 See Mennel, "Bruce Lee in Kreuzberg." For an analysis of the cultural exchange of images of Bruce Lee among minority cultures, see Ongiri.

9 Masquerade as theoretical paradigm has been especially influential in feminist film studies, most importantly in the works of Doane.

10 A critique of the figure of the Turkish woman in need of Western liberation can be found in Mandel. For more discussion of the methodological concerns regarding those tropes of oppression and liberation, see Adelson.

11 For an analysis of the final shot of *Brothers and Sisters*, and a general discussion on the cinematic representation of Turkish women in German streets, see Göktürk, "Turkish Women." For a discussion on the significance of Kreuzberg as a space in which representations of transnationality and conflicting notions of nationality are played out, see my essay "Bruce Lee in Kreuzberg."

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