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The make-up and performances of Turkish-German homosexuality: A reading of Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola und Bilidikid* (1999)

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Abstract

In 1999, *Lola und Bilidikid* emerged as the creative product of Turkish-born director, Kutluğ Ataman, and provided a rare example and highly nuanced exploration of homosexuality in a Turkish-German context. This article explores the film's representation of a group of characters marginalised not only on the level of their cultural background, but also on the level of sexual identity. Through a close analysis of the film, various demonstrations of and responses to homosexuality as a sub-culture within a patriarchal, migrant (and therefore already marginalised) group will also be explored, including particularly the notions of drag and performance. These responses will be analysed from the perspective of the protagonists, who are themselves not only both gay *and* of Turkish origin, but also demonstrate almost fundamentally conflicting approaches to homosexuality. This is particularly evident in the varying degrees to which they either accept or reject their own homosexuality. The article will also explore the consequences of the acceptance and rejection of their respective homosexualities and the extent to which this informs the construction and/or perpetuation of a particular performance of masculinity.

Keywords: drag, gender roles, homosexual masculinity, homosexuality, honour, patriarchy, shame, trauma

Introduction

This article was extracted from a chapter of the author's doctoral thesis (Petersen 2012), which was centred on an examination of the representations of Turkish-German masculinity in literature and film. The thesis itself was entitled 'Cultural constructions of Turkish-German masculinities in a selection of contemporary literature and film'. At the time of selecting the principal works for the research, *Lola und Bilidikid* provided one of the only examples of a representation of Turkish-German homosexual masculinity. While this is no longer the case, the work remains significant not only because it interrogates notions of male homosexual identity in the Turkish-German community, but also because it does so through an exploration of the stereotypes associated with male homosexual identity and homosexual narratives. While migrant communities are marginalised on the level of ethnic, cultural and national identity, this article explores the dynamics and consequences of an additional level of marginalisation *within* an already marginalised group. Through a close analysis of the film, with particular attention paid to the interaction of the narrative strands represented by

the protagonists, the author will highlight some of the problems associated with being gay and Turkish in Germany.

Kutluğ Ataman was born in Istanbul in 1961. He studied film in Los Angeles and at the Sorbonne, and has established himself today as an accomplished filmmaker and contemporary artist. The film, *Lola und Bilidikid*, was released in 1999 (released in the US as *Lola and Bili the Kid*), and stars, amongst others, Baki Davrak, as the 17-year-old Murat, whom the viewers meet at the onset of his 'coming-out' in Berlin. Murat has two brothers, but was raised to believe he had only one, namely his older brother, Osman (Hasan Ali Mete). Osman, as the first-born son, assumed the role of the head of the household following the death of their father, and the two men, Murat and Osman, live with their mother in an apartment in Kreuzberg, Berlin. The third brother (though not in chronological order) is introduced to the viewer (and the other characters) only by the name of Lola, and is played by Gandi Mukli. Lola was rejected by his family and thrown out of the familial home when he revealed his homosexuality to them, and Murat was conceived in an attempt to literally replace one son with another. Osman, too (unbeknownst to every other member of his family except Lola), is gay, and fundamentally incapable of reconciling the expectations of his culture with his sexuality, as tragically transpires.

Lola performs as part of a drag dance troupe by the name of *Die Gastarbeiterinnen* (The Female Guest-Workers) and his partner Bili (Erdal Yıldız) is a hustler. While Bili is unable to come to terms with his homosexuality and is intent on leaving Berlin and heading back to Turkey to lead a 'normal' life with Lola as his wife, Lola is perfectly content wearing a wig and make-up for the rest of his life. One such wig is delivered by Murat, upon uncovering his family's secret. While Murat appears eager and curious to explore his sexuality and sexual identity, Osman is presented as the polar-opposite character construct. He offers a demonstration of masculinity which is crude, abrupt and aggressive, in contrast to that of Murat, who is gentle, soft-natured and shy. In addition, Osman is eager to make a man out of his younger brother and demonstrates this by suggesting that they visit a strip show or solicit sex from a prostitute. His apparent need to deliver this *hyper*-male image suggests that Osman overcompensates for what he perceives as a lack or deficiency in his own masculinity. This becomes clearer much later in the film when Osman's (own and repressed) homosexuality is revealed.

As mentioned, Lola performs in drag, along with Scheherazade (Celal Perk) and Kalipso (Mesut Özdemir), as part of a troupe calling themselves *Die Gastarbeiterinnen*. Lola's name refers to a character portrayed by Marlene Dietrich, named Lola Lola, in Josef von Sternberg's film, *The Blue Angel* (1930). According to Barbara Mennel (2004, pp. 297–298), Lola Lola refers to 'a character who connotes feminine seduction and spectacle and the impossibility of a bourgeois life'.[1] Bili, on the other hand, is named after one of the – male – icons of American Western Cinema, 'Billy the Kid', an individual 'whose biography is elusive and contested, the material of myths and legends'.[2]

Lola, who claims not to have any problems wearing a wig for the rest of his life, defends Germany's tolerance towards homosexuality: 'Nobody cares what we do with each other.' Bili, on the other hand, claims that his family finds their relationship problematic, and that he feels embarrassed when with his friends. He attempts to provide Lola with insight into his concept of 'normality' by sharing his vision or intentions for their collective future. Bili suggests that they

move back to Turkey and settle down at the coast, where they – specifically Bili – will open up a bar. Lola would, logically (according to Bili), undergo a sex-change operation in order for them to then live as a 'normal' couple. According to Bili's plan, this operation would be financed by Lola's inheritance.

As a 'normal' (that is, heterosexual) couple, Bili and Lola would be married. According to Bili, it would not be possible for them to continue living together, as two men 'like these German fags', so that they should live together as husband and wife. As husband and wife they would then comply with all expected (conventional) gender roles; by day Bili would work at the bar while Lola stays home, running the household (while never being the head of the household). Bili would come home to Lola who would be waiting for him, having spent the day baking, cooking and being, essentially, a home-bound wife. Interestingly, it is Bili who appears to invest more time thinking about this (his) domestic utopia. Bili further attempts to market the idea of marriage to Lola, by claiming that as a married couple (with specific reference to Lola as Bili's wife) Lola would then be the envy of everyone. Importantly, of course, this dream takes place in Turkey, and strongly contradicts the image Lola projects when he is with Bili (on the streets of Berlin, particularly in the suburb of Kreuzberg), which is often an image of embarrassment and awkwardness. Justifying his need for (and potential preoccupation with) family on the basis of his gender, Bili claims that he thinks about and wants a family, because he is a man and wishes to conform to the patriarchal norm. According to Bili, Lola is not a man, and therefore is not capable of (rational) thought.[3] Following the death of his father, Lola became entitled to a portion of the inheritance. This money would then be used to finance Lola's sex-change operation. Lola remains silent while Bili speaks, but his silence, however, does not signify assent. Bili and Lola then set off for the apartment of Lola's estranged family, in order to claim this inheritance. It is at the apartment that Lola first meets Murat, and though his intention was initially to confront his family (particularly Osman) about his inheritance, his encounter with Murat inspires him to get to know his younger brother. This then leads to Murat visiting Lola one night (it also turns out to be Lola's birthday) at the club after his performance.

Unfortunately, violence and trauma mark the tragic end of Lola and Bilidikid. Lola's body is found floating in the river the morning after his birthday. Bili suspects that the young (German) men in Murat's school class are responsible because they have had several run-ins in the past, and devises a plan to exact revenge – the plan involves Murat disguising himself as Lola, wearing the same ill-fated red wig, and luring the young men into a deserted factory. In the end Bili violently castrates Rudy, one of the young men, and kills another young man named Hendryk, before being killed himself. During this time Murat and Walter (the last of the three young men in the group) hide in another part of the building. Walter admits that he regrets his actions, and while Murat initially suspects this has to do with Lola's death, he ultimately realises that the young men were indeed not responsible for Lola's death at all. Murat is led to suspect that Osman was in fact responsible for Lola's death. He is able to confirm this suspicion when he returns home still wearing the wig and costume he wore the night before. At home, he confronts Osman not only about Lola's murder, but also about his own homosexuality. Osman has now been disgraced. At this point the mother enters the kitchen, having overheard the entire confrontation. When Osman tries to approach her she

slaps him and storms out of the apartment, with Murat following her. In a final dramatic cinematic gesture, her headscarf blows off her head. She does not stop and continues walking while Murat picks up the headscarf as the closing credits appear on screen.

According to Barbara Mennel (2004, p. 291), despite the fact that the film had been lauded for its identification and portrayal of a 'Turkish-German gay identity', it received limited academic response and criticism beyond an exploration of the concept of performativity and its relation to drag. The film opened the Panorama Section of the 49th International Berlin Film Festival in 1999, and won the prestigious Teddy Award for gay and lesbian films.[4] This does not, however, mean that *Lola und Bilidikid* could or should be viewed as a distinctly *gay* film. Although homosexuality is certainly one of the themes explored within the work, the film also explores various aspects, degrees, implications and consequences of marginalisation; namely marginalisation experienced by being a Turk in Germany, as well as the marginalisation and alienation experienced by being part of a sub-culture *within* a marginalised group, for example, being a homosexual Turk. Mennel (2004, p. 289) suggests that

> 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 characters in the film (principally the Turkish characters) are marginalised firstly on the level of their ethnicity as Turks in Germany, and secondly on an economic level in terms of their portrayal as impoverished (drag) artists and hustlers. Mennel initiates her argument in a discussion of the city of Berlin as a scene or location which enables an anonymous interaction of people, bodies and desires. Berlin, in this manner, as a decontextualised location, facilitates 'pleasure in camp as a form of resistance without losing sight of the material conditions from which marginalised minority subjects create camp in the first place' (Mennel 2004, p. 287).[5] Due not only to its size and the anonymity it offers, but also its peculiar history, Berlin becomes invested with unlimited potential. Berlin is identified as the location of the film through the symbolic, but detached image of the *Siegessäule* (Victory Column) in the opening sequence of the film. Mennel (2004, p. 295) suggests that the *Siegessäule* is decontextualised as a signifier of Berlin through the darkness that surrounds it in the opening shot, and posits:

> 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.

Interestingly, Bili's image mirrors the traditional and iconic image of James Dean. Similarly shrouded in mystery, Dean's cinematic roles echoed the idea of the outlaw figure. The idea of the outlaw figure is, by extension, particularly relevant when considered as a figure which queers masculinity; a figure which *is* queer. The conscious misspelling of the name is, according to Mennel, meant to address the gap between the reception and internalisation of the legendary American Western figure within the Turkish-German community. Historical accounts of Billy the Kid are centred on Billy in his capacity as a figure which 'embodies opposition to the expansion of law, and

thus the nation of the United States', as well as his interaction with his 'all-male posse' (Mennel 2004, p. 298), and do not include any references to his relationships with or to women. While the film employs the narrative strand of conflict and individual resistance and opposition to a larger and imposing system or structure, it does so by translating the idea of conflict into one of (or centred on) sexuality and sexual identity. Citing Claudia Breger, Mennel (2004, p. 298) then suggests that Bili's masculinity 'rearticulates his marginality by mirroring it in the outlaw figure', effectively queering masculinity.

Furthermore, just like James Dean, Bili would tragically die a young man. Bili is a hustler and, like Murat's brother, Osman, is presented as something of a *hyper*-male character, perched, as we encounter him in one of the opening scenes of the film, at the end of the bar, dressed in a pair of dark jeans, a white t-shirt and a leather jacket – an image which strongly echoes that of the famous James Dean. What is interesting to note, is that it is precisely the combination of these factors – his position at the end of the bar, his wardrobe, and his attempts at demonstrating solely the macho side of his character – which collectively draw attention to him. Within the context of the club the men, like Lola and the members of his troupe, disguised in wigs, make-up and costumes, effectively appear more 'normal' than Bili, whose idea of 'normal' is an essentially heteronormative ideal based on the nuances of an image generated by a screen star – ironically, of course, the screen star in question was also homosexual. Likewise, the members of the audience appear to belong to, or rather to fit into, the context of the club. Bili ultimately, despite (or perhaps because of) his attempts to project a sense of 'normality' akin to heterosexuality, is, and remains, the outsider. Citing Claudia Breger's analysis of the film, Mennel posits that Bili, through the combination of factors such as his wardrobe and body language, delivers a masculinity which is not only a masquerade or performance, but also fundamentally a defence mechanism:

> Bilidikid's machismo is a masquerade, which serves as defence 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 his hypermasculinity. (Breger in Mennel 2004, p. 298)[6]

In this manner, Bili seeks to defend himself against masculinities which are coded as feminine and inferior; paradoxically, masculinities with which he should theoretically be able to identify on the basis of his sexual orientation, but which he actively rejects due to the influence of his Turkish culture. This is also, however, intentional, to a degree. In a posed, studied and almost rehearsed manner, Bili seems to *want* to project the image of the angry young man, a type of latter-day James Dean. The body language suggests that Bili, cool, casual and aloof, is ready to leave at will. Interestingly, though, it is clear that he belongs there by default as it were, through his relationship with Lola, although he places himself deliberately on the periphery. Ultimately, then, the calculated nature of Bili's appearance at the club remains nothing more than an act, just as costumed and rehearsed as Lola's performance on stage. Furthermore, this calculated and rehearsed act echoes the performance carried out by Lola's brother, Osman, who also goes to great lengths to project a very particular image of masculinity.

Bili's inability to identify and accept himself as a homosexual man is rooted in the influence of his Turkish culture. This assertion is supported in an ethnographic study conducted by Hermann Tertilt (1996) in the early 1990s of a group of young German men of mostly Turkish origin, living in Frankfurt, and collectively forming the gang, the Turkish Power Boys. At this juncture it is, of course, important to note that although Tertilt's study is rooted in the extra-literary domain of day-to-day Turkish–German interaction, as opposed to the filmic world portrayed in *Lola und Bilidikid*, there are, nevertheless, insights that shed light on aspects of the film referring or alluding to the world outside the story. These insights can be utilised to explain attitudes to masculinity studied by Tertilt and appearing as part of the world view of the film's characters, such as Bili, for example. During the time spent with the members of the group, Tertilt (1996, p. 107) established that what is regarded and defined as homosexuality in a German context is, in the Turkish context, classified according to the role played or assumed during sexual intercourse. A homosexual man in this case refers specifically to the submissive or passive sexual partner in the relationship – essentially, therefore, the one who is penetrated.

This echoes and ultimately confirms Mimi Schippers' (2007) assertion that masculinity, within the masculine/feminine binary, could effectively be reduced to penetration and dominance in an attempt to define and understand gender hierarchy. In her attempt to define the concept of hierarchy, Schippers (Segal in Schippers 2007, p. 90) associates it with the concept of domination:

> …symbolic constructions of heterosexual sex still reduce it to penetrating and being penetrated and that relation is consistently constructed as one of intrusion, 'taking', dominating.

In this manner, dominance and submission become key features of the relationship between the sex categories of male and female, and by extension between masculinity and femininity, which is then supported by the assumption of masculine authority and physical strength and female compliance and physical weakness (Schippers 2007, p. 90). Thus physical strength and weakness as well as authority and compliance become central defining features categorising the relationship between masculinity and femininity, and ultimately between various categories or demonstrations of masculinity.

Bili uses the fact that he is the active or dominant sexual partner in the relationship to substantiate not only the claims that he makes against Lola (that Lola is not a man), but also his wishes for a normal (i.e., heterosexual) life; a life which he wishes to lead in Turkey with Lola as a woman. As the dominant partner in the relationship, Bili's involvement in a homosexual relationship does not in any way affect his position as a 'real' man. Bili remains a man *because* he is the dominant partner. The passive partner, however, according to Tertilt, is often subjected to public abuse. As this is a position associated with weakness, this partner is therefore considered insufficiently masculine or manly (Schiffauer in Tertilt 1996, p. 198).[7] The passive homosexual is metaphorically castrated and forced into the role of the woman. Therefore, just as Bili simply does not see or regard himself as gay, he sees or regards Lola, although biologically a man, as a woman, *because* Lola is the passive partner in the relationship. Bili feels justified in his pursuit of a heterosexual relationship with Lola, which would require Lola undergoing sex-change surgery because he has already been metaphorically castrated.

Bili's macho image is encouraged and supported by his heterosexual friends who believe that homosexual Turks – or specifically Turks like Lola – give the rest a bad reputation. Bili is unable to acknowledge Lola as his partner when he finds himself with other, heterosexual Turks. He does, however, revert to referring to Lola as his wife when he is with the rest of the *Gastarbeiterinnen*. This addresses the assertion made by Stephen Murray (1997, p. 24) regarding the behaviour and interaction of men in Islamic countries. Whereas Murray indicates that apparent intimacy can be observed in the interaction of men (including, for example, the sight of two men walking down the road holding hands), Tertilt (1996, p. 194) demonstrates that it is indeed commonplace to observe similar acts of intimacy between Turkish youths in Germany.[8]

Through his observations Tertilt was able to establish that Turkish men, youth and boys interact intimately all the time. This behaviour is, however, never considered homosexual in light of the fact that the Turkish youth in this case regard and understand masculinity and homosexuality in a manner which is different from that of their German counterparts. In Turkish culture (and, broadly speaking, in Mediterranean culture for example), it is a common occurrence to observe men engaging in friendly, almost intimate, behaviour. In public men are observed hugging and kissing each other. In fact, in Turkish culture, men, among friends, greet each other with a kiss on both cheeks. This, of course, differs somewhat from the image one encounters in so-called Western cultures, such as German culture, for example. Marked by Anglo frigidity, the sight of two men engaging in an act as innocuous as holding hands would lead one to automatically assume that the men are in a homosexual relationship. This is due to what Tertilt (1996, p. 194) identifies as the Western definition of homosexuality, which almost fundamentally revolves around intimate bodily contact.

Bili's inability to acknowledge Lola in front of his heterosexual friends is, then, the result of a curious combination of factors. First, Bili does not think of himself as gay at all, because he is the dominant partner in the relationship and, according to the logic demonstrated in Tertilt's observations, still a man. Second, it could be inferred that Bili practises this logic, as it were, in his life as a hustler. Bili never allows himself to be penetrated, thereby maintaining a dominant role in his encounters and relationships. He remains a 'man' in the heterosexual sense of the term, despite having engaged in a homosexual encounter. Indeed, he encourages this ethic in Murat, who resorts to hustling after running away from his family. Bili encourages Murat to take and maintain the active role in his sexual encounters, particularly when he learns that Murat is gay. To illustrate his point to Murat, Bili associates the active and passive roles assumed during homosexual encounters with being a 'man' and being a 'hole' respectively. A 'man' is the active and dominant partner, while the passive and submissive partner is essentially reduced to a 'hole', i.e., a receptacle for penetration.

Bili is embarrassed and does not want to be associated with Lola in public because this would make him (Bili) less of a man. However, an important distinction has to be made here; a distinction which is located primarily in cultural difference. If Lola and Bili were simply to leave the Turkish ghetto, they would be able to lead a 'perfectly normal' homosexual life together in Germany. The problem, however, is that although Lola, perfectly happy to wear a wig for the rest of his life, would essentially be more amenable to this idea, it is Bili, who identifies himself principally as Turkish,

who would object to this. This is, of course, because Bili consciously tries to reject not only what he considers as the label of homosexuality, but also the implications of the sexual orientation itself, within both Turkish and German culture.

Bili is simply incapable of reconciling his love for another man with the expectations determined and enforced by his patriarchal and heteronormative culture. He seems convinced that Lola's sex-change operation would somehow afford him the opportunity to indulge his dreams and wishes for a 'normal' heterosexual life and family, while simultaneously allowing him to continue loving and being with Lola. Lola, as the passive partner in the relationship, is, for all intents and purposes, already a woman, and the sex-change operation would simply bring about closure in this regard. Lola, on the other hand, is attracted to the idea of getting to know Murat as his brother, providing an extension of the idea of family. Though he does not appear to agree entirely with Bili's ideas or wishes regarding marriage and family (particularly insofar as they require him to undergo reconstructive surgery), befriending and getting to know Murat provides a more realistic and feasible approach to the concept of 'family'.

Bili is not only convinced of the validity of his plans for their (his and Lola's) future, but he also expresses his intention to resort to violence in order to realise these plans, threatening to castrate Lola, should he be unwilling to go through with the operation. Mennel (2004, p. 300) suggests that

> [t]he expressed violence is an extension of Bilidikid's masculinity, which he repeatedly asserts throughout the film. Bilidikid threatens to match the roles that 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.

This could be taken even further to address Bili's propensity for overcompensation within the context of his expressed intentions of having Lola undergo a sex-change operation. It could therefore be argued that Bili not only seeks to project a violently sadistic role for himself, but, moreover, that he wants to subject Lola to the physical trauma of removing his manhood, in order to compensate for his (Bili's) perceived loss of manhood brought about by his homosexuality. In short, Bili wants Lola to cease being a man (biologically), because loving a man makes him (Bili) feel like less of a man. This is supported by Roy Jerome's (2001, p. 7) assertion:

> Paradoxically, however, the experience of trauma destroys the potential for building a mature erotic relationship. Trauma extinguishes any real opportunity for mature erotic contact and replaces it with an axis of power relations – characterized by a rigid, extreme polarity – around which interactions turn. Sexualisation becomes a means of keeping the self alive while also providing an agency for controlling the Other – an Other who might remind the subject of his traumatisation, his lack of manliness.

Lola appears to be aware of the impossibility of Bili's plans and dreams for their future. On the night of his (Lola's) birthday he narrates their story, including Bili's version of the ending, in the manner of a fairy tale:

> 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, Bili 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 the 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.[9]

It would seem, then, that Bili's predicament could be viewed in light of the concept of familiarity. That with which he is able to identify and to which he relates, is culturally, ideologically and geographically located in Turkey, not in Germany. He remains seemingly unwilling to even attempt to adjust to life in Germany, and clings to what is only the idealised image he has of what life could be like in Turkey. Bilidikid, in this manner, contradicts what has been identified as a common trait identified within migrant communities, namely that of ambivalence:

> Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better 'then' or 'now'. Ambivalence towards the future: whether to retain a 'myth of return' or to design a new project without further expected movement built in. Ambivalence towards the 'host' society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. (Benmayor 1994, p. 3)

In Berlin, Bili has the option and indeed the freedom of openly living an alternative lifestyle, of acknowledging his homosexuality and acknowledging Lola as his partner, and living a life free of judgement in the German community. However, although he may physically be located in Germany and have at his disposal the tolerance and acceptance of his lifestyle choices and sexuality, his mind is still very much in Turkey; entrenched in a fundamentally heteronormative and patriarchal mindset, and a cultural ideology and philosophy which strongly condemn alternative lifestyle practices. Bili's naïveté stems from the fact that he is convinced that returning to Turkey, and having Lola undergo the sex-change surgery, would afford him the luxury and benefits of cultural and ethnic identification and solidarity on the one hand, as well as the romantic and intimate benefits of spending the rest of his life with the woman who makes his heterosexual ideal or fantasy complete (and who happens to be the man with whom he had initially fallen in love). Bili then overcompensates for the fundamental flaw in his plan by resorting not only to a charade of hypermasculinity, but also, finally, to violence.

Similarly, Osman overcompensates for his homosexuality through his crass, violent and vulgar behaviour. Also prone to violence and aggression, he is responsible for Lola's death. Even though he is forced to confront his homosexuality in the end, it is unlikely that he would be able to pursue this aspect of his life since he has simply not been conditioned for it, nor would he allow himself such a weakness. Like Bili, his perceptions of (his) masculinity are motivated and encouraged by

his close association with his (Turkish) cultural background. Specifically, this background which has made him the (perhaps unwilling) head of the household makes him react so violently to what he considers to be a challenge to conventional masculinity. The head of the household simply cannot be gay. Subsequently, it is also his violence which facilitates Bilidikid's violence. Mennel (2004, p. 306) suggests that

> [a]s 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.

Bili's violence *does* occur as a result of Osman's violence, and both by extension address the concept of honour. Citing Schiffauer, Tertilt (1996, p. 198) suggests that the gender(ed) division amongst young Turks in Germany, particularly the manner in which they view and define their own and other masculinities, is connected to the gendered division of roles in Turkey, which is based on the concept of honour. Within this dynamic men are expected to be perpetually ready to defend not only their honour but also that of their family. The violence perpetrated by Osman and Bili addresses not only the concept of honour, but more importantly the corresponding concept of shame. Osman killed Lola because Lola had threatened to destroy the stability of the lie he had created for himself and for his family. In short, Osman killed Lola not because Lola was gay, but because he was gay, and Lola's intentions of establishing a relationship with Murat threatened to expose this, and to expose him. Osman, like Bili, was ashamed.

After the death of the father Osman became the head of the household, as per the demands of his (Turkish) culture on his gender. As mentioned, the head of a Turkish household cannot be gay because he is a man, and men are not gay. Osman is, for this reason, completely incapable of reconciling his sexuality with the demands placed on his gender and sexuality by his culture. Therefore, in an attempt to compensate for this inability, Osman repeatedly rapes Lola (after Lola had come out to his family, after which he was forced to leave their home), and in a way, inverts the logic which sees him as the powerful male head of the household, and uses it to address, demonstrate and satisfy his sexual, physical and cultural dominance. By raping Lola, Osman satisfies his need for having sex with a man, and by virtue of his dominant position he remains a man and the head of the household. In addition, by raping Lola, Osman then addresses the jealousy and envy he feels towards Lola, who is able to accept his sexuality in a way which he, Osman, cannot. Lola is effectively left emasculated through the rape, and in this case the rape becomes a symbolic act of castration. Finally, Osman's rape of Lola also serves as an act of incest, which is considered taboo across all cultures. Osman then not only seeks to hide his deviant sexuality by killing Lola, but also to conceal the transgression of the taboo. Osman had been under the impression that Lola's expulsion from the family home would be sufficient to maintain the secret. Lola's unexpected return to the family home, however, threatened to expose Osman and his secret.

The physical act of castration is, at its crudest level, a violent and emasculating operation. Bili had threatened to castrate Lola, and after Lola's death, he then castrates one of the men he suspects is the killer, by effectively taking his manhood. The reason for this is that Lola's death robbed Bili of *his* own manhood. Bili fell in love with a man, and because this man was an effeminate

homosexual, Bili was ashamed of him and their relationship. While Bili regarded Lola as a woman, the truth is that Lola was one of the last vestiges of stability and authenticity for Bili's perception of his own masculinity. The extent to which he was clearly incapable of reconciling himself to loving a man (because a public association with an effeminate man would be regarded as an affront to, and indictment of, his own masculinity) was subsequently demonstrated not only in his wish for Lola to have a sex-change operation, but especially in his threat to castrate Lola himself if he (Lola) was unwilling to go through with the operation. Bili's manhood and perception of his masculinity were ultimately lived vicariously, as it were, through Lola. Therefore, with Lola dead, Bili felt emasculated and attempted to compensate for the loss of his own masculinity by killing the young men he held responsible for Lola's death, and specifically by castrating Rudi.

As a film, *Lola und Bilidikid* confronts conventional ideas of heterosexuality and homosexuality by deliberately employing and parodying various stereotypes associated with each category. This is evident, for example, in the hyper-femininity demonstrated by the members of *Die Gastarbeiterinnen* on the one hand, and the hyper-masculinity demonstrated by the characters of Bili and Osman on the other hand. Westernised notions of homosexuality, for example, that rely 'on the idea of liberated individuals' (Mennel 2004, p. 290) are collapsed through the use of characters who effectively represent different approaches and responses to not only homosexuality in general, but particularly their own homosexuality. The personal struggle with male–male sexual desire is exemplified and ultimately embodied in the figures of Bili, Murat and Osman, to varying degrees, and this may also be a testament to a generational dynamic at work. While Murat, as part of a younger generation born and raised in Germany within a Turkish migrant background, is less influenced by his Turkish cultural roots and evidently more accepting of his homosexuality, Bili and Osman, representing an older generation, remain shackled to the influences and control of their Turkish patriarchal history. They are, as a consequence, fundamentally unable to accept their homosexuality and actively reject displays of homosexuality, as well as the acceptance of homosexuality in other members of their community. Bili ultimately seeks a heterosexual love – and by association, heterosexuality – which will be affected by the loss of his homosexuality. The loss of his homosexuality would, in turn, be symbolised by Lola's castration. This loss of homosexual attachments, according to Judith Butler (1995, p. 26), is necessary for the development and cultivation of heterosexuality. This active rejection of their own homosexuality, as well as the homosexuality of others, ultimately translates into acts of violence. In other words, these acts of violence are generated by the conscious repudiation of their own homosexual desires – a repudiation of their own femininity. Furthermore, in their attempts to address or come to terms with their sexualities and their sexual desires, in a manner opposing a traditional Western perspective, it could certainly be said that the characters should not be seen as subjects or creations of Western desire, but rather as 'subjects of their desire for each other' (Mennel 2004, p. 291).

Notes

1 Mennel describes the character Lola as one which evaded a concrete definition of sexual identity due to her portrayal of roles which addressed multiple desires.

2 Ibid.

3 Interestingly, this sentiment is, for example, echoed in Islamic Sharia law which dictates essentially

that women have no voice or credibility, particularly in relation to men. Women are considered fundamentally inferior to men and consequently have fewer rights and responsibilities. Due to their inferiority, women are also considered irrational and in need of male protection. Their weakness also serves as a justification for abuse and punishment. Since Sharia law makes no allowance for the equality of the sexes, a woman is considered to count as half a man in a court of law and concerning matters of inheritance. See Women's Rights and the Sharia [online].

4 http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/177472/Lola-and-Bilidikid/overview [Accessed 30 June 2010].

5 Mennel suggests that some of the sites featured in the film 'signify gayness' – these sites include the Siegessäule, which has become a symbol of the gay movement in Berlin (the main gay newspaper/magazine in Berlin is called the *Siegessäule*), and the Tiergarten, which is a popular gay cruising location in the city. In addition, other sites featured in the city address the significance of the city, its history and its importance in the film. A principal example of this is the Olympic Stadium (*Olympiastadium*) which is located in the west of Berlin and is the stadium Hitler built for the 1936 Olympic Games.

6 See Breger, C., 2001.

7 See Schiffauer, W., 1990.

8 Tertilt observes that when greeting, young men embrace and kiss each other. Furthermore, when they meet to listen to music, for example, it was and is perfectly normal to observe young men lying in each other's arms, to see a man stroking the hair of another young man, or simply for them to hold hands while listening to music.

9 This English translation of the scene is located in Mennel, B. 2004, p. 301.

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