

The Evolution of the *Immigrantenfilm* in Germany

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My honors project focuses on migrant discourse and representation in German film. Today's modern Germany has been shaped by waves of migration since World War II. While migration studies often falls under the umbrella of political science, or public policy, these disciplines do not fully address the cultural significance of mass migration. Within the scope of cultural studies, this project centers on the medium of film as a lens through which one can examine migration in Germany. In my project, I analyze the evolution of *Immigrantenfilm* from the eccentric director Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the New German Cinema to newcomers like Florian Kunert and the contemporary German film scene, with an in-depth look at the transformative, intervening era of 1990s Turkish-German cinema through the works of directors Fatih Akin and Ayşe Polat.

My project, in many ways, takes the form of a genealogy, following the lineage of the *Immigrantenfilm*. This genealogical framework, however, is not an exhaustive overview. The overarching notion of lineage follows a thematic thread of style and authorial identity, examining the changing and interconnected nature of these films and how they relate to the social representation of migration and to audience engagement. Each chapter of my project focuses on a period of German film (New German Cinema, 1990s Turkish-German cinema, and Contemporary German cinema) and utilizes a case study approach to tease out these ideas of authorial identity and style.

The films I have selected are not historical documents of migrant experience, but rather artistic interventions. While audience expectations regarding the *Immigrantenfilm* tend to gravitate toward documentary realist depictions of journey and affliction, these films represent the *Immigrantenfilm* on a more discursive level. They are works of art—commentary on the migrant experience that need not be confined to their historical context.

Despite the importance of *Immigrantenfilme* to migrant discourse in Germany, distribution of these films is limited at best; often they are solely confined to the film festival circuit. With funds from the Grua/O'Connell Research Award, I was able to attend the *Berlinale* (The Berlin Film Festival), where I watched nearly 15 films, two of which became central texts for my project. While these films make for engaging intellectual debate, it is important to acknowledge their scarcity. Without broader distribution, these films will remain fodder for discussion only by scholars and film festival audiences.

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